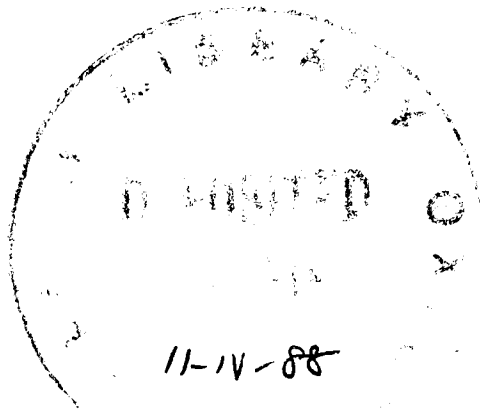


NINETEENTH CENTURY CO-OPERATIVE RETAILING IN ENGLAND AND
WALES: A GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACH.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE CIRCULATION OF CO-OPERATIVE INFORMATION: RAISING
AWARENESS OF THE INNOVATION.

I

In the preceding chapters aspects of the geographical pattern of co-operative growth in the second half of the nineteenth century have been outlined. It now remains to attempt an exploration of the mechanisms which underlay this development: the process behind the pattern. Such an exploration will begin with the national spread of society foundations, for it was only once the initial collective decision to establish a co-operative had been taken that the remainder of the local population could individually make a judgement about membership.

Examinations of the geographical pattern of innovation adoptions have frequently given primacy to the spatial flow of information as an explanatory variable. This follows from the work of Hägerstrand whose approach derived from

the obviously basic idea that a cultural innovation can be accepted by a person only if he is aware of its existence. In other words, the behaviour of a population towards a cultural innovation must be closely related to the distribution of information regarding the new
1
phenomenon.

More recent work has called for a broader approach to the study of innovation adoption. A series of papers have drawn attention to the perils of making generalised use of Hägerstrand's information based approach outside the context of agricultural extension in twentieth century Sweden for

which it was first developed. Much of this work has stemmed from study of the development process in the contemporary Third World which has demonstrated that in many instances information was not

the only missing variable, the only element needed to get the diffusion process in motion.

It is unwise therefore to make the a priori equation of information diffusion and innovation adoption. Any diffusion study should examine the possibility of the mediating influence of variations in the perception of the utility of the innovation between potential adopters and any difference in the constraints placed on recipients of information determining their ability to put an innovation into practice. In the present case Hägerstrand's basic point is not, however, invalidated. Co-operation did not expand through a locally independent process of invention by groups seeking a solution to their problems of food supply; new societies were based on established models elsewhere. Thus the spread of awareness of the innovation was a necessary, if not sufficient, precondition for its adoption.

Any examination of the process of innovation diffusion should logically follow the sequence of that process. Thus the present chapter deals with the means available for the spread of co-operative information, not because it is assumed to be the most important determinant of the changing geographical pattern of co-operative foundations but because it is the initial creation of awareness of an innovation

through information diffusion that starts the process of decision making about its adoption.

II

Many channels and formats are potentially involved in the flow of information about any single innovation. The most basic and consistently functioning mechanism is the personal transfer of information between individuals. Hägerstrand's own observations of the clustering of new adoptions around the original nuclei of introduction, the neighbourhood effect, led him to assert the primacy of private information transfer as

the most important driving force behind the innovation
4
diffusions under study here.

The process of interpersonal information transfer is assumed to generally display a pattern of distance decay with the possibility of contact between existing and potential adopters having a strong inverse relationship with geographical distance. The wide acceptance of the importance of private information flow in both the geographical and 5 sociological literature on diffusion was noted by Cliff. Indeed as Rogers points out there is a rationale other than that arising from the spatial clustering of adopters for the stress on interpersonal contacts rather than the dissemination of information through the mass media; such contacts are more likely to persuade an individual to adopt a new idea. It is suggested that the potential adopter's decision making is particularly influenced by the subjective

evaluations communicated to him by near peers with previous
6
experience of the innovation.

The pattern of co-operative development in the late forties and early fifties was certainly dominated at the national scale by a distinct clustering of societies in the northern textile districts (Figs. 3.1 and 3.3). Within these districts it is impossible to recreate anything approaching the total volume or pattern of information exchange but individual elements have been recorded. These show the flow of information between neighbouring settlements, although not necessarily between nearest neighbours. It is also clear that the process of exchange involved initiative by potential adopters as well as the passive receipt of information. Commonly, initial awareness of the innovation of co-operative trading, perhaps arising out of normal social contacts such as the visit from a relative in Bacup which is credited
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with the introduction of co-operation to Nelson, stimulated a more active local search for further details. In a few cases small sections of the chain of information transfer can be pieced together. The Openshaw society, for example, drew its inspiration from the Staleybridge co-operative supplemented by information from those at Dukinfield and Manchester; the Staleybridge society had itself been guided by the experience of stores at Rochdale, Dukinfield and
8
Mossley. In many other instances throughout the northern textile districts it was personal observation of local examples that was noted as the stimulus for the development

of new societies. Later co-operative spread in rather different social and economic milieu from the industrial north also included similar elements

Owing to our success [at Winterborne Whitchurch, Dorset] they are endeavouring to establish co-operative societies at the villages of Milton Abbas and Strickland, also in the town of Blandford.⁹

The local spread of information would follow naturally from the personal contacts generated by the circulation of population during the course of regular social and economic activity. The few surviving records such as diaries which detail the movements of individual workers show a pattern dominated by local journeys. This was true both of circulation in the course of daily activity and the majority of the less frequent moves involving change of residence and workplace.¹⁰ More widely based studies suggest the importance of the circulation of population within the textile districts. In 1851 Preston had an immigrant population consisting of 52 per cent of the total. Of those whose birthplace was known 42 per cent had travelled less than ten miles to the town.¹¹ A similar pattern of predominantly local population movement between the textile towns is revealed by Turner's study of Accrington.¹² There is evidence that such circulation of population was the mechanism for the initiation of co-operation in some new locations.¹³ It seems unlikely, however, that the individual migrant was important only as a carrier of information, much of which may have been previously known in his new place of residence. Rather it was

his enthusiasm and previous practical experience that were critical in generating action.

Permanent migration also provided a mechanism for the transfer of co-operative ideas over longer distances. Again society histories show the enthusiasm of a recent arrival with previous experience of co-operation to have been an important stimulus to development. Details of the total pattern of migration, as opposed to net flows, during the mid nineteenth century are sketchy. The only available data are the census records of the birthplaces of the population arranged by their county of current residence. Table 5.1 uses figures from the 1851 census to show the regional distribution of the most likely sources of co-operative

Table 5.1. Regional Distribution of Present Place of Residence in 1851 of Adult (20 Years plus) Migrants Born in Lancashire and Yorkshire.(14)

	Lancashire		Yorkshire	
		% of Total Lancs Born Migrants		% of Total Yorks Born Migrants
North	8,614	9.7	32,267	20.9
North-West	24,391*	27.5*	65,103	42.1
Yorkshire#	22,138	24.9	-	-
North Midlands	4,391	4.9	16,167	10.5
West Midlands	7,084	8.0	5,043	3.3
S.E. Midlands	783	0.9	1,436	0.9
E./E. Anglia	1,492	1.7	3,106	2.0
London	11,185	12.6	20,847	13.5
Extra-metropolitan				
Kent, Middlesex & Surrey	1,582	1.8	2,832	1.8
Rest of S.E.	1,875	2.1	3,018	2.0
South-West	2,393	2.7	2,932	1.9
Wales	2,883	3.2	1,917	1.2
	88,811	100	154,668	100

* Cheshire only

East, North and West Ridings

information, adult migrants from Lancashire and Yorkshire. While the view presented of the pattern of movement is necessarily simplified, it is clear that most moves were to immediately neighbouring counties. There were, however, concentrations at greater distances in the largest urban centres, especially London. The numbers shown here would have been supplemented by others who although not Lancashire or Yorkshire born, had experience of co-operation through residence in these counties. The labour demands of the northern textile districts were principally met by local
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immigration, but some workers were drawn in from further afield. Thus the enthusiasts for the revival of co-operation in Coventry in 1867 included not only a Yorkshireman from Delph but also a former Coventry ribbon weaver who, following the collapse of this local trade had worked in Lancashire as
16
a calico weaver.

Although the probability that a message would be transferred by personal contact increased with the volume of movement there was no absolute limit to the migration stream needed to spread co-operative information. In many instances it was seemingly the enthusiasm of a single individual which was critical in stimulating development. But of course it cannot be assumed that every migrant would be equal in enthusiasm for or knowledge of co-operation, or that these would be successfully communicated to the resident population of his new home who may have been wary of both newcomers and their ideas. In this last respect the opinion of a returned

migrant might have been more influential, for they combined knowledge acquired in the outside world with established local contacts. The potential for information transfer suggested by the presence of Lancashire and Yorkshire migrants throughout England and Wales was not fully realised in practical developments. There was no simple equation between population movements and the proliferation of co-operatives; societies did not initially spread steadily and widely away from their northern core. But while population movement in the course of general activity was ineffectual as a mechanism for the universal diffusion of co-operation, the importance of its contribution in particular instances cannot be doubted.

As the Coventry example suggests migration was commonly structured not only by distance but also by the distribution of economic activity and the search for employment. Geographical mobility seems often to have been more prevalent than occupational change. Work on movement into North-East England showed that long distance migration was principally from areas suffering serious economic depression or between areas with a similar employment structure.¹⁷ The latter¹⁸ conclusion has been confirmed by more local studies. Such a pattern of movement might have contributed to the concentration of early co-operative development in communities with economic structures based on a restricted number of trades. Specific instances can be given of the transfer of co-operation by long distance migrants between areas with a common element to their economic bases. The

establishment of a cotton mill at Kidderminster during the eighteen sixties brought workers to the town from the depressed northern textile districts to swell the established migrant community associated with the town's carpet trade.

Thus it was reported

Our society was originated by a number of Lancashire and Yorkshire men resident here, and chiefly by the President Mr. R. Barker (manager of the cotton company's mill here), formerly of Bacup. I and three others of the committee are from Halifax, one from Bradford, one from Leeds, one from Rochdale and our storekeeper is from
19
Todmorden.

Workers from the metals and engineering trades, well represented in areas of initial co-operative strength, also stimulated new societies in their movements to other parts of the country. Men from northern England and Scotland, a country with its own strong co-operative tradition, developed the society associated with the Brighton railway works during
20
the eighteen forties and fifties. Indeed the common importance of railwaymen in the development of co-operation in southern England partly derived from the early strength of
21
northern recruits amongst their number. The railway workers involved in the establishment of the society at Gloucester in 1860 included men linked with such northern towns as Halifax,
22
Huddersfield and Burnley. In addition the railway workforce contained men who were uniquely mobile in the regular course

of their work and thus were well placed to learn of developments in other areas of the country.

The volume of private contacts, especially over long distances, was swollen by postal communications. The expansion of the postal system during the nineteenth century, particularly following from the introduction of the uniform penny post in 1840²³, must have greatly increased the general flow of information (Table 5.2). The flat rate charge probably also reduced the degree of decline in the volume of postal traffic with increased distance noted under the earlier system of charging in proportion to the mileage travelled.²⁴ Individual postal contacts do not commonly seem to have had the effect of initiating co-operative development in the manner of the migrants discussed above. A letter offered personal information and opinion but could not of itself translate these into action. However, an important part of the accumulation of information by many incipient societies was accomplished by post. Established centres, especially the society at Rochdale received correspondence from groups throughout the country interested in the foundation of co-operatives. Without a cheap and effective postal service the direct role of the larger northern societies in advising on co-operative developments elsewhere in the country would have been curtailed. The volume of postal traffic greatly outstripped personal visits to stores such as that at Rochdale²⁶, or the efforts made by northern societies to supply speakers for meetings associated with the

Table 5.2. Mail Traffic in the United Kingdom: Total Traffic and Mail per capita, 1839-1901.(25)

G.P.O. Mail Traffic (000,000s)

Date	Letters	Books & Newsp'r's	News-papers	1/2d Packets	Post-cards	Parcels
1839	75.9*					
1840	168.8					
1850	347.0					
1860	564.0	82.8				
1870	862.7	130.2				
1880/1	1176.4		133.8	248.9	122.9	
1890/1	1705.8		161.0	481.2	229.7	46.3
1900/1	2323.6		167.8	732.4	419.0	81.0

Mail per capita

Date	Letters	Postcards	Printed Papers
1839	3		
1840	7		
1860	19		
1880/1	34	6.1	6.9
1900/1	57	10.2	17.9

* Excluding 6.6 million franks

foundation of new societies. Thus the development of co-operation would have been a slower and more difficult process without an efficient postal system. In addition to facilitating the personal exchange of information the postal service allowed the accumulation of material for publication in printed media, particularly newspapers. It was also the means of distribution of these widely circulated information sources, whose importance will be a major theme in subsequent discussion.

III

While inter-personal contacts made a significant contribution to the spread of co-operation they were not the mechanism which produced some of the main variations observed in the pace and spatial extent of its development. Contemporary comments indicate that surges in growth such as that of the late fifties and early sixties or the rapid increase in society numbers in the late twenties and early thirties noted in Chapter Two were information led events and that much of the stimulus came from the circulation of new printed sources. Many of those involved in the developments of these periods recorded their previous ignorance of co-operation per se or the change in their perceptions of the idea produced by information receipt. For some this involved the revelation of the practical success of an idea that had previously locally been known only to fail. In other cases groups with a wider purpose such as the political reformers of Chartism were shown how the idea of co-operative trading could be used to further their particular ends. The episodes of rapid spread of co-operation would have been impossible without an effective means of initial spread of information.

This is not to oversimplify the process. The speed of co-operative spread was also a reflection of the receptiveness of elements within the population of potential adopters - their willingness and ability to make the transition from awareness of an innovation to its implementation in practice. Co-operation was often seen as attractive because it offered

a solution to problems experienced by large sections of the working class, either broadly cast as the economic and social upheavals of the industrial revolution or narrowly defined in terms of food supply. Variation in the severity of such difficulties might be expected to have exerted an influence on the course of co-operative development and aspects of this relationship will be examined in the following chapters. It seems likely that the balance of the importance of local circumstances and receipt of information from outside as determinants of the timing of innovation adoption shifted during the course of development. In the early stages of the several waves of co-operative advance the production of new sources and an increased volume of information were critical stimuli to general action. It is much less clear what prompted the production of these new sources. Ideas were implemented because they were seen to be relevant, but the circumstances which encouraged this view were in many cases of long standing and it was not any sudden general deterioration of conditions that prompted the upturn of co-operative growth. Having passed through an initial phase of information dearth it became more likely that the timing and location of subsequent developments would be determined by changes in local circumstances which caused a reassessment of the value of an idea already in circulation - although in some instances the receipt of new information as a further prompt still provided the final trigger.

Attention will now be turned to the detailed evidence of temporal variation in the volume of information production,

particularly in the printed form which assumed considerable importance in the stimulation of original awareness of co-operation because of the ease of its widespread circulation. The relation of the spatial pattern of co-operative foundations to that of information circulation is handicapped by a lack of data. It is difficult to demonstrate clearly whether and to what extent the spatial extent of information circulation was greater than the pattern of its successes suggest. Argument has to be based not on comprehensive data but on individual instances and the generalised judgements of contemporaries. Where possible details of the scale of production and spatial circulation of particular sources have been included in the following review of the correspondence between the variation in the means available for the transfer of information and the pace and geographical range of co-operative development.

The development of printed material was a stimulus to the spread of co-operation outside its earliest centres of strength. This reflects the general role of such sources, that

The press in the nineteenth century was the most important single medium of the communication of ideas....²⁷

Printed sources became more accessible as rates of literacy increased during the century but the impact of the press had always extended beyond its direct readership.²⁸ Ideas originally introduced into a centre by newspapers were

relayed to a wider audience through informal local discussion and perhaps ultimately in the case of institutions such as co-operation by means including house-to-house canvassing and public meetings. Moreover, particularly early in the century, newspapers were often read, sometimes aloud, in a communal situation; amongst workmates, or in a pub or a club. Thus not only was each paper read by several different individuals²⁹ but the circumstances allowed for the

effective participation in the literate culture by³⁰ essentially illiterate people.

The importance of the press was recognised by contemporaries. As was noted in 1851

Almost every religious and philanthropic movement had its monthly organ, which not only gave leading articles upon the movement, but also reflected its proceedings³¹ and progress.

Thus the co-operative press was but a small part of a much wider popular journalism which included papers advancing such diverse causes as temperance, trades unionism, religious freedom, free trade, educational, landownership and political reform.³² The scale of this activity reflected the desire of the multitude of popular institutions both to relay information to established adherents and to present their views to a new audience. The press was a far more effective means of ensuring the widest distribution of information than, for example, the efforts of itinerant lecturers or

tract distributors.

The impact of printed sources of information was recognised from the earliest Owenite period of co-operative development. Especial importance was accorded to the Brighton Co-operator issued in monthly numbers between May 1828 and August 1830. This was not the earliest co-operative paper; it had been preceded during the early twenties by Mudie's Economist (1821-22) and joined the extant Co-operative Magazine issued by the London Co-operative society. However, the presentation of co-operative ideas and principles, especially the alliance of storekeeping with communitarianism, in what were in effect a monthly series of tracts, seems to have given an important impulse to co-operative development.³⁴ Contemporaries saw it as the inspiration behind the rapid spread of societies away from London and the south coast. In February 1830 the "pre-eminence" of the Co-operator was asserted with the statement that

the immense majority of the Co-operative Trading Associations formed since 1828... have been nourished³⁵ with the sound doctrine of the Co-operator.

Two years later the fourth national Co-operative Congress was told that the paper had

converted hundreds, if not thousands to the cause³⁶

The impact of the Co-operator reflected its relatively large circulation; Dr. William King, its author, considered that "immense numbers" had been sold. The annual circulation for 1829 was £12,000 and the total for the thirty monthly

issues was an estimated 50,000. It is unclear how this total was distributed geographically but specific instances show how news of the successful Co-operative Association at Brighton extended outside the immediate area. Publicity provided through the Co-operator and the earlier information supplied by the Association to the Co-operative Magazine led to the Brighton leaders receiving early

applications from parties at Kingstanley near Stroudwater, and at Belper near Derby, as well as from Birmingham, for instruction in forming similar societies.

The Co-operator also found its way further north to the textile districts which became a major focus of development. The initial advocate for the establishment of co-operation in Halifax in 1829 was inspired by personal experience of the workings of the Bradford society but he also had presented to him

An old and nearly worn-out number of the Brighton Co-operator and another of the Associate.

which he used to further his own knowledge and to stimulate interest in the scheme in his home town. This example also suggests that copies of the Co-operator continued to circulate for some time after their issue and that each individual copy might have had a large number of readers. The paper was not only read but preserved for reference, one of the Rochdale Pioneers of 1844 owned a bound volume of the Co-operator by then some fifteen years old which was

subsequently placed in the society's library.

The Halifax example also included reference to another southern co-operative journal, the Associate (1829-30) which was produced by the First London Co-operative Trading Association. The total circulation of this journal is unknown but in April 1829 it was reported that over 5,000 had been published.⁴¹ Co-operative news was also carried in the established London based trades paper the Weekly Free Press. As a stamped paper it was expensive and thus its circulation was never particularly large, seldom selling above 1,000 copies. Most of its sales were confined to London but it was clearly also read by northern co-operators.⁴² In 1830 it was found circulating amongst co-operators at Gateacre near Liverpool. An attempt to stimulate interest in co-operation at Lamberhead Green near Wigan included the circulation of the Free Press amongst local workers.⁴³ The Free Press was also specifically mentioned as providing the stimulus to start societies in other northern towns including Kendal,⁴⁴ Sheffield and Darlington.

During the years 1829-31 a number of monthly co-operative journals developed in the provincial centres of the north and Midlands helping to promote interest in their respective areas. The first was the Birmingham Co-operative Herald (1829-30). This was followed by the Chester Co-operative Chronicle (1830)⁴⁵, and the formation of the Manchester and Salford Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge led to the publication of the Lancashire Co-operator, later the Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator

(1831-32). In April 1832 it was reported that the circulation of each of the first eighteen numbers of the Lancashire Co-operator had averaged around 1,000.⁴⁶ The bulk of this circulation was probably within the North-West and Yorkshire, as Fig. 5.1 shows the agents and societies responsible for its distribution were concentrated in these areas. However, it did have outlets in London and Birmingham.

In addition to the specifically co-operative journals there was also news of its progress in northern trades papers. These included the Manchester based United Trades Co-operative Journal (1830), the Voice of the People (1831-32) and the Union Pilot and Co-operative Intelligencer (1832). Co-operative spread also attracted attention, not always favourable, in the general press. During December 1829, for example, the Weekly Free Press recorded favourable comment on co-operation in the Leeds Mercury and the Liverpool Mercury and more hostile notice in the Elgin Courier, the Manchester and Salford Advertiser⁴⁷ and the Sheffield Iris. Attention seems to have been less forthcoming in the London press. The Quarterly Review of July and November 1829 carried favourable⁴⁸ comment on the success of the Brighton society, but later the same year the Weekly Free Press noted

when our contemporary expresses himself as being struck with amazement, that all the London journals, excepting the Free Press, should have been entirely silent on the⁴⁹ subject, he conveys to them a well-merited rebuke.

Attention in the general press was a reflection of the

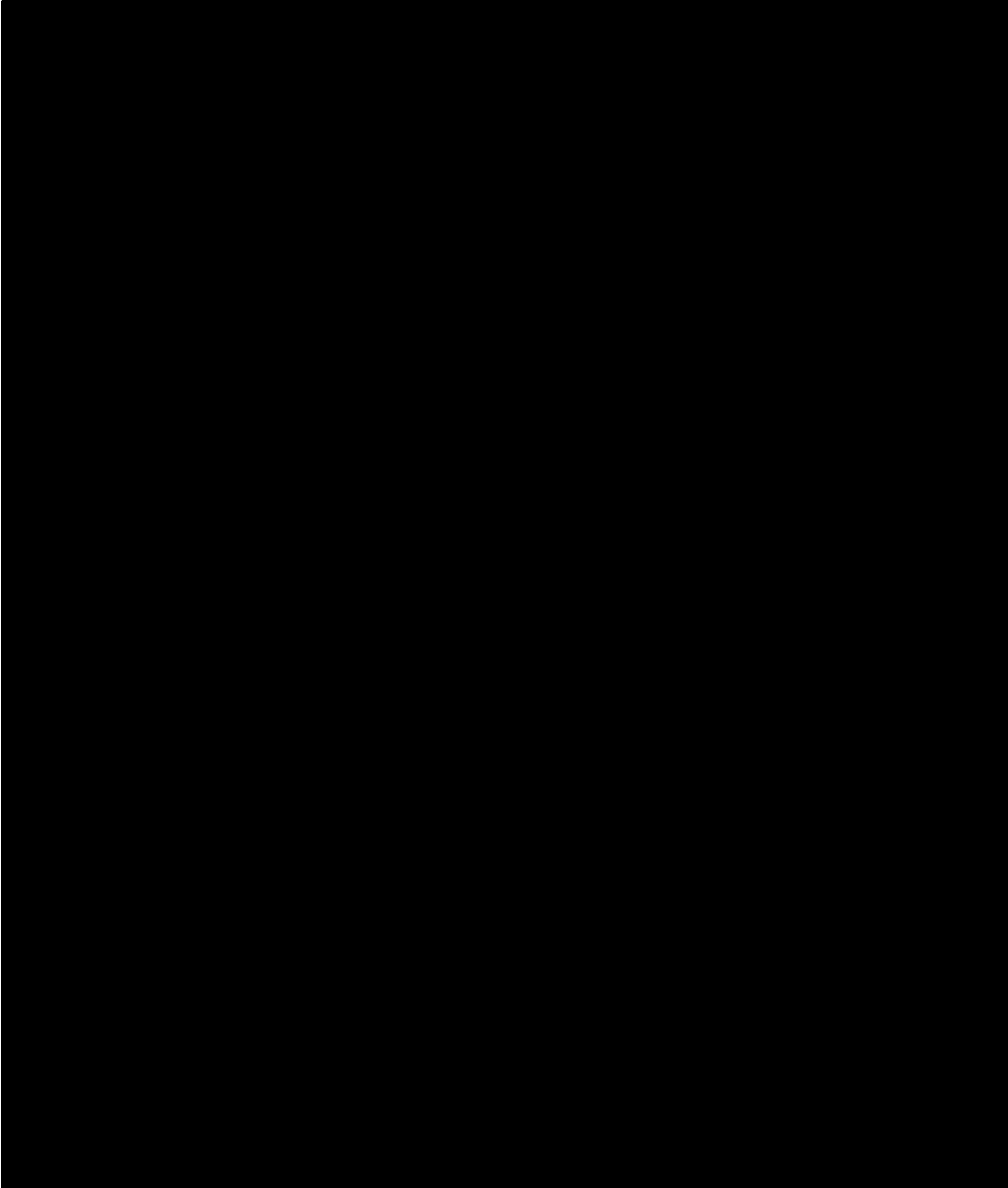


Fig. 5.1. Societies and Other Agents Distributing the Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator, 1832.

Source: Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator, 4. Feb. 1832.

novelty of co-operation in the late twenties and the interest excited by its increasingly rapid spread. Press comment might have been expected in its turn to have created further interest. Even hostile notice may ultimately have worked to co-operative advantage by stimulating local debate on the topic. However, once co-operation became more commonplace press attention to its development was not sustained, particularly as there were new popular causes, notably the campaign for parliamentary and wider political reform, competing for coverage. This declining notice was compounded by the cessation of publication during the early thirties of the specifically co-operative journals which shared the generally ephemeral character of the wider unstamped press. In some cases this stoppage reflected the unwillingness or inability of the groups responsible for the production of the journals to sustain the consequent financial loss. Even the Brighton Co-operator, for all its impact, made a net loss of £50. New journals founded during this period, of which the Crisis (1832-34) and the New Moral World (1834-45) were the most widely circulated, reflected the Owenite progression away from storekeeping which received only limited attention. Discussion was focussed on the goal of communitarianism and shorter lived enthusiasms including labour exchanges. There was little encouragement to counteract the depressive effect of society failures of the period after 1832 and the increasingly hostile notice co-operation received in the popular radical press where opinion was turning in favour of a political

solution to working class grievances. This included comment in the Poor Man's Guardian, the most widely circulated of the unstamped press.⁵⁴

Co-operative propagandism during the Owenite period was not confined to newspapers, there were also efforts to spread the message through lectures and missionary tours. Initially this work seems to have been the product of local enthusiasm. Particular societies and exceptionally motivated individuals devoted themselves to the promotion of co-operation within a fairly restricted district. Figure 5.2 shows the recorded engagements during 1831-32 of one of the more active lecturers, Thomas Hirst. Most were within a fairly restricted range of his Huddersfield home with speeches in London being associated with visits to the Co-operative Congress held in the capital. The impact of such work was thus not so much to extend co-operative development to new districts as to consolidate its position in areas where it already had a foothold. Moreover, most lectures were given in response to invitations from groups already interested in the issue. They thus supplemented sources such as newspapers which provided the first introduction to co-operation, perhaps easing the transition from awareness of abstract principles to their practical implementation.

Various bodies were also established to give a more formal sponsorship and systematic organisation to propaganda. In the spring of 1829 the London-based British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge (BAPCK) was formed. This

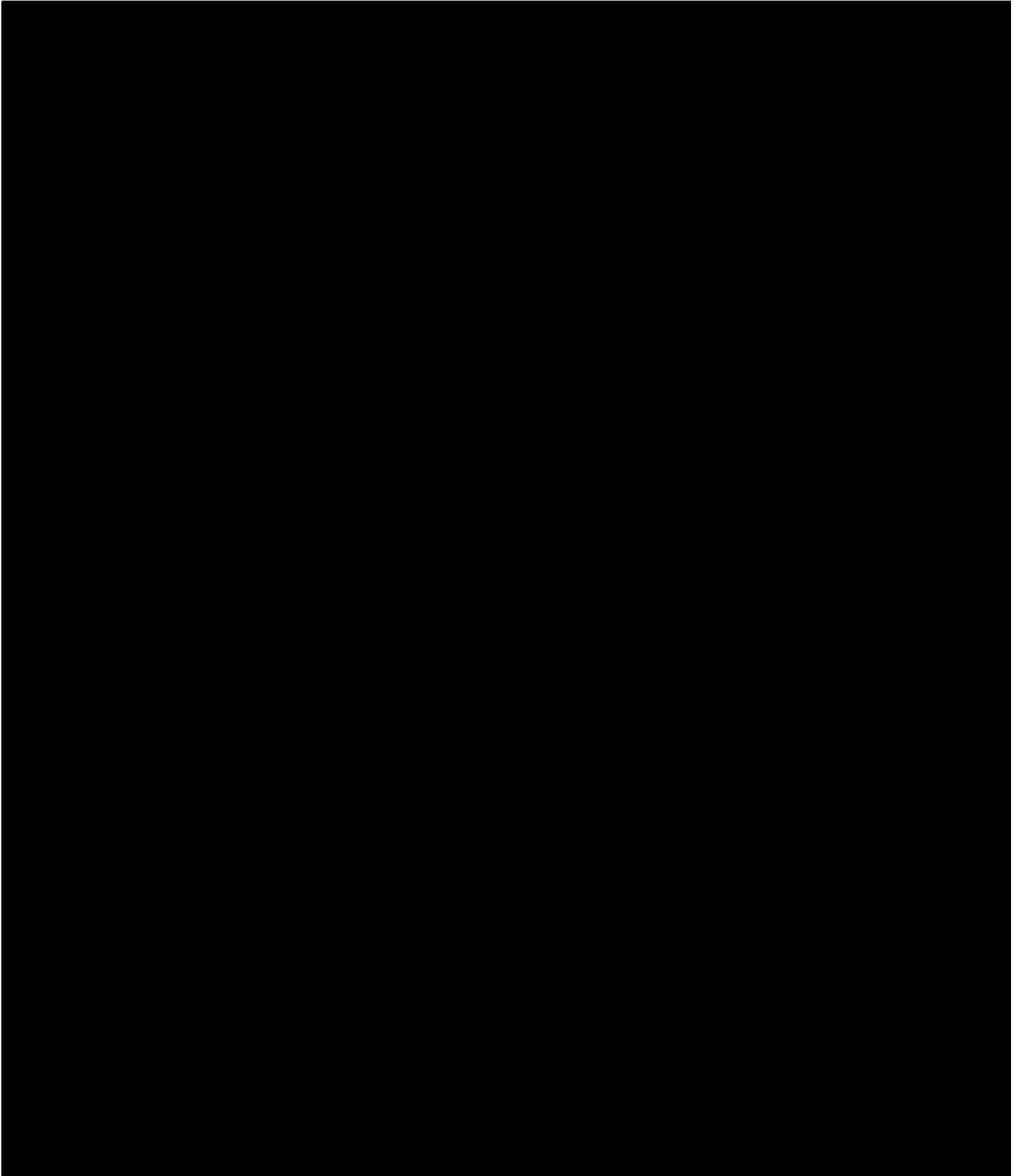


Fig. 5.2. Lecturing Engagements of Thomas Hirst, 1831-32.

Source: Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator, 1832; Crisis, 1832.

seems to have developed from the activities of G.C. Penn and others connected with the First London Co-operative Trading Association. During the first half of 1829 Penn placed regular advertisements in the Weekly Free Press indicating his readiness to advise on the formation of new co-operatives. He also offered to actively assist in obtaining publicity for new societies in London and other places within five miles of the capital.⁵⁵ His efforts seem to have stimulated some response for it was noted that

we have received many letters from the country, for information relative to the co-operative societies....⁵⁶

The BAPCK sponsored some limited missionary work but their main activity seems to have been the distribution of printed material. Thus it was recorded

Persons in remote parts of the kingdom hearing of their projects, and requiring information, were supplied with books on the subject; and in this manner more was done in the space of twelve months to disseminate Mr. Owen's peculiar views, than he had done himself during his long career.⁵⁷

There was similar initiative based in Manchester with the formation of the Manchester and Salford Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge in 1830 to organise lectures, short missions and cheap publications, including its own journal the Lancashire Co-operator, for the surrounding districts.⁵⁸ Suggestions were also made, apparently without result, that similar bodies should be established at Derby and Birmingham.⁵⁹

Ultimately there were attempts to organise missionary activity on a national basis as part of wider efforts to weld the various co-operatives into a more integrated movement. At the second national Co-operative Congress in October 1831, a committee was appointed to draw up regulations for the future direction of missionary activity. Its report at the third Congress of April 1832 proposed a division of the United Kingdom into nine districts centred on London, Birmingham, Manchester, Norwich, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Belfast, Dublin and Cork. Within each missionary work would be co-ordinated by a council reporting its operations to the national Congress.⁶⁰ The tone of most of these later reports does not suggest any consequent increase on previous activity. There were suggestions that the national system was not welcomed by individual societies which preferred to maintain local initiative.⁶¹ Perhaps in consequence propagandism at the district level was crippled by a lack of funds.⁶² The fact that the establishment of the missionary districts post-dates the real period of expansion of society numbers suggests that it was not necessary for the spread of co-operation and its rather half-hearted execution seems to have minimised its impact. Its practical importance was rather less than that of the individual missionaries and the newspapers discussed earlier.

IV

Although the decline of popular enthusiasm for co-

operative trading in its Owenite guise was in part associated with the rise of alternative political forces for reform it was in alliance with Chartism that co-operation received increased attention in the late thirties and early forties. It was through Chartist rather than specifically co-operative channels that its benefits were proclaimed and its successes reported. The advocacy of co-operation became in some areas, particularly those with previous experience of storekeeping and a continuing co-operative tradition, a part of general Chartist propaganda. The case was argued at Chartist rallies and through the circulation of printed tracts such as Robert Lowery's Address on the System of Exclusive Dealing of 1839.⁶³ In its alliance with Chartism co-operation could be extended through channels and contacts established to meet the wider functions of political campaigning. Thus it was debated at national Chartist conventions and at district delegate meetings. The potential of such meetings for information exchange is obvious, especially as in some districts meetings were held in premises which also housed a store; the visiting delegates⁶⁴ could thus see the workings of an example of co-operation.

Co-operation was also reported in the Chartist press. Notice of its progress was carried in several papers, the most widely circulated of which was the Northern Star whose mass sales far exceeded the modest totals achieved by other journals such as the Charter.⁶⁵ Attention has already been drawn to the role of the Northern Star as a medium for co-operative information exchange, not only in presenting

reports but in stimulating further correspondence and requests for more detailed information. Thus co-operative interest was being sustained through

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the most widely read journal of its time in Britain. In 1839, the year of its greatest sales the average weekly imprint of the Star was c36,000 and during the months April to June a peak of 42,000 copies per issue was claimed. ⁶⁷ Although this level was not maintained the weekly issues of the paper continued to be printed in large numbers throughout the forties, even in the depression early in the decade sales remained above 12,000. ⁶⁸ Moreover, like other contemporary papers its readership would have been much larger than the numbers of copies in circulation with a multiplier of between ten and thirty being suggested at the time. ⁶⁹ The popular impact of the paper should not be measured by its circulation figures alone, descriptions of the local arrival of the weekly issues emphasise the eagerness with which it was awaited and the attention paid to its contents. ⁷⁰ While first and greatest notice was devoted to the political content of the paper co-operation may have gained some reflected glory from its reporting in a newspaper whose opinions were held in such widespread popular esteem.

While Chartist enthusiasm for co-operation stimulated new stores it did little to extend the idea to areas without previous experience of the idea. In part the continued concentration of societies in areas of previous co-operative strength may have reflected the geographical diffusion of

information through means such as the Northern Star. This was most widely circulated in areas of manufacturing industry with a particular concentration of its agents in the northern textile districts (Fig. 5.3). Moreover, individual northern towns accounted for large sales of the paper. In February 1839 1,330 copies were ordered weekly in Ashton-under-Lyne alone.⁷¹ But the distribution of the Northern Star and the development of Chartism itself (Fig. 2.6) were more widespread than the geographically restricted growth of co-operation. It seems therefore, that the geography of co-operative development at this period reflected not only the availability of information but also variations in local response to the information content deriving from different experiences of both co-operation and Chartism, and other rather more prosaic matters including the adequacy of the service provided by private retailers (see Chapter Two). Co-operation grew chiefly in areas where there were already established societies. Thus in the northern textile districts and to a lesser extent in the industrial North-East there would have been the mutually reinforcing influences of practical examples and journalistic advocacy to stimulate further development. Elsewhere the power of the press alone might have been rather less; any practical benefits from storekeeping were not seen as of immediate local relevance and the politically committed viewed co-operation not as complementary to their campaigning but as a distraction.

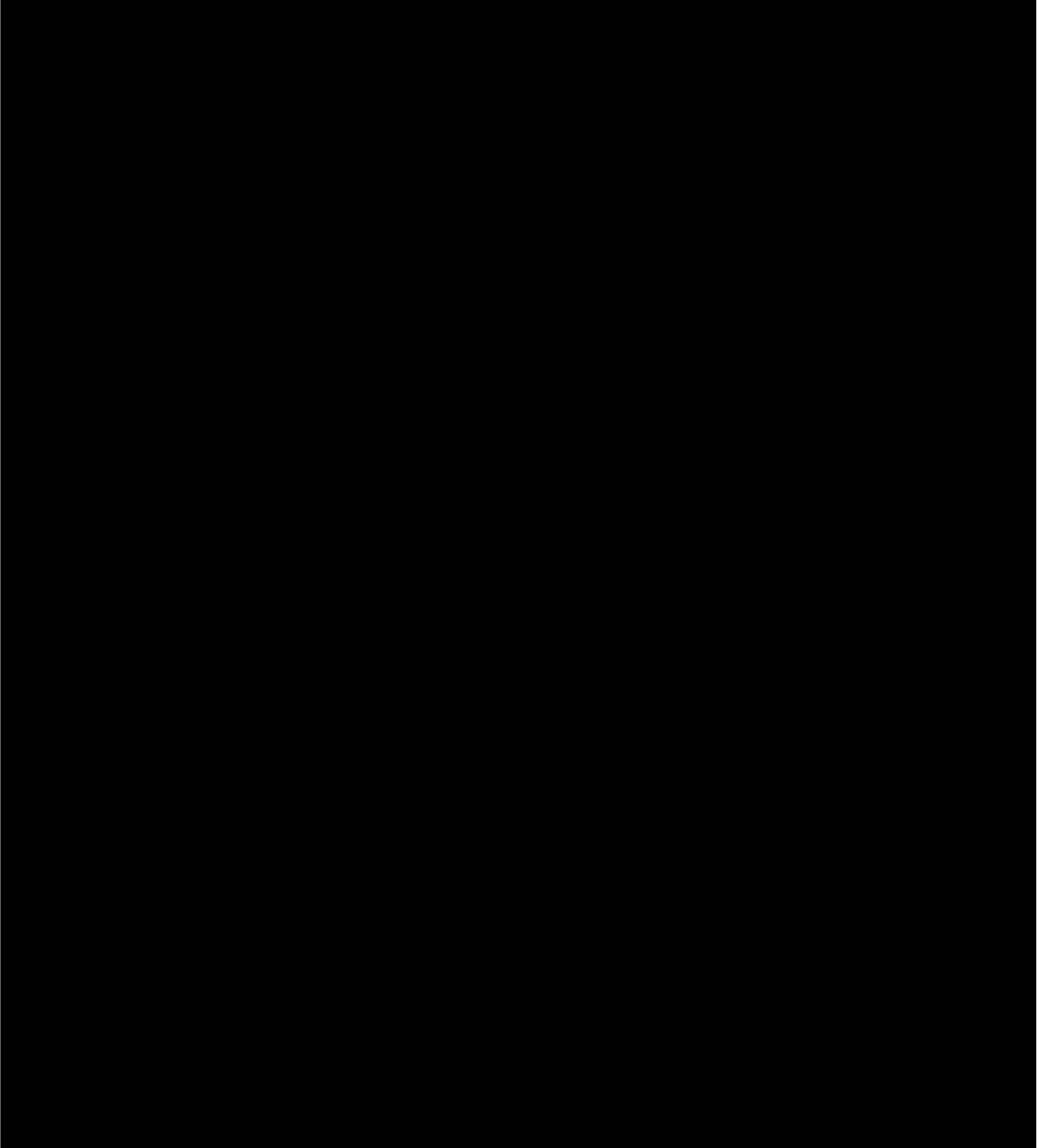


Fig. 5.3. Agencies Distributing the Northern Star, 1839.

Source: Gregory 1984, 89.

v

Greatest attention was given to co-operation in the Northern Star during the early forties, in the second half of the decade regular reports on the progress of individual societies were largely displaced by details of the Chartist Land Company. While the Star continued to be used by some societies to give notice of their activities ⁷² it seems likely that the availability of printed information about co-operation declined during the mid eighteen forties. The renewed development of co-operative mills, chiefly in Yorkshire, provoked the comment

Hitherto it has been deemed necessary that such movements as the present should be puffed into existence by means of newspapers; but one of the most remarkable signs of the times is, that this powerful effort towards a perfect co-operation, has been recorded by few ⁷³ journals; it has extended itself silently but firmly.

The spread of co-operative milling is demonstration of the manner in which such an innovation could diffuse within a relatively limited geographical area largely in the first instance through direct personal contacts and information seeking ⁷⁴ postal communications. Critical in the process was the initial stimulus of the rising corn prices and the local existence of established co-operative mills which seemed to offer a practical solution.

A similar process of predominantly local personal

information exchange would have been operating gradually to increase the number of retailing societies within the cluster of co-operative development in south-east Lancashire and the West Riding. During the mid and late forties there was little effort to integrate individual co-operatives into a wider framework comparable with that attempted during the periods of greatest Owenite and Chartist influence. Attempts by the Christian Socialists during the early eighteen fifties to create a national federal organisation that would have included some propaganda functions failed under the weight of the disapproval of the majority of co-operatives which feared loss of their independence. Propagandism was thus largely at the local level with individual societies having neither the motivation nor the resources to work for the wider extension of the idea. Most societies were concerned with the maintenance and growth of their own local activities. There were suggestions in the early fifties that the lack of co-operative spread throughout England and Wales was at least partly a reflection of the general ignorance of the success achieved by northern societies

Most persons in London are under the impression that only a few coöperative associations exist in the country, that the metropolis affords a few recent instances, and that confidence in them is pretty much confined to London.

This was a result of the reluctance of northern stores to publicise their achievements

none of these associations thinks of reporting their existence. Each one thinks its efforts of no importance to the public at a distance, and thus the whole are silent, when the voices of the group would reëcho in neighbouring counties, and reverberate even in London.

Thus any perception of co-operation in much of England and Wales was coloured more by knowledge of its past failures than its present success. The suggested solution was the collection of regular reports from all societies by a central organisation (a rôle proposed for the Christian Socialists) which would

prepare useful, brief, well-expressed paragraphs, and
send them weekly to all editors of newspapers....⁷⁶

Such information it was hoped would both introduce co-operation to a new audience and change the opinion of those already aware of the idea but prejudiced against it.

This contemporary analysis offers an appealingly simple explanation of the limitations of co-operative spread during the mid and late forties. There was certainly a much greater currency of co-operative awareness, information and practical demonstration of its success within restricted areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire than in the country as a whole. This reflected not only the personal exchange of information, but also the reporting of co-operative developments in local papers such as the Manchester Examiner.⁷⁷ However, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that there were no means available for the wider spread of co-operative information. These included the potential for personal contacts outlined

in Section II and a number of printed sources.

If the content of co-operative news in the Northern Star was declining during the eighteen forties and the paper itself no longer commanded a circulation comparable to its earlier peak a measure of compensation was derived from other journals, some of them specifically co-operative in character. Discussion of co-operative principles and some reporting of the progress of individual societies was a feature of newly founded journals such as the Herald of Redemption, later the Herald of Co-operation (1847-48), the Co-operative League Circular (1848), the People's Journal (1846-47), Howitt's Journal (1847-48), the Spirit of the Age (1848-49), Cooper's Journal (1850) and the Reasoner (1846-72). It is doubtful, however, whether even together these new journals would have equalled the circulation and perhaps more importantly the popular impact of the Northern Star at its peak. Cooper's Journal, for example, had an initial weekly circulation of 5,000 which fell to 3,600 after six months and continued to decline so that production was suspended after only ten months with a final circulation of 2,000.⁷⁸ A similar peak of 5,000 was recorded by the Reasoner whose notice of co-operation was secondary to its main concern with⁷⁹ atheism.

While these papers contributed to debate about co-operation in general they were less effective as agents in the spread of interest in co-operative stores in particular. Those with the clearest co-operative interest were produced

by groups whose concerns were chiefly with agriculture and communitarianism. The Herald of Co-operation was the organ of the Leeds Redemption society and the Co-operative League Circular revealed its parentage in its title. It was the Leeds Redemption society which received most notice in these and other journals during the late forties. This reflected the attention paid to propaganda by the Leeds society. Although its strength remained clustered around its Yorkshire origin, the Redemption society unlike the locally based co-operative stores aimed at nationwide recruitment. Its own paper was an important means of communicating with both existing and potential members. The distribution of the Herald of Co-operation was probably chiefly amongst existing members and thus reflected their geographical concentration but as Fig. 5.4 shows it also had agents in Midland and southern towns including Nottingham, Worcester, Plymouth, Cambridge and several in London. The society made other efforts to spread its message nationally. At its congress of Whitsun 1851 a plan of propagandism to co-ordinate the efforts of members scattered throughout the country was discussed. It was suggested that during two weeks in July a national campaign including the distribution of bills and tracts, lectures and public meetings should be mounted. In the event no major programme was reported in the press making it likely that financial limitations curtailed such ambitious plans. Most of the meetings reported during 1851 were within a restricted radius of Leeds itself in locations including Farsley, Pudsey, Holbeck Moor and Woodhouse Moor.

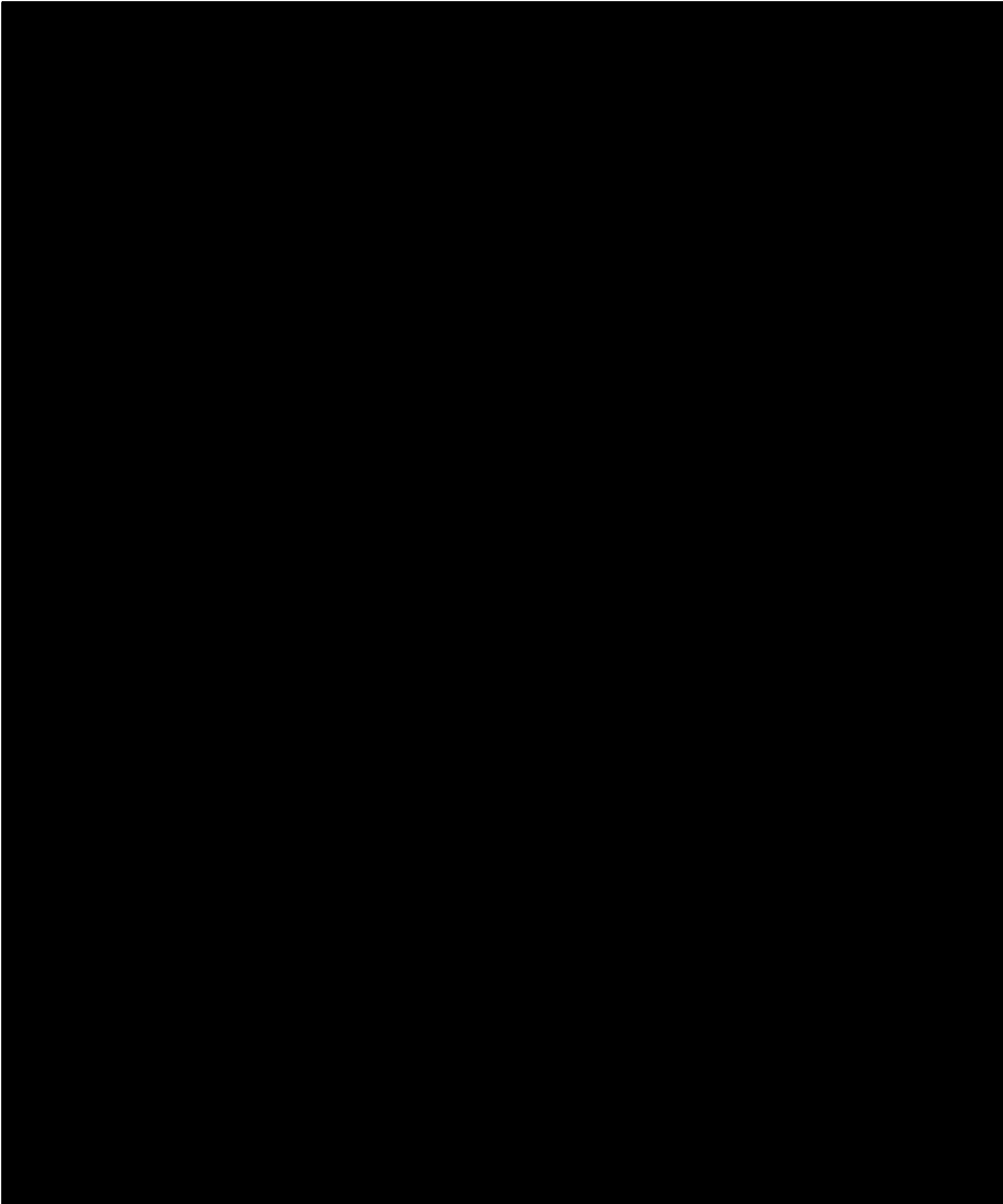


Fig. 5.4. Agencies Distributing the Herald of Co-operation, 1847.

Source: Herald of Co-operation, Sept. 1847.

Attention was not restricted to the Leeds Redemption society, even in its own journal. There was, however, generally more notice of co-operative association for production, including both communitarianism and milling, than to storekeeping per se. This last was chiefly represented by occasional descriptions of individual stores, including the Rochdale Pioneers.⁸² Press advertisement was also used to publicise the early attempts at greater co-ordination amongst societies. The co-operative conferences held during the early fifties were in practice regional assemblies of Lancashire and Yorkshire representatives but there were attempts to spread news of their convocation more widely. The organisers of the conference held at Bury during Easter 1851 resolved to seek publicity through the Northern Star, the Leader, the Christian Socialist, the Working Man's Friend, the Manchester Spectator, the Northern Instructor, and the Friend of the People.⁸³ If there were few established societies to respond to the invitation to the conference, such publicity would have increased awareness of the existence of the northern co-operative stores. What it apparently did not do particularly effectively was stimulate a desire to emulate their operations. The persuasive power of occasional news of events such as conferences would probably have been less than that of regular reports of the success of local societies. Evidence from the eighteen fifties and sixties suggests the importance of the latter type of material as a major element of later co-operative journalism. It gave details of the

profits made and dividends returned to individual members so presenting the attractions of co-operation in a way that was easily appreciated and provided the material for initial enthusiasts to convert their more sceptical neighbours.

To a certain extent two new weekly journals, the Leader and the Christian Socialist, both founded in 1850, provided an outlet for co-operative reports. The Christian Socialist, the organ of the group of the same name, reflected in its content their general interest in co-operation. The Leader which provided a wider coverage of political and social affairs devoted attention to co-operation through its regular column entitled "Associative Progress". However, attention in these journals, as in those of the late forties, was devoted as much to co-operative production as to storekeeping. This was partly due to the reticence of the northern stores in supplying details of their operations but it also reflected the greater interest of the sponsors of these journals in production. Within the Christian Socialists there were divisions on the relative merits of storekeeping and production. Some members of the group, particularly Lloyd Jones, Neale, Hughes and St. Andre supported the establishment of stores both as desirable in itself and as a step towards extension of co-operation into production. Others led by Ludlow saw the two schemes as serving opposing
84
ends. Thus while the Christian Socialists collected and published news of the progress of individual consumers' co-operatives it was not always presented with the enthusiasm that characterised much later co-operative journalism.

On the one hand there were reports of gatherings such as the Lancashire societies conference of April 1851, to which was appended statistics showing the success achieved by a number of individual societies in terms of their recruitment of members and their sales.⁸⁵ More detailed treatment was also provided of particular societies; the subject of the first of a series of sketches of "flourishing English Associations" published in the Christian Socialist was the Rochdale Pioneers' society.⁸⁶ Material gathered by the Christian Socialists was relayed not only through the press but also through public meetings in London and the provinces. Attempts to win support for co-operative trading in London quoted the success of a string of societies in Lancashire,⁸⁷ the West Riding and Cheshire. The Christian Socialists also sponsored visits and lecture tours outside the capital by Lloyd Jones and Walter Cooper. As these were in part intended to forge links between the London-based group and established retailing societies many visits were to the towns of the Lancashire and Yorkshire textile districts. But their travels did bring information about co-operation into other areas where it was likely to have been less well known including the Potteries and the North-East; during 1850/51 Cooper's lectures on both storekeeping and productive associations included venues at Newcastle, North and South Shields,⁸⁸ Sunderland, Middlesbrough and Stockton. However, the persuasive powers of such advocacy of co-operation was probably reduced by less favourable comments about some

northern societies. In particular the reports made by J.M. Ludlow on his tour of northern co-operatives reflected his prejudice against stores and greater interest in productive associations. Thus the treatment of stores was on occasion critical, some were noted as lacking in true co-operative spirit and tending towards the enrichment of a few members at the expense of the wider public, even indulging in practices such as adulteration.⁸⁹ There was also criticism of co-operative methods from the Chartist Ernest Jones. In his journal Notes to the People Jones predicted the failure of retail societies arising from practices which encouraged profit mongering by a few rather than leading to the moral⁹⁰ and material improvement of the mass of workers. As a consequence of these contradictory messages the presentation of information about co-operative stores perhaps lacked the inspirational qualities which seem to have been present in the stimulation of the rapid spread of co-operation during the later fifties and early sixties.

The impact of the co-operative reporting of the Christian Socialist and the Leader was also reduced by their small sales. In late 1851 the circulation of the Christian Socialist was c800 per issue.⁹¹ Ludlow complained of the⁹² difficulty in securing outlets for the sale of the journal. The level of sales was insufficient for a profitable⁹³ operation and publication ceased in June 1852. Moreover it seems that a high percentage of the circulation was bought by middle class liberals rather than the working men who were potential co-operators. Similar difficulties in reaching a

working class audience were faced by the Leader, problems compounded by the fact that as a stamped newspaper it cost sixpence per issue compared with the penny charged for the Christian Socialist⁹⁴

It is difficult to assess the total volume and geographical pattern of information flow about co-operation from the various journalistic and oratorical sources during the late forties and early fifties. The remaining evidence is fragmentary and the judgements of contemporaries contradictory. There was certainly a small and short-lived upturn in the rate of society foundations during the early fifties which coincided with the increased attention to co-operation largely stimulated by the involvement of the Christian Socialists. These included a number of societies in London where the direct impact of the group was most apparent. Indeed the Central Co-operative Agency set up by some individual Christian Socialists reported itself to be

in constant receipt of demands for prospectuses, catalogues, and rules from co-operative stores in course of establishment in different parts of England, Scotland⁹⁵ and Wales.

These requests stemmed at least in part from advocacy⁹⁶ of the services of the Agency by itinerant lecturers and advertisements of the availability of such information through the press.⁹⁷ Individual press reports show papers acting as channels of information transfer to aid the establishment of new societies. Moreover, information about

co-operation was more widely diffused through the press than its pattern of adoption would suggest. Interest was reported from locations including Cambridge and Worcester where there were no recorded store foundations in the immediately following period.⁹⁸

The impact of the activity of the early fifties on the long term growth of co-operation and the geography of its spread was, however, limited. The Central Co-operative Agency probably exaggerated its own importance and there were practical problems in the local adoption of co-operation. The small upturn in the rate of foundations did not represent the beginning of the take off of co-operative growth as the pace subsequently slackened. While foundations continued in the north in much of the rest of the country co-operation was stable or in retreat during the mid fifties. Most societies outside the northern core did not survive and their collapse curtailed any creation of new clusters of co-operative strength. The failure to maintain the rate of foundation also reflected the elimination of many of the channels of information flow established during the early fifties. There was consequently little external stimulus to encourage co-operative perseverance. The failure to sustain propagandism over a period of several years may have been critical in the failure of co-operation to take permanent root, allowing for a few false starts, in most parts of the country in the early fifties.

The northern stores, particularly the Rochdale society, provided advice to those who requested it but seem themselves

to have developed no formal mechanism for the extra-regional spread of the initial awareness that would prompt such inquiries.⁹⁹ The dying away of journalistic discussion of co-operation was thus an effective curb on the spread of information and so of societies. The interest of the general press was not sustained once the novelty inspired by the activities of the Christian Socialists had worn off. As a group they themselves became disengaged from active co-operative campaigning after the passage of the 1852 Industrial and Provident Societies Act which established a clear legal status for co-operatives. Thus there was no promotional effort to back up the achievement of this important constitutional step. The stoppage of the Christian Socialist paper, by then retitled the Journal of Association in June 1852 was compounded by a reduction in the coverage of co-operative news in the Leader after 1852.

The upturn of society foundations in the early fifties was not only short-lived it was also relatively small. This reflects in part the limitations of the circulation of information; the small sales of papers advocating co-operation and their even more limited currency amongst the workers who would have been the class to engage actively in co-operative storekeeping. Nor were the co-operative lectures and tours of this period particularly targeted at the spread of co-operation into extra-metropolitan southern England and Wales where practical co-operative efforts were almost entirely absent. The main objectives of the Christian

Socialists were the cultivation of links with established northern stores. It was perhaps hoped that the development of ties within the co-operative body would be a prelude to a concerted national propaganda effort. Such plans were never realised.

There was also a question mark over the content of the available information and its efficacy in promoting interest in the practical application of the idea of co-operative trading. Retailing may have been overshadowed by discussion of co-operative production both in journals with a particular interest in co-operation and in the general press. It was the prevalence of material on productive associations that provoked the comment

The provincial papers throughout are discussing the question, competition versus Association. Several of the influential metropolitan papers are furnishing able articles on the same subject.... Six months ago, nobody would have believed that the press of England would be overflowing with discussion on quasi communism.

Not only was attention divided between production and storekeeping but both in principle and in practice co-operative storekeeping received some adverse comment in the very papers which reported its progress. It seems likely that even in the localities where the co-operative message did get through it lacked the inspirational quality to generate further interest.

VI

If the early fifties showed only limited progress in the

diffusion of co-operative information and the spread of storekeeping then the mid fifties revealed even more restricted development in the absence of any geographically wideranging means to raise interest in the idea. There was little fresh initiative to compensate for the loss of momentum in propagandism. New journals, principally the Co-operative Commercial Circular, first issued in November 1853 under the aegis of the Central Co-operative Agency, had a circulation that continued the modest standards of their forerunners of the early fifties. Moreover, the suspension of publication of the Circular in March 1855 left co-operation without its own journalistic voice for the rest of the decade. There remained only isolated references in journals such as the Reasoner and the Leader.

By contrast with the immediately preceding period the late fifties and early sixties saw a remarkable development of new societies not only in the northern textile districts but also the introduction of co-operation to all regions of England and Wales. This upsurge occurred in the wake of an increase in the availability of information about co-operative success, particularly in printed form. The recorded details of the foundation of individual societies confirm the importance of new information sources in prompting action. The secretary of the Bradford-on-Avon society reported the circumstances of the initiation of their store

It was in February last, that No. 1 of Chambers's Social Science Tracts found its way into Bradford. It was read

by a few and set us thinking. We were not long before we put our thoughts into practice, for on the Saturday evening about fourteen or sixteen of us met together to discuss the practicability of opening a store here, and to make a beginning we subscribed £12 between us. Next week we spread the news amongst our shopmates and friends, and we collected nearly £12 more.

The publication in 1858 of G.J. Holyoake's book Self-Help by the People: a History of Co-operation in Rochdale seems to have marked a turning point. The material in the book was originally intended for serial publication in the Daily News during 1857 but this was abandoned after the first issue, displaced by news of the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny. The publicity accorded the work through its initial newspaper issue may have prompted the subsequent wide circulation of the book. Some of the information it contained was also relayed through other printed sources. These included the tract Co-operation in its Different Branches of 1860 mentioned at Bradford-on-Avon above. Co-operation was also discussed in articles in journals such as the Quarterly Review, Macmillan's Magazine and Fraser's Magazine, and some of the popular Sunday papers which had a mass working class readership. Lloyd's Weekly and Reynolds's Newspaper were both mentioned as providing the initial stimulus to the development of individual societies. In addition there was the revival of specifically co-operative journalism with the foundation of a new paper initially issued monthly, the Co-operator. This was joined briefly from November 1860 to May

1861 by the National Co-operative Leader (later the Co-operative Newspaper) published by William Watkins as the organ of his National Industrial and Provident Society.

From the small number of cases for which data are available mapped on Fig. 5.5 it is unwise to attempt any detailed conclusions about the geographical pattern of the impact of individual sources or their relative importance. It is sufficient to note that the variety of sources gave the capacity for the long distance transfer of information. The bare bones of the pattern on the map can, however, be fleshed out to give a more detailed picture of the sources and processes of information diffusion during this important period.

Holyoake's history of the Rochdale Pioneers' society was often quoted as directly providing the inspiration for the foundation of societies in the early wave of developments in the late fifties and early sixties. As Joseph Cowen Jnr. told the national Co-operative Congress meeting at Newcastle in 1873

I believe that the revival of the co-operative spirit of this district is owing chiefly to the publication of that admirable and useful book which was written by Mr. Holyoake. That book had a wide circulation in this neighbourhood some fifteen or sixteen years ago; and in consequence of its being read in workmen's societies, and at their firesides, it gave a fresh impetus to the

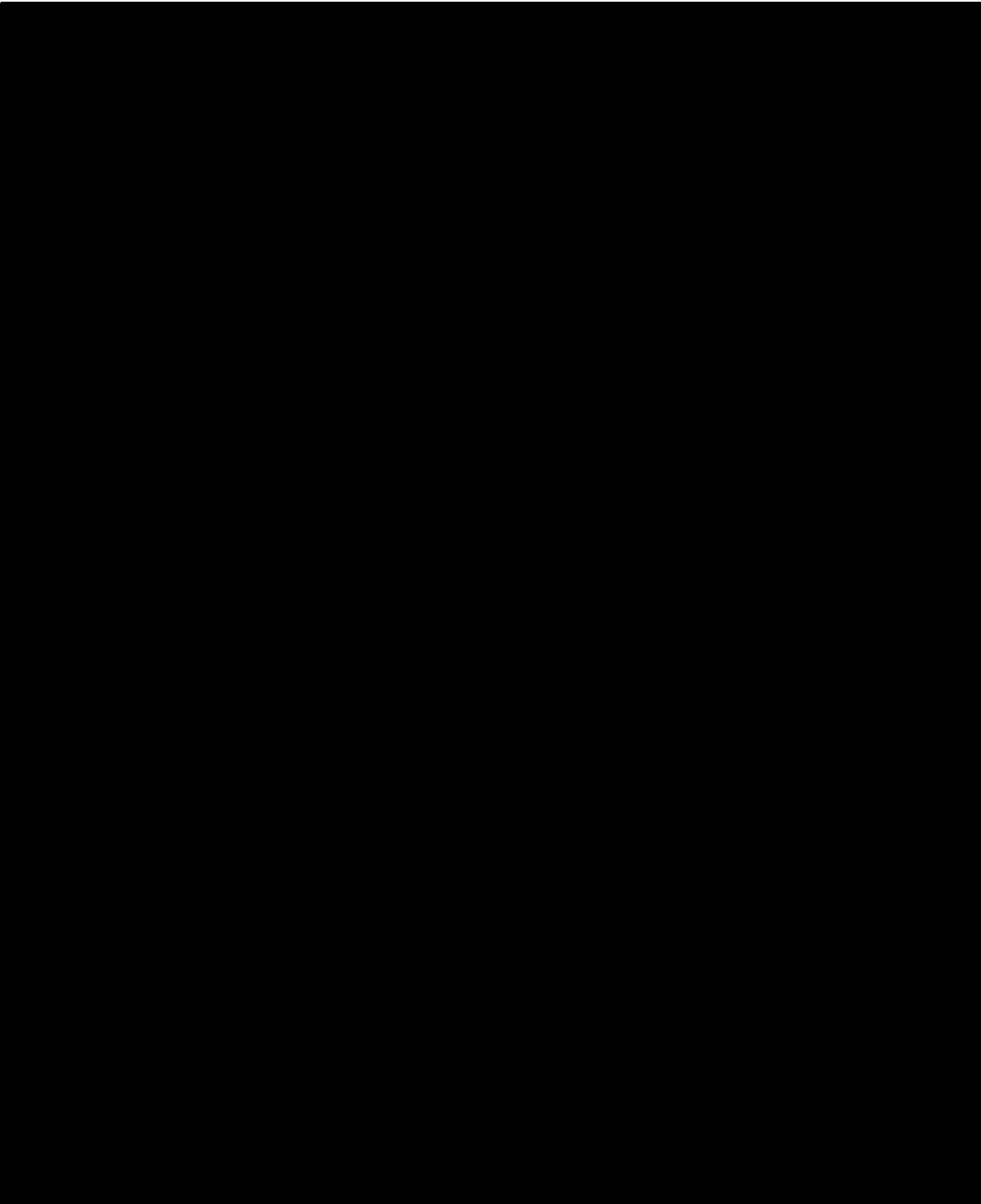


Fig. 5.5. Published Information Sources for New Co-operative Foundations, 1859-61.

Source: Co-operator 1861-70; Co-operative News 1871-75; Society Histories as detailed in bibliography.

cause. The instruction it imparted on the formation of co-operative societies, and the hopeful prospect it held out as the result of their establishment, gave new life to the co-operative effort of this district.

Cowen, who was personally acquainted with Holyoake had himself played a key role in the development of north-eastern co-operation by introducing the successful example of the Rochdale society via the medium of Holyoake's book to workmen at the Mechanics' Institute which he had helped to found at Blaydon.

The early society at Blaydon proved to be a focus for further development in the industrial North-East where co-operation took particularly firm root. Holyoake's book was also mentioned as a stimulus to their establishment by other early societies in the district.

Elsewhere it was quoted as a source by societies as far removed from each other and from the early co-operative core as Maryport, Plymouth, and Merthyr Tydfil.

Such references suggest that the work was not only sold in large numbers - it ran into a second edition within a year of its first publication and a fourth edition by 1860, it was also produced in various unauthorised abridged editions - but was also geographically widely circulated.

Holyoake's travels would have helped to extend the sales of his book. During the eighteen fifties he was regularly engaged as a touring lecturer, chiefly in the secularist cause, but in the later fifties his repertoire also included a lecture on the Rochdale Pioneers.

Even when the subject of his lectures was removed from co-operation he may have relayed its message in more informal

discussions.

Holyoake's book consolidated the strengthening national reputation of the Rochdale society. It acted as an inspirational example, not just a cold presentation of information but as a story with the power to engender conviction, both amongst those learning of co-operation for the first time and those whose previous awareness of the idea had been touched with scepticism. Accounts of its impact were couched in almost messianic terms. At York, for example, the book

came amongst them as a revelation. The lamp of faith which had been glimmering for years at once became full and bright. It was a message of inspiration. It even
108
caused many old deserters to give themselves up.

The picture it presented was far more glowing than most co-operative journalism of the early fifties and indeed the advance made by the Rochdale society in the intervening years
109
made the story all the more impressive. The wider publicity thus extended Rochdale's role as a centre of practical advice.

Amongst newspapers the Co-operator provided the most regular journalistic advocacy of co-operation during the eighteen-sixties; however, despite its importance its career was somewhat chequered. It was in constant danger of financial collapse, being maintained only by funds raised through appeals printed in the paper itself. This money subsidised its production to the level of around £150 for

every year of the paper's existence. The Co-operator's financial troubles reflected a circulation that was small by the standards of the mass-circulation press of second half of the century. At the end of twelve months' production Pitman was claiming a sale of nearly 10,000 copies of each issue. 111

However, this seems to have been the numbers printed rather than the true lower sales figures. 112 In December 1865 it

was reported that the print run of individual copies of the paper was 9,000 (publication was fortnightly from May of that year increasing to weekly numbers in January 1868), but it still seems likely that sales were below this figure. 113

Indeed neither the Co-operator nor its successor the Co-operative News enjoyed a particularly wide circulation by the standards of popular Victorian journalism. 114

The bulk of sales of the Co-operator and the Co-operative News would have been to individuals who were already co-operative members and concomitantly most correspondence and reports printed were by and about established societies. Indeed one of the major aims of these papers was the improvement of communications between existing societies. However, particularly in the earlier Co-operator there was a certain amount of correspondence from individuals and groups not yet engaged in storekeeping. As Fig. 5.6 shows the information appeals actually printed in the paper came predominantly from outside the main areas of previous co-operative strength. It seems plausible that requests for advice which were the main component of this published correspondence should be addressed to a newspaper chiefly

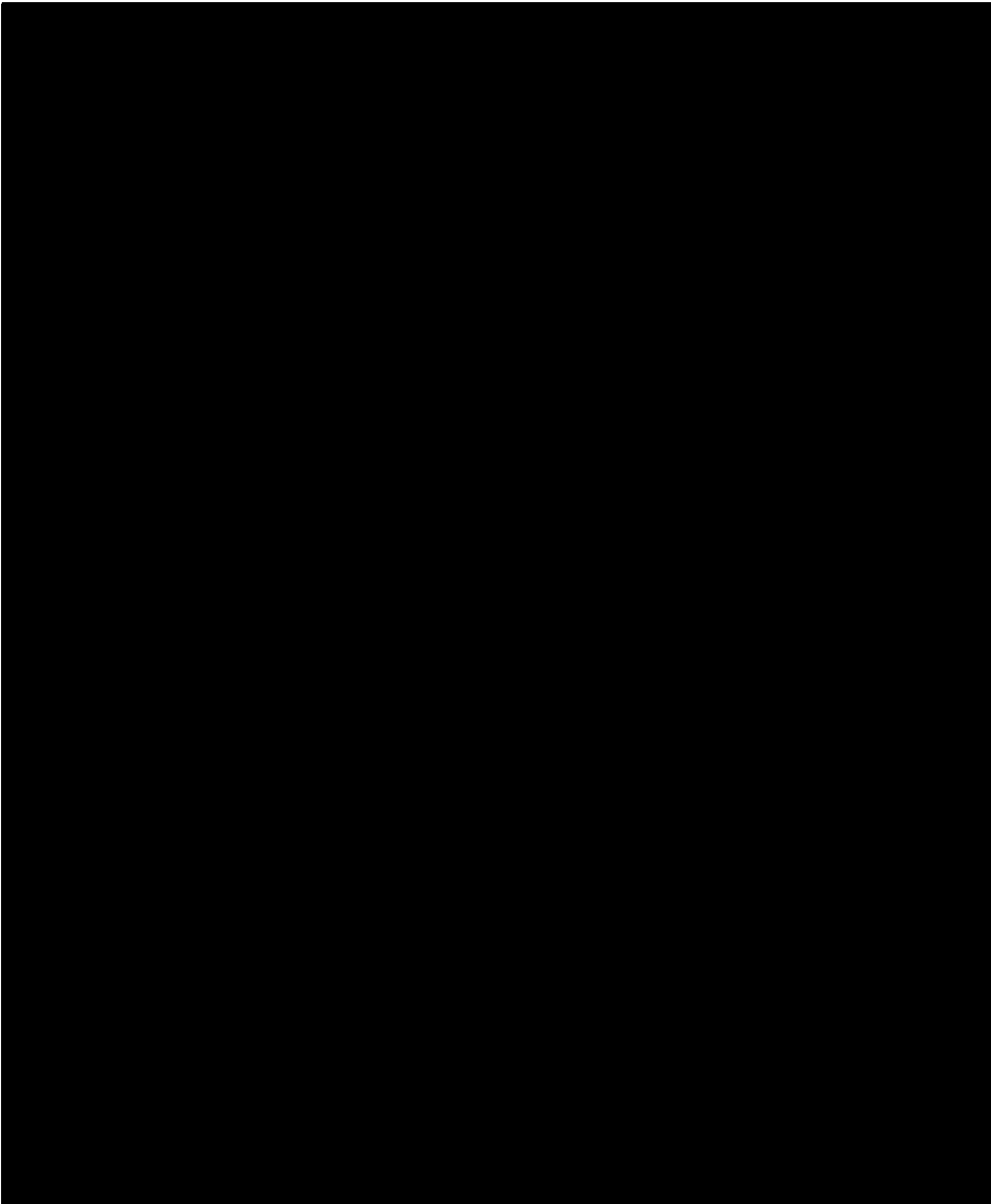


Fig. 5.6. Requests for Information About the Procedure of Foundation of Co-operative Stores Made to the Co-operator, c1860-69.

Source: Co-operator 1860-69.

from areas where there was no local source of information.

It is not always clear how the circulation of the Co-operator extended into new areas. In some cases it was taken by individuals already interested in co-operation who specifically sought it out as a source of further information. Isaac Burton, a shoemaker from Raunds reported

I had never seen one of your co-operative records until a month ago, when, being at Northampton, I enquired at one of the stores for them, and had a few back numbers given to me; these I gave to a few friends, and they were the first that ever came into Raunds.

115

Elsewhere the Co-operator seems to have brought the first knowledge of co-operation in a rather serendipitous process. The Mitcheldean society, for example

was originated by a single copy of the Co-operator reaching the place, and being read by two persons who felt an interest in its contents.

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The distribution of such single copies of journals to new locations may have been the work of individuals who despatched copies regularly with the aim of co-operative extension. The secretary of the Hackleton society, for example, recorded that when he himself had finished with the Co-operator

I always send my copy away, sometimes into one part of the country, and sometimes another.

117

However, there was no indication of how individuals chose the locations to which they sent literature. The decision

probably involved personal considerations with material being sent to established contacts thought likely to be sympathetic towards co-operation. Hopes of extension through such means were not always realised. It was reported from Newmarket in 1862

I have sent your journals over almost every part in the surrounding district, and the good that will follow must shortly become patent by the establishment of these
118
excellent institutions.

Thoughts of co-operative success in Newmarket itself proved over-optimistic. There were no foundations in Cambridgeshire until that at Sawston in 1867 and the only society founded in West Suffolk in the intervening period was that at Bury St. Edmunds of 1864. This cannot have been the only case where there was a failure to translate the co-operative message into practice.

Renewed attention to co-operation in the general press played an important complementary role to specifically co-operative sources of information. Indeed some of the sales of Holyoake's book would have followed from its notice in the press, a medium through which part of it originally appeared. The general press did not compare with the specialised journals in the detail and frequency of reporting of co-operative progress, but its message reached a much wider audience than ever achieved by co-operative papers. The press both relayed comment on co-operation from other sources and added its own contributions to discussions. Increasingly the successful northern stores won the plaudits of influential

liberals whose comments were reported in the newspapers. John Bright, the Rochdale MP, used the achievements of the town's society as part of his arguments in favour of the extension of the Parliamentary franchise. It was the reading of newspaper reports of this Commons speech in 1860 which was credited with the awakening of co-operative interest in Gloucester and Reading. Co-operation was also discussed by bodies such as the Social Science Association. Reporting of Lord Brougham's speech to the 1864 conference in the Times provided the first introduction to co-operation in localities including Thrapstone, Northamptonshire.

Co-operators were themselves requested to use the press to publicise their cause, the editor of the Co-operator wrote

We would again urge upon our co-operative friends the duty of advocating the principles of co-operation more frequently through the medium of the newspaper and periodical press.... Short, pithy, telling, letters, articles, &c., filled with co-operative facts and illustrations, will generally, we believe, be readily accepted and printed by the editors of liberal newspapers.... The use of the pen is daily becoming more necessary in the conduct of co-operative business, and the advocacy of its principles.

There were also efforts to spread co-operation through a campaign in the general press. This was the means used by William Watkins during the late fifties and early sixties to promote his National Industrial and Provident Society. His

series of articles ensured that co-operation received attention in one of the most widely circulated papers of the day, Reynolds's Newspaper. This and other popular Sunday papers such as Lloyd's Weekly which also included co-operative material had, with the abolition of stamp duty in 1856, achieved a working class readership far in excess of the modest totals of the co-operative press (Fig. 5.7). Given the large circulation of the Reynolds's Newspaper it seems reasonable to record Watkins' claim that

Upwards of one hundred societies were established, under
123
our instructions.

The geographical distribution of the sales of the popular Sunday papers suggests that they may have been a force in the introduction of co-operation to industrial areas outside the original northern core. Reynolds's circulated widely in industrial Lancashire and Yorkshire, but it also sold well in the Midland hosiery districts, South Wales and central Scotland. Lloyd's pattern of readership was similar but it
124
also had a larger London circulation. It was in South Wales that there was the clearest evidence of the importance of Reynolds's in the introduction of co-operation. It was recorded as providing the inspiration for the first enduring
125
Welsh society at Cwmbach in 1859. Although this was organised as a conventional independent society, Watkins' National society played an important part in the early development of Welsh co-operation. Of the eleven recorded stores extant in South Wales by 1860 seven were affiliated to the National society and others acknowledged a debt to

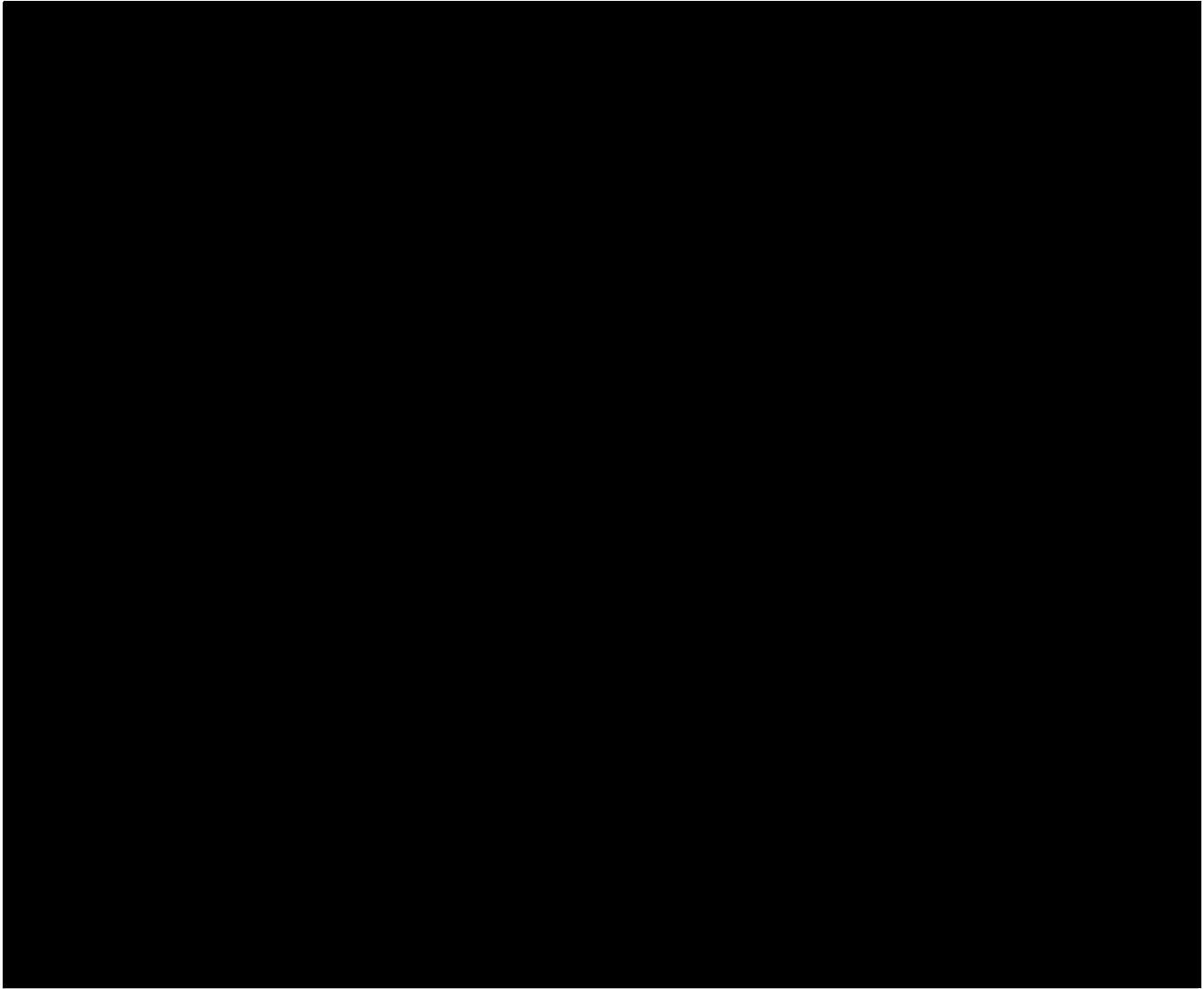


Fig. 5.7. Circulation of Lloyd's Weekly and Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper, 1844-90.

Source: Berridge 1978, 263.

Watkins' letters in Reynolds's.

The distribution of branches of the National society through the country as a whole indicates its role in the development of co-operation in areas of the country where previous experience was limited (Fig. 5.8). The number of National society branches was greatest in southern England. Although the branches were almost all short lived, even in his failure Watkins may have exerted a long term influence on co-operative development. The initial negative experience of co-operation perhaps retarded the introduction of more conventional retailing societies in parts of England and South Wales. It is difficult to identify precisely the forces shaping the distribution of National society branches. It cannot be that these were the only locations reached by National society literature, particularly through the Reynolds's Newspaper. Perhaps while press articles sparked off interest in areas with a greater established co-operative presence this led to the foundation of conventional independent stores rather than links with the National society. Watkins' scheme was probably most appealing in areas where there was no alternative local model. It may also have been the case that the National society made efforts to introduce societies into districts where co-operation was weak. The large number of branches in London probably reflected a concentration of promotional activity in the capital which was the headquarters of the society and the place of residence of its leaders.

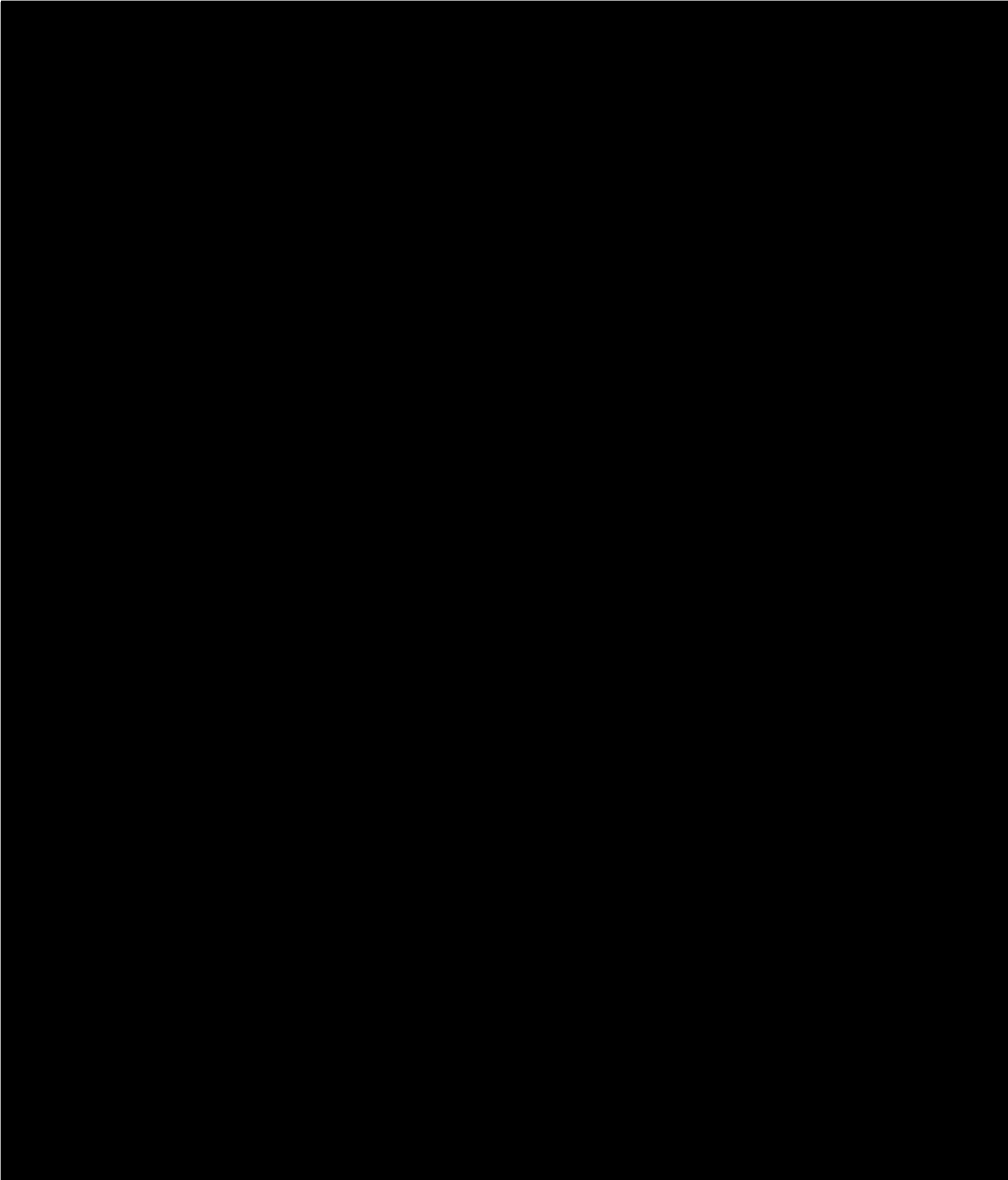


Fig. 5.8. Stores Affiliated to the National Industrial and Provident Society, 1860-61.

Source: National Co-operative Leader 1860-61; PRO FS 3.

VII

In the period after 1860 there was continuity of both co-operative development and the publication of printed material about the movement's progress. The increasing eccentricities of the Co-operator, used by Henry Pitman as a vehicle for others amongst his enthusiasms, notably vegetarianism and the anti-vaccination campaign, led in 1871 to a confederation of retail co-operatives organising its replacement as the chief journalistic voice of the movement by a new weekly paper, the Co-operative News. This is still in production today. Established writings about co-operation continued to be available; Holyoake's history of the Rochdale society was regularly reprinted and extra chapters were added to bring the narrative upto date. By 1882 the original section dealing with the period prior to 1857 had reached its ninth edition. Similar histories were produced for other societies, some including those dealing with Halifax and Leeds written by Holyoake himself.¹²⁶ The volume of co-operative information circulating in printed form increased in other ways. Individual retail societies or district groupings produced their own local co-operative journals, the earliest being the Banbury Co-operative Record a monthly first issued in October 1871. The idea spread and by 1878 the combined annual circulation of the several journals issued by societies at Banbury, Derby, Coventry, Alderman's Green, West Smethwick,¹²⁷ Hathern and Leicester was 313,000. Similar publications were attempted, not always with lasting success by other

societies including those at Colchester, Norwich, Ipswich,
Worthing, Greenstreet, Leeds, Manchester and Macclesfield.¹²⁸
General local papers also increasingly carried regular
reporting of the affairs of co-operative societies in their
district.

In the furtherance of co-operative development, the impact
made by the sort of printed material outlined immediately
above was rather different in the later decades of the
century from its counterparts in the period upto the late
fifties and early sixties. Co-operative material continued to
be read, but its function commonly changed. Holyoake's
history of the Rochdale society, for example, became less a
means of exciting new interest in co-operation and more a
pedagogic tool for the education of those already enrolled in
the movement. The number of reports of the first revelatory
awareness of co-operation declined considerably as the idea
of the operation of a retail store, if not its successful
practical execution, had already spread widely.

This chapter has outlined the temporal coincidence between
variation in the output of basic information which would
stimulate popular awareness of co-operation and interest in
its practical development in the years upto the eighteen
sixties. Episodes of co-operative growth seem to have been
information led with the success of early societies
attracting further attention and thus increasing the
publicity given to the movement. But consideration of the
material which was the means of creating initial awareness is
only the beginning of any understanding of the geography of

co-operative development. As Rogers's model dividing the process of innovation adoption into a series of stages makes clear, awareness of the existence of a new idea is only a preliminary to a more complicated process of decision-making regarding its implementation. Further investigation of the process involves a more detailed consideration of the resources of information available to potential adopters. But we also need to know more about the character of adopters and of the local arena, the particular place, within which any decision about the acceptance of an innovation was made. The full complexities of the decision-making process cannot be recreated but it is important to attempt to piece together the limited available evidence. During the latter half of the nineteenth century it became increasingly likely that non-adoption reflected causes other than complete ignorance of the principles of co-operative storekeeping. The fact that societies once established experienced varying fortunes in different locations also suggests the need for a broadening of the analysis if anything like an adequate understanding of the development of co-operation during the last four decades of the nineteenth century is to be achieved.

NOTES

1. Hägerstrand 1967, 138.
2. E.g. Blaut 1977, Blaikie 1978.
3. Blaut 1977, 344.
4. Hägerstrand 1967, 164.
5. Cliff 1968, 75.
6. Rogers 1983, 18.
7. Hamilton 1910, 8.
8. Co-op. June 1860; Hinchliffe 1909, 54.
9. Co-op. 4 Jan. 1868.
10. E.g. O'Neil 1982; Lawton and Pooley 1975; Dennis 1984, 255.
11. Anderson 1971, 37-39.
12. Turner 1983.
13. Instances include movement from Rochdale to Bolton and Barnsley: Peoples 1909, 29; Barnsley British Co-operative Society Ltd. 1903, 18
14. P.P. 1852-53 LXXXVIII Pts I and II.
15. Jackson 1982 follows Redford 1964 in contrasting the limited long distance movement into northern textile towns with its greater importance in metal working districts elsewhere.
16. Coventry Perseverance Co-operative Society Ltd. 1917, 41, 361.
17. House 1954, 51-52.
18. Jackson 1982; Gwynne and Sill 1976.
19. Co-op. 15 June 1866.

20. Brown 1938.
21. McKenna 1980, 25.
22. Purnell and Williams 1910, 2.
23. Table 5.2 may overstate the increase as prior to the introduction of the penny post letters were also carried by clandestine means: Gregory 1987, 142-48.
24. Gregory 1987, 137-40.
25. Daunton 1985, 80-81.
26. Especially as individuals recorded in the visitors book for the Rochdale society were mainly middle class liberals rather than the officials of other stores.
27. Lee 1976, 18.
28. Matthews et al 1982, 573 provides an indication of improving educational standards during the nineteenth century.
29. In 1829 it was estimated that on average every paper was read by around twenty five people: Asquith 1978, 101.
30. Schofield, quoted Lee 1976, 35.
31. P.P. 1851 XVII, 207.
32. B. Harrison 1969, 127.
33. B. Harrison 1969, 128.
34. The journal was originally conceived as a single pamphlet to explain the workings of the Brighton society.
35. Co-operative Miscellany Feb. 1830.
36. Quoted Mercer 1947, 31.
37. Mercer 1947, 24; Ch. Soc. 11 Oct. 1851.
38. Co-operative Magazine Oct. 1828.
39. L & Y Co-op. Mar. 1832.

40. Mercer 1947, 45.
41. It is unclear whether this refers to the first monthly issue or to the total production of the three numbers then issued: Co-operative Magazine Apr. 1829.
42. Hollis 1970, 101.
43. Co-operative Miscellany June 1830.
44. W.F. Press 11 Sept. 1830; L & Y Co-op. Apr. 1832, May/June 1832.
45. This shows further evidence of the influence of the Brighton Co-operator as the Chester paper took as its mottoes extracts from the earlier journal.
46. L & Y Co-op. Apr. 1832.
47. W.F. Press 12 Dec. 1829, 19 Dec. 1829, 26 Dec. 1829.
48. Mercer 1947, 22.
49. W.F. Press 12 Dec. 1829.
50. The co-operative press was not affected by the general harassment of the unstamped press, only the United Trades Co-operative Journal which also carried general news and comment was ended by government suppression: Hollis 1970, 103.
51. Ch. Soc. 11 Oct. 1851.
52. The first issue of the Crisis sold c17,000 copies; in 1840 the circulation of the New Moral World was c2,000 copies per issue: Holyoake 1875, 179; J.F.C. Harrison 1969, 217.
53. See Chapter Two.
54. Sales peaked at 12-15,000 copies per issue in 1832-33: Hollis 1970, 110-11.

55. W.F. Press 14 Mar. 1829.
56. W.F. Press 4 Apr. 1829.
57. Quoted Cole and Filson 1965, 213.
58. L & Y Co-op. Apr. 1832.
59. Birmingham Co-operative Herald 1 July 1829; W.F. Press 9 July 1830.
60. Crisis 5 May 1832.
61. Co-operative Congress Report Oct. 1832; Lancs. Co-op. 21 Jan. 1832.
62. Lancs. Co-op. Mar. 1832.
63. Lowery 1979.
64. Delegate meetings for the West Riding were regularly held in the same premises as the stores in Dewsbury: see e.g. N. Star 22 July 1843.
65. Circulation of the Charter reached 5,000 during 1839: Hollis 1970, 119.
66. Thompson 1984, 50.
67. Thompson 1984, 51. Figures quoted for the sales of the Star vary; it is possible that individual issues sold nearly 60,000 copies: Harrison 1959, 73-74.
68. Gregory 1984, 221.
69. Asquith 1978, 100-01.
70. Thompson 1984, 51-52.
71. Thompson 1984, 51.
72. For example the Rochdale Pioneers' society wrote to the paper to publicise their forthcoming anniversary tea party in December 1847: Manchester Central Library MF 870.

73. Herald of Co-operation June 1847.
74. These could sometimes be quite numerous, at the first meeting of the Stockton-on-Tees Co-operative Mill communications were received from societies at Hull, Whitby, Beverley, Leeds, Lincoln, Barnard Castle, Paisley, Kirby, and Thirsk: Howitt's Journal 26 June 1847.
75. St. Andre 1854, 10-14, 75-82. Backstrom 1974, 45-47.
76. Leader 21 Dec. 1850.
77. Leader 29 June 1850.
78. Cooper's Journal 26 Oct. 1850.
79. Royle 1980, 2.
80. Leader 10 May 1851, 17 May 1851.
81. Leader 6 Sept. 1851; Harrison 1954, 9-10.
82. E.g. People's Journal 15 May 1847.
83. Leader 22 Mar. 1851.
84. Ludlow 1981, 186-87, 209.
85. Ch. Soc. 3 May 1851.
86. Ch. Soc. 14 Dec. 1850; see also article on Rochdale, "The Facts of Co-operative Success" in Leader 23 Nov. 1850.
87. E.g. Ch. Soc. 7 Dec. 1850, 28 Dec. 1850. The latter meeting was also reported in the Northern Star which used the information given as the basis for a later article on co-operation: N. Star 21 Dec. 1850, 28 Dec. 1850.
88. Ch. Soc. 2 Nov. 1850, 25 Jan. 1851, 1 Feb. 1851, 5 Apr. 1851, 17 May 1851.
89. Ch. Soc. 27 Sept. 1851, 11 Oct 1851. See also St. Andre 1854, 46-47.

90. Notes to the People Nos 2 and 21, 1851.
91. Ch. Soc. 22 Nov. 1851.
92. Ludlow 1981, 191-92.
93. Ch. Soc. 12 Apr. 1852.
94. Holyoake 1892, 239.
95. Ch. Soc. 1 Mar. 1852. If this is not an exaggeration then the relatively low recorded total of society foundations in the early fifties suggests that many enquiries must have failed to produce concrete results.
96. Holyoake was appointed as a representative for the Agency during his tour of Scotland and the north of England in the autumn of 1851: Co-operative Union, Holyoake Collection No. 434
97. E.g. Leader 26 July 1851.
98. Ch. Soc. 22 Feb. 1851.
99. There seems, for example, to have been little response to the suggestion from the Christian Socialist Charles Kingsley for a concerted national campaign of meetings and other agitation: Leader 14 Sept. 1850.
100. Leader 28 Sept. 1850.
101. Co-op. Dec. 1861.
102. CN 19 Apr. 1873.
103. Blaydon District and Industrial and Provident Society 1958, 10. Not surprisingly Holyoake seems to have held a similar opinion, taking for himself the credit for the upsurge in co-operative foundations: Holyoake 1879: 366.

104. These included societies at Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, Hunwick Lane Ends, Bedlington, South Shields, Tyne Dock and Tweedmouth: Tyne and Wear Archives Department 634/B41.
105. Cumbria Record Office (Carlisle) DB 16 2/1; Briscoe 1960, 7; PRO FS 8/19.
106. Hibberd 1968, 556; Goss 1908, 23-25.
107. McCabe 1908, 297; Tyne and Wear Archives Department 634/C557.
108. Co-op. Mar. 1861.
109. Membership had increased from 630 in 1851 to 1,850 by 1857 with a corresponding growth of annual sales from £17,638 to £79,788: Cole 1944, 81.
110. Saville 1972, 272.
111. Co-op. June 1861.
112. Holyoake 1879, 370. No precise sales figures were given.
113. Co-op. Dec. 1865.
114. The Co-operative News started with a UK circulation of 7,000 rising to 41,000 by 1895: CN 19 Apr. 1873; Co-operative Union 1895, 46.
115. Co-op. 1 June 1867.
116. Co-op. Aug. 1862.
117. Co-op. Aug. 1862.
118. Co-op. Mar. 1862.
119. Bing 1972, 76-77; Lockwood 1949, 17.
120. Co-op. 15 July 1865.
121. Co-op. July 1863.
122. See Chapter Four note 50.

123. National Co-operative Leader 16 Nov. 1860.
124. Berridge 1978 and 1982.
125. Co-operative Union 1917, 165.
126. Holyoake 1866, 1882 and 1897.
127. CN 27 Apr. 1878.
128. CN 29 Apr. 1876, 8 July 1876, 21 Apr. 1877, 2 June 1877,
20 Apr. 1878, 13 July 1878; Harrison et al 1977.
129. Rogers 1983, 163-92.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CIRCULATION OF CO-OPERATIVE INFORMATION: PRACTICAL
COMMERCIAL KNOWLEDGE.

I

The variety of media which carried co-operative information and the large circulation which some of these achieved make it likely that awareness of the potential for co-operative success became widespread throughout the country during the late fifties and early sixties. Indeed it must have been so to produce the distribution of foundations recorded on Fig. 3.4. Some years later the veteran campaigner Lloyd Jones considered

that in almost every village and town in the kingdom there are a few persons who have heard of co-operation, and have a slight notion of what it means. The word "co-operation" must have found its way every where through
1
the press....

Given discussion in the mass-circulation popular press and an increasing notice in local newspapers as well as in specifically co-operative sources it is likely that Jones' judgement was correct not only for 1874 but also for the period from the early sixties onwards.

It follows, therefore, that information which in some areas excited workers to the rapid development of stores must elsewhere have produced no tangible result. It is clear also that of the many societies established during the late fifties and early sixties those in northern England and the South-East Midlands were generally more successful than elsewhere. In part this reflected differences in local

economic and social conditions which shaped the popular response to co-operation and dictated the ease with which it could be put into practice. These are forces whose exploration will be attempted in following chapters. However, the creation of initial awareness does not end the role of information transfer as a factor influencing the progress of innovation adoption. The complexities of the flow of information and the arrangement in space of individual societies as well as their circumstances of place need to be further explored.

The information element within the process of innovation diffusion encompasses more than its passive receipt by a potential adopter. In the case of co-operation the initial small group of enthusiasts in every locality had an active role to play both in the accumulation of practical information to enable them actually to operate a store and in the communication of their interest to other workers in their district to ensure capital and custom for the store. Failure in either respect nullified the impact of the wide ranging spread of awareness of co-operation.

Different types of co-operative information were appropriately disseminated through particular media and channels. General information which raised first interest in the idea was most widely distributed and often introduced into areas removed from established concentrations of co-operatives through printed sources. These generally presented argument in favour of co-operation in terms both of the demonstration of the collective power of the working class to

2

effect their own social and moral elevation , and in a more directly appealing form which detailed the immediate benefits. It was suggested that co-operation would lead to freedom from exploitation by shopkeepers who overcharged their customers and sold poor quality or adulterated goods, members would be freed from debt and have a means of saving. Ultimately, it was sometimes claimed, co-operatives would accumulate sufficient capital to finance production for their stores; working men would themselves become capitalists signalling the reshaping of the relationship between capital and labour.³ Such general points were reinforced by statistics of the growing sales, membership and capital of particular societies and the consequent financial benefits⁴ for their members, especially in the form of dividends.

The widely circulated sources rarely included details of the means by which the success they documented had been achieved. Even in an extended account such as Holyoake's history of the Rochdale society there is only a brief indication of the process of the establishment of the store from the assembling and enlarging of the initial group, the raising of capital through subscriptions, the hiring of premises and the original meagre stock. The early rules of the society were quoted but these were more a general statement of intent than a detailed guide to operations. Nor did the co-operative press regularly carry information about the administrative and financial side of storekeeping, being chiefly filled with more abstract discussion of co-operative

principles and reports of the progress of individual stores. For new societies the lack of practical information did cause problems. It was reported from King's Lynn that

the working out of a system of business and management has been attended with difficulties unknown I should think, in the northern and midland counties; and although there is a vast store of information in the pages of the Co-operator, and the various tracts and books we could lay our hands on, a systematic manual of advice suitable to an infant society, did not come under
5
our view.

It was necessary therefore for groups interested in co-operation to individually seek out further information both to confirm the worth of the idea and provide practical details. This was accomplished by the initiation of personal contacts, both face to face and postal. These new links included feedback to the original information source and links with other parties newly revealed as likely to provide additional details.

The interactive process of information exchange was probably most easily conducted in areas where there were already other established societies. The leaders of the infant co-operative could see for themselves the daily workings of a store and it was not difficult to renew contacts across short distances as fresh queries arose. The presence of other local co-operatives was also an aid to the drawing of wider support for a store within a community. While printed material helped to extend the idea to small

groups of enthusiasts throughout the country it was not so effective in winning the support of the less committed mass of the population. The local recruitment of popular support was most likely to follow from personal endorsement of co-operation either informally amongst neighbouring groups of workers or within the context of a public meeting. Leaders of nearby societies were often invited to address such meetings as part of a programme of propagandism that also included discussion in local newspapers, the distribution of tracts, bill posting and house-to-house canvassing to back up more informal contacts between workmates and friends.⁶ Something of the pattern of information exchange is indicated by Fig. 6.1 which maps links between new and existing co-operatives for the period c1860-75 as recorded in the press and society histories. The contacts mapped are only a small proportion of the interaction that must have taken place during this period but they do indicate the limited distances over which most were made. This was particularly true of the concentration of societies in northern England. Elsewhere the lower density of co-operative development led to correspondingly longer distance contacts between neighbours.

The greater distance between societies was itself a handicap to new growth in southern and Midland England. One aspect of the success of new co-operative developments from the late fifties onwards in the North and the South-East Midlands was that, as in Lancashire and Yorkshire, the industrial communities which provided the base for individual

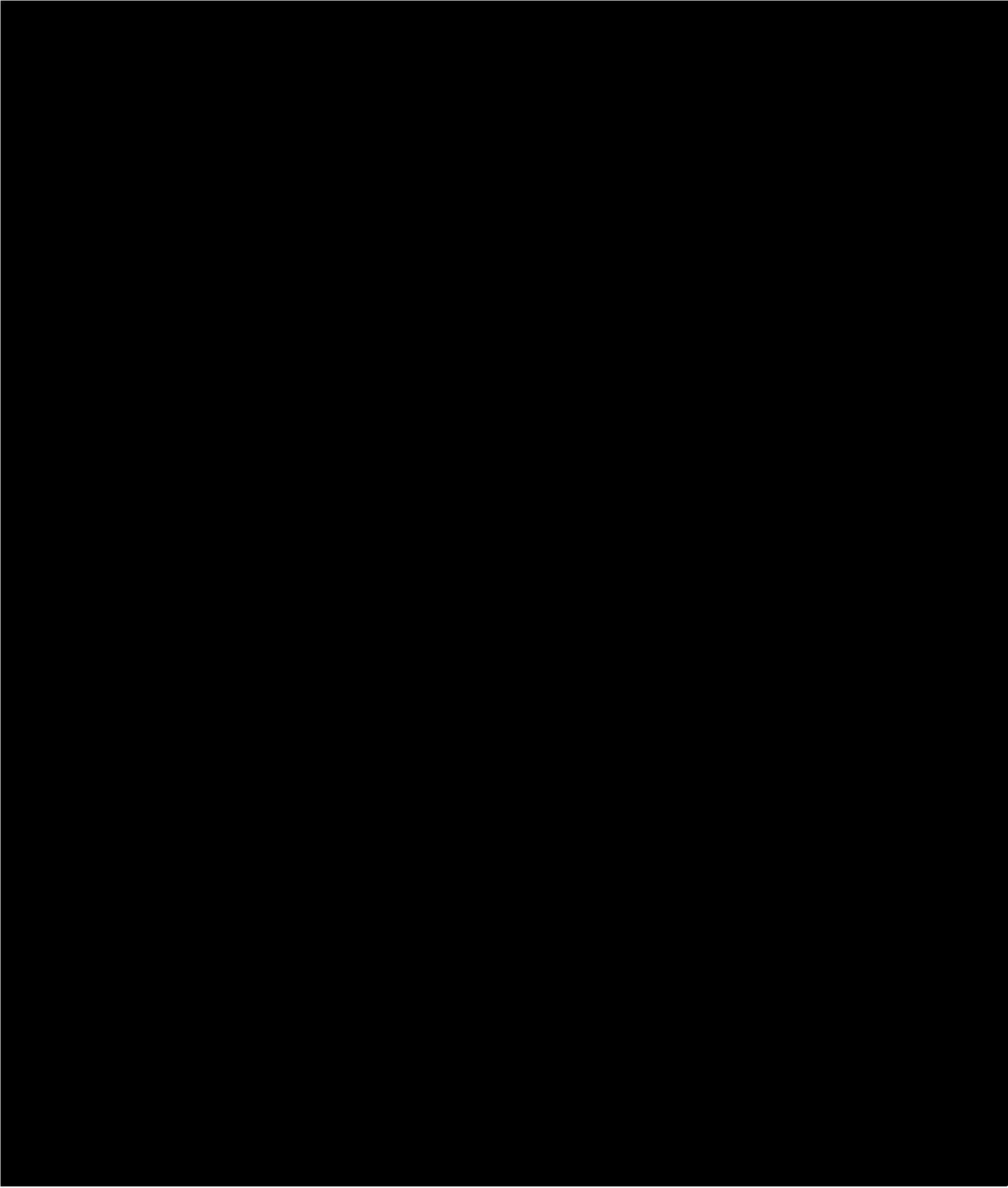


Fig. 6.1. Examples of the Pattern of Information Exchange Between New and Established Co-operative Retail Societies, 1860-75.

Source: Co-operator 1850-71; Co-operative News 1871-80; Co-operative Society histories referenced in detail in the bibliography.

societies were clustered together easing the circulation of detailed information both for the initiation of stores and to improve the efficiency of their subsequent operation. In southern England the urban centres which were the location of early co-operative developments were usually more widely spaced. The resultant isolation of societies was considered to be

a great hindrance to the fuller development of co-operative progress. From this cause many societies have made little or no headway while others have been signal failures.⁷

A specific instance of such problems was given when it was reported of one Warwickshire society

the Harbury people had no knowledge of the workings of the North of England Wholesale Society, or ... in what manner they could become members of it.... So also ... as to book keeping. How many societies have failed through want of knowledge of this most important part of co-operation...?⁸

The lack of knowledge of particular aspects of business practice which weakened existing societies might be expected to have been a greater problem for groups attempting to start a society away from previous areas of co-operative strength. A lack of "how to" knowledge perhaps constricted the extension of co-operation within much narrower bounds than the geographical extent of awareness of the idea.

Potential co-operators lacking the support and advice of neighbouring societies were not, of course, completely

without access to guidance based on the experience of others. They could draw on a number of sources which were of national importance. The early publicity given to the Rochdale society made them a natural target for requests for further advice and during the fifties and sixties their secretary William Cooper seems to have maintained a steady correspondence with co-operative groups and societies throughout the country advising on the framing of rules and the operations of retail trade. The society also provided some practical services, for example, in the supply of business stationery and the printing of rule books.⁹ Thus as Fig. 6.2 shows the Rochdale society's pattern of contacts with other co-operatives (the figure provides no guide to the number of contacts which would have been much greater) was quite different from the majority of those shown on Fig. 6.1¹⁰ A complete picture of the flow of co-operative information would involve the superimposition of the two patterns as many new societies with accessible neighbours also contacted Rochdale.

An additional source of information during the eighteen sixties was the editor of the Co-operator, Henry Pitman. His activities in support of co-operation were varied in form and geographically wide ranging. It was noted that

Mr. Pitman has devoted the greater part of his time and income to the cause of co-operation, answering letters of inquiry (numbering at a low estimate 5,000 per annum), - editing the Co-operator, - lecturing throughout the country, - and printing and distributing

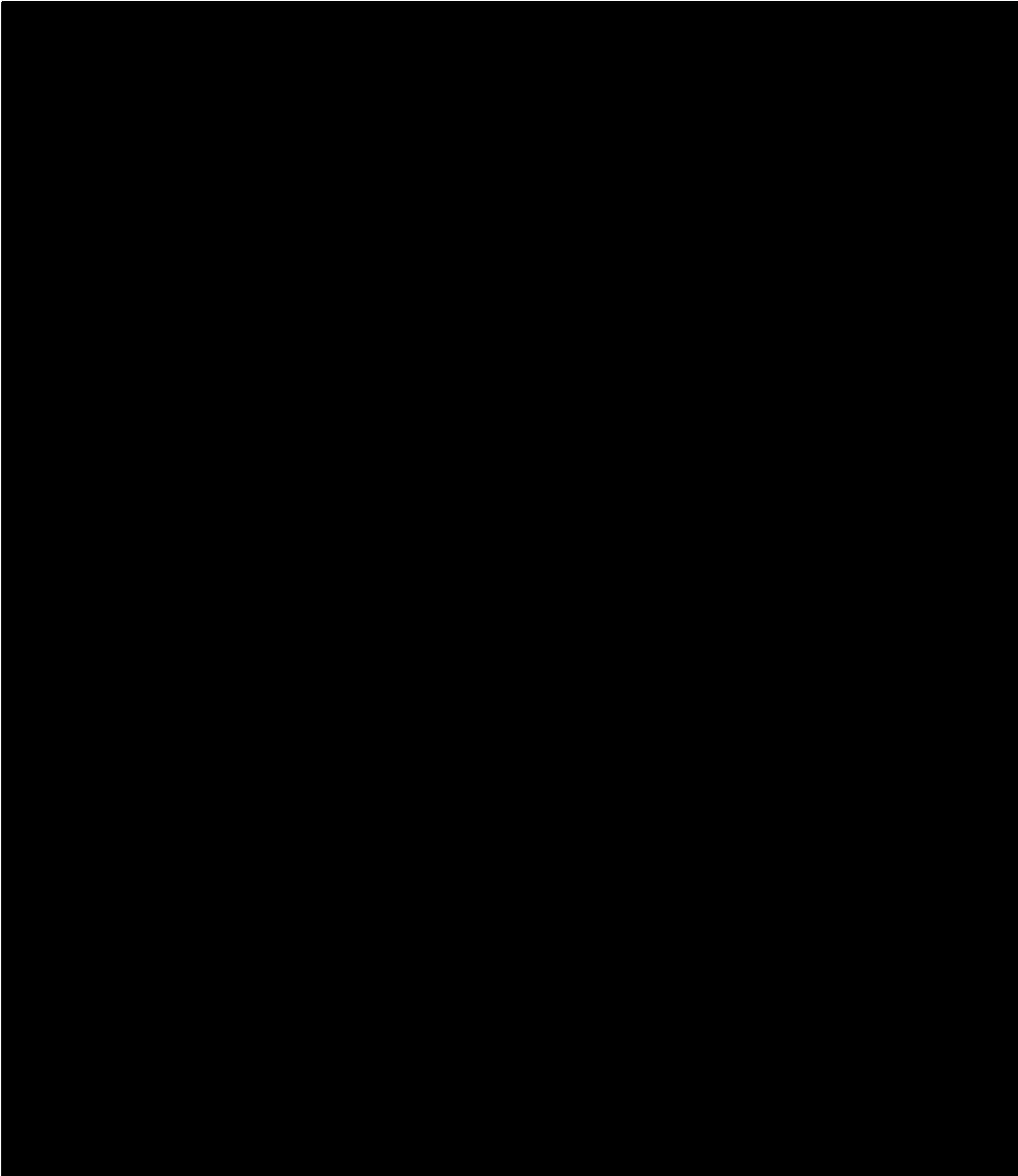


Fig. 6.2. Examples of the Pattern of Information Exchange Between the Rochdale Pioneers' Society and New Retailing Co-operatives, 1860-75.

Source: As Fig. 6.1.

co-operative tracts, dialogues, &c. of which he has circulated at his own cost during the last six years, more than 250,000 copies.¹¹

Some indication of the geographical range of correspondence received by Pitman is provided on Fig. 5.6. His activities as a lecturer can be gauged from the coverage of his travels in the Co-operator. In the period 1864-71 (these dates are determined by the availability of data rather than establishing any limits to Pitman's work) there were reports of 170 lectures and visits, involving 140 different societies (Fig. 6.3). Not surprisingly these were chiefly in the North-West and Yorkshire - Pitman himself lived in Manchester - but they do include incursions into other areas of the country. The spatial range of Pitman's activity distinguished him from most other lecturers. Even those who advertised their services in the co-operative press - during the mid sixties the list of available lecturers carried regularly in the Co-operator comprised one each from Eccles, Manchester and Bury, three Londoners and a Scot from Barrhead - confined their work to their home locality.¹² This form of stimulus to development was thus most available in areas where co-operation was already an established presence.

Access to national sources of information was not, however, a completely effective substitute for local experience, making the development and successful long term operation of individual isolated co-operatives more difficult. It was virtually impossible to gain guidance that was both comprehensive and appropriate to different local

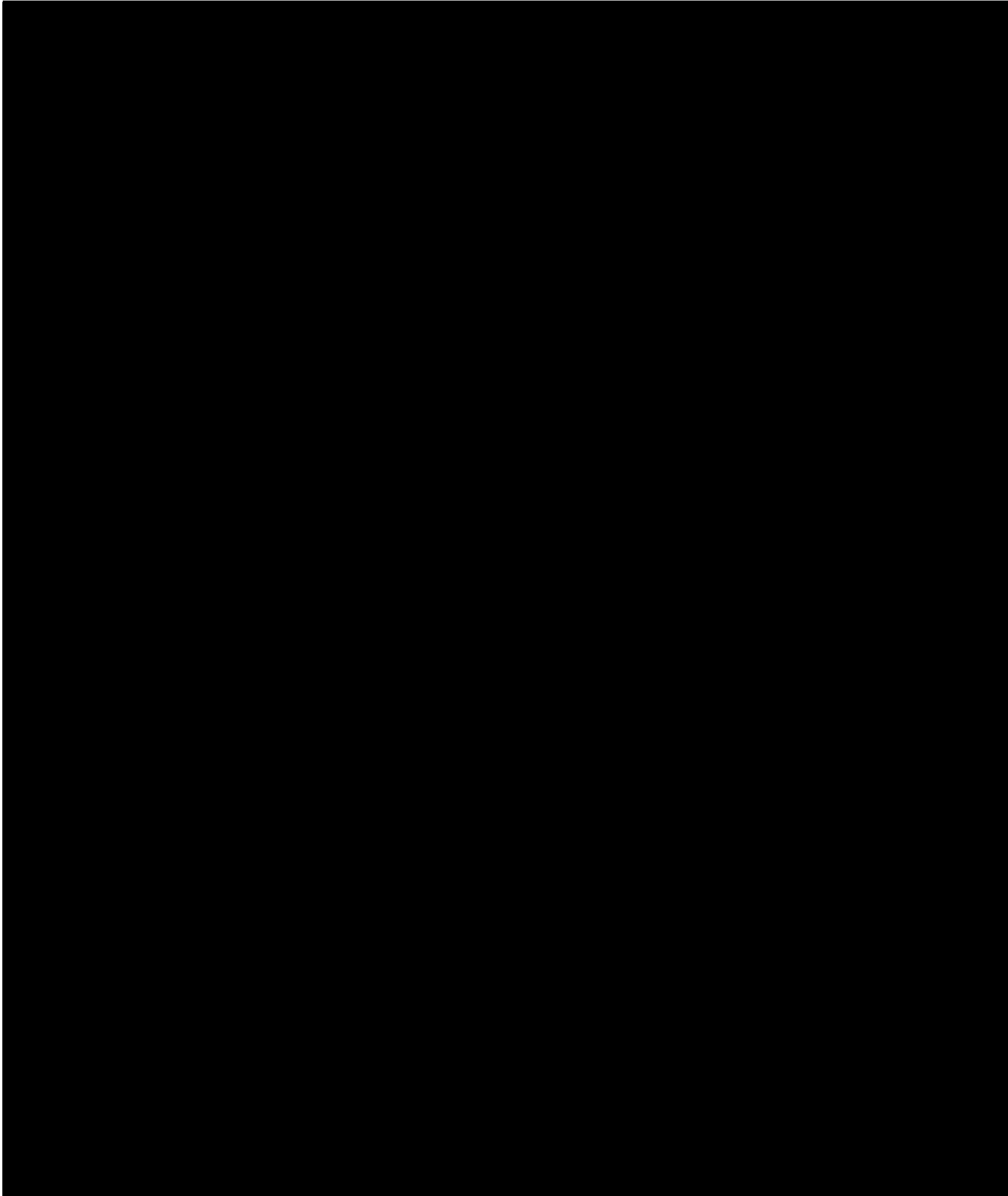


Fig. 6.3. Lecturing Engagements and Visits Of Henry Pitman, 1864-71.

Source: Co-operator 1864-71.

circumstances. Advice suitable for a northern industrial town was not necessarily of equal value in a smaller centre. It was noted from Crumlin in Monmouthshire

The tracts are very good, but they do not quite meet our case. The success of the Rochdale stores in a populous locality, gives rise to hopes that cannot be realised in
13
a country village.

Printed sources and national agencies could set out the general procedure for the establishment of a store. The explanation of matters such as book keeping, stocktaking and the management of the dividend system were of wide relevance but there were other details that were geographically specific. One such issue was the best markets in which to obtain stock. The experience of larger northern stores had little direct relevance for groups interested in co-operative development in the rest of the country during the late fifties and early sixties under the prevailing system of the wholesale grocery trade which was organised by suppliers in regional and district centres, each with their own fairly
14
distinct market area.

It was, of course, not impossible for individual consumers' societies successfully to investigate local suppliers for themselves, but it was not always an easy task. From Witney it was reported in 1866

There is a difficulty we have met ... which has given us a great deal of trouble - viz. the finding of good
15
markets in which to purchase.

More generally it was reported by the secretary of the Tring society that co-operatives in the Home Counties were

in difficulties, from not knowing when and where to
16
buy.

This issue illustrates the combination of greater practical difficulties and the lesser availability of information and advice to deal with them often faced by co-operative groups away from the main areas of strength. The task of finding suitable suppliers was much less likely to end in frustration with an established neighbour as guide. This made it possible to avoid wholesalers who exploited societies or rebuffed them completely, often under pressure from private traders who threatened the loss of their custom if co-operatives were assisted. This was a circumstance of itself less likely to occur where there was already a strong co-operative body to exert a countervailing influence on wholesalers. In addition to steering infant societies towards those dealers most likely to provide supplies of an acceptable price and quality in the small quantities initially required some established
17
co-operatives themselves acted as wholesale suppliers.

Institutional developments within the co-operative movement during the eighteen sixties and early seventies did not provide an immediate solution either practical or advisory to the problems of isolated societies. The earliest of a series of important federations in which individual local societies combined to extend the range of co-operative activity was the North of England Co-operative Wholesale Society of 1863. Although as the CWS this eventually extended

its operations to cover the whole of England and Wales it was of little early benefit to the scattered societies of southern England. They were too far from the original depôt at Manchester to make dealing practical or financially advantageous given the cost of carriage.¹⁸ While the development of stores in southern England would have benefitted from access to co-operative wholesaling the existing societies were unlikely to be able to organise and sustain financially such a body themselves. Northern co-operators were generally unwilling to imperil their own operations with potentially loss-making depôts elsewhere in the country.

Plans for a separate wholesaling association in London were greeted with enthusiasm; it was said that

to these centres we must look as the great means of making co-operative stores spring up in places where there are none already.¹⁹

However, in practice the Metropolitan and Home Counties Co-operative Purchasing Association founded in 1864 as a practical offshoot of the propagandist body the London Association for the Promotion of Co-operation, made little impact on development in southern England. Its reliance on the custom of a limited established co-operative body meant that the Association was itself financially weak and without the resources either to offer a particularly advantageous wholesaling service or to engage in sustained propagandism. It did not have the power to stimulate the cycle of

cumulative growth that would have produced the strong co-operative body necessary for its own survival, in consequence²⁰ it ceased trading around 1869. It was not until the CWS was finally prevailed upon to open a London depot in 1874 that there was a permanent and effective co-operative wholesaler for south-east England.

The other major federation, the Co-operative Central Board, later reorganised as the Co-operative Union was established in 1870 as a more formal body to fulfill and extend the advisory role earlier performed by the larger consumers' societies and the Co-operator. In addition to dealing with societies' individual problems efforts were made to extend the range of practical information in printed form. In 1876 the Central Board reported that it was preparing a Manual of Co-operation and a Handbook of Co-operative Accounts as well as framing a set of model rules for societies.²¹ Later in the decade the Southern Section of the Board sponsored a Manual for Co-operators written largely by E.V. Neale which covered the moral and economic base of co-²²operation and the practical conduct of business. Attempts were made to give more specific guidance, for example Walter Morrison prepared a pamphlet for the Board which dealt with²³ Village Co-operative Stores. However, there were still problems with the coverage of geographically specific details and the usefulness of some material was limited by the manner of its presentation. E.V. Neale's work while an important statement of his own Christian Socialist philosophy was

unfortunately indigestible as a Manual for Co-
24
operators.

II

There was a general difficulty in the expansion of co-operation that, given the local focus of activity and the independence of individual consumers' societies, it was often most difficult to promote and support new co-operatives in the very areas where there was greatest need. The ideal of district level organisation to stimulate development integrated within an overall countrywide framework as a complement to the work of the national offices of the Co-operative Union was not widely achieved until fairly late in the century. In areas of co-operative strength there was already during the eighteen sixties interest in the establishment of bodies to strengthen ties between local societies and aid the extension of the movement. The Lancashire and Yorkshire Conference Association was inevitably the largest of these organisations. Initial attempts to establish a similar Northern Union of Co-operative Stores for North-East England ultimately proved abortive. Amongst its aims in 1862 was the hope that it would act as a centre of communication between all the co-operative stores in the two counties of Northumberland and Durham, to revise rules, suggest modes of keeping accounts, and to offer suggestions for the formation of new societies, and generally ... to promote the cause of
25
co-operation in the North of England.

From the late sixties there were an increasing number of district associations formed throughout northern England and parts of the Midlands.²⁶ Amongst their number was the Airedale and Calder association which originally pledged itself to

take any necessary steps, by advertising, hiring rooms for lectures, distributing tracts, &c., to spread the cause of co-operation in those districts where co-operation is yet comparatively unknown.²⁷

Although it is difficult to judge the scale of any growth beyond the development that would have occurred in the absence of special effort, some district bodies did organise activities, such as the funding of visiting speakers²⁸, which aided the extension of co-operation, probably more through the expansion of existing societies than the foundation of new ones. However, it was also common for plans to be proposed which were never fulfilled. The leaders of the Banbury co-operative, itself active in campaigns to recruit membership from surrounding villages, attempted to win support amongst neighbouring societies for a wider programme of propagandism. Initial support for the project was not backed up by financial contributions. The monthly levy of one penny per member from each society which it was suggested would enable us to print tracts in hundreds of thousands, to employ a lecturer throughout the coming winter....²⁹

was not forthcoming.

The establishment of the Central Board offered the potential for the co-ordination of initiatives by groups of societies and the means to prompt their extension to cover the whole of the country. During the course of the eighties the Board evolved a three tier structure of organisation and meetings. The activities of the Central Board itself ranged nationwide; in addition to organising the annual national Congress it was an advisory centre for societies throughout the country. Some indication of the scale of its operations can be gauged from the statistic that during the year 1875-76 the Board distributed 100,000 tracts.³⁰ National activity was supplemented by the work of the Sectional Boards which performed a similar role at the regional level. These were originally five in number, for Scotland, the North, North-West, Midlands and South increasing to six in 1878 with the creation of a Western section covering south-west England and South Wales; this was further split in 1895 when the counties of the south-west peninsula became separately constituted.³¹ The sections were subdivided into districts, some of them based on existing associations, within which contact was maintained through regular conferences.

In addition to their rôle as advisors to groups interested in establishing societies, Sectional Boards made efforts to attract notice for co-operation. Routine activity was arranged to serve propagandist ends - some of the regular conferences were held in towns without strong established societies as a means of prompting local interest.³² There

were also deliberate attempts to increase the volume of co-operative information in circulation. Sections produced their own literature, including efforts by the Western Section to overcome the suggested barrier that language presented to co-operative spread in Wales. In the mid eighties they arranged the translation of leaflets and tracts and organised ³³ bilingual speakers for public meetings. The Sections were the agencies through which some of the subscriptions paid by consumers' societies to the Central Board were channelled into propagandism. Such money was mainly devoted to the ³⁴ conventional ends of tract and leaflet distribution. There were also some more original schemes, including the suggestion in 1888 that good publicity would be gained by offering prizes for essays on co-operation at Welsh ³⁵ eisteddfodau. Individual sections also had a limited involvement with propaganda missions later in the century. In 1891 the Midlands Section reported a three day programme in the Loughborough district and a week's tour of villages ³⁶ around Louth. Its Western counterpart participated in propagandism in western Cornwall, also during the early nineties. Such work met with mixed results, certainly the latter operation was ineffective in developing co-operation in one of the few remaining areas where it was still largely ³⁷ untested.

The most sustained effort to provide guidance to prospective co-operators was, however, centred in south-east England. While individual societies were generally weak and

few in number there were also many middle class liberals sympathetic to the cause resident in the area, especially in London. These people were active in the organisation of new propagandism in the final quarter of the century. This reinforced London's reputation as a centre of co-operative ideas and discussion. The capital had a rôle as a centre of promotional activity in southern England that was greater than its own dismal performance in the development of stores would suggest.³⁸ This activity was chiefly organised in parallel with the Southern Sectional Board rather than under its direct jurisdiction. In 1873 the Committee for the Organisation of the Southern District was formed to assist the Sectional Board in its propaganda work.³⁹ From this there developed in 1877 the Guild of Co-operators. The Guild worked to co-ordinate the efforts of individuals interested in the extension of co-operation by establishing local branches wherever a small group could be assembled. This network was overseen by a Central Council in London. Although its original constitution envisaged action both to support existing co-operatives and to encourage new foundations, the Guild concentrated on the latter rôle. Thus in 1885 it was noted that its aid was extended to societies only in their first year, after which any advice was sought from the Sectional Board.⁴⁰

The original aim of the Guild was to ensure the presence of a co-operative store in all towns in the Southern Section of 5,000 or more people. Its constitution laid out a programme which included the broaching of the subject in

individual towns through letters to local newspapers offering the supply of more detailed information and the business and propaganda services of the Guild. Its report for 1879 noted that a letter had been prepared for circulation to 300 local newspapers in southern England. The Guild also sought contacts with established groups including working men's clubs, trade and friendly societies as potential nuclei for the development of co-operatives.

In later years the Guild financed missionary tours aimed to draw public attention to co-operation in areas where it had little established presence. In 1884 its Oxford branch supported a three week tour of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. In 1887 a mission was organised to Bedfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, and a pair of missionaries toured the outer London suburbs. In both years new societies were formed in several of the locations where meetings were held. However, the report of the eight week tour of East Anglia conceded that the immediate reaction had not been marked; nor was there any real change in the subsequent rate of foundations.

The work of the Guild in funding general propaganda and advising specific societies was not a complete answer to the difficulties of co-operative development in southern England. There were practical problems, those of the operation of a store in a hostile social and commercial environment, that were not easily overcome. But in providing publicity and advice the Guild did somewhat smooth the path of development.

Any assessment of the Guild's role is difficult for it is impossible to judge the extent to which co-operation would have grown without any promotional activity. It does seem likely, however, that the impact of the Guild was reflected in the renewed wave of society foundations (Table 3.2) and an increase in the pace of recruitment of members (Fig. 4.5C). Many of the societies founded in the south-east of England from the late seventies to the mid nineties, when the Guild was dissolved, received its assistance. Its final report of 1895 noted involvement with 150 societies, 110 of which were still extant at the time.⁴⁵ In addition co-operative membership grew faster during the period 1881-1901 in the South-East and East/East Anglia regions than it did in areas beyond the Guild's influence where co-operation was also relatively weak: the West Midlands, the South-West and Wales.⁴⁶

The work of the Guild and indeed propaganda activities in other Sections⁴⁷ do, however, make clear that the availability of information on a wide range of issues concerning co-operative trading did not guarantee immediate action. In 1879 the Guild reported steps to introduce co-operative ideas to eight of the larger towns in south-east England, in none of these was any society registered before 1884 and in Chatham and Ramsgate foundation was as late as 1890.⁴⁸ Nor was the success of all new societies guaranteed. In London the presence of the Guild did not produce a significant reduction in the high rate of society failures (Table 3.5).

III

That the sustained propagandism of the Guild of Co-operators was largely the product of middle class initiative was consistent with the ambivalence felt by many consumers' societies towards promotional activity. Other efforts to extend co-operation to new areas involved groups and individuals outside the main co-operative body rather than attracting the support of existing societies. This was true of rural areas. The more liberal clergy and gentry, and agricultural trades unions were responsible for the initiation of many of the co-operatives in country districts. Indeed while most individuals confined their activities to the single community where they had their residence a few were especially active in attempting to spread co-operation over a wider district. The enthusiasm of the Cumberland landowner William Lawson included efforts during the mid eighteen sixties to turn part of his estate over to co-operative agriculture and propagandism in favour of storekeeping involving meetings in at least twenty towns and villages in the county. Societies were subsequently established in six of these locations, but it is unclear⁴⁹ whether Lawson had any direct hand in their foundation.

Agricultural workers were regarded as potential supporters of co-operation but unlikely of themselves to start societies. This, it was suggested, reflected both their limited contact with general information sources, including newspapers, and the lack of the organisational abilities⁵⁰ necessary to run a store successfully. Such handicaps were

not shared by those who often took the lead in establishing rural stores. Individual members of the clergy and gentry had a higher degree of personal mobility than the vast majority of their neighbours⁵¹, a wider compass of personal contacts probably including an extensive range of postal communication and a ready access to printed material. This contrast illustrates the general tendency within a population for class based differences in access to information. Moreover, they had the time, education and finances to enable a practical experiment; resources not commonly shared by agricultural labourers. Even where initiative came from other sources the support of local clergy and gentry was often canvassed by rural societies hoping for help with capital and premises, and guidance in the complexities of storekeeping.

An alternative agency for the development of rural co-operative retailing during the early seventies was the agricultural trades unions which flourished during these years of prosperity. Indeed they were mentioned by Lloyd Jones as a possible force for the spread of co-operative information in a proposed plan of rural propagandism to be sponsored by the CWS.⁵² Prominent was the National Agricultural Labourers Union (NALU) led by Joseph Arch which discussed the benefits of co-operation at its inaugural meeting⁵³ in May 1872. Arch himself supported the spread of stores and sent copies of co-operative rules to local groups⁵⁴ of his members. Agricultural trades unions seem to have been particularly active in establishing co-operatives in

Lincolnshire. Branches of NALU and the Amalgamated Labour League formed several societies during the period 1873-76 (Fig. 3.7)⁵⁵ There were also stores founded, chiefly in Herefordshire and Shropshire, under the auspices of the West of England Agricultural Labourers Association.⁵⁶ However, like many of the advances of wages achieved by the agricultural unions and their own mass memberships, the stores invariably failed to survive the economic downturn later in the seventies.

The geographical distribution of rural co-operatives reflected the role of landowner and clerical patronage and agricultural trades unions in the formation of many of them. Stores were most common in those counties, chiefly in the Midlands and east, where agricultural trades unionism was strongest. The pattern of union strength itself reflected agricultural and social conditions being often a reaction against a system dominated by large farms and a relatively small class of substantial farmers and landowners. But such a system and thus such areas were also those in which an alternative source of co-operative inspiration was best developed. The presence of a rural elite provided in some instances patronage for co-operation.

There was no general enthusiasm amongst more mainstream co-operators for such efforts to extend the movement into rural areas.⁵⁷ Some individual societies showed the success that concerted propagandism could have even in areas regarded as unfavourable for co-operative development. Attention was attracted by the work of the Banbury society⁵⁸ and later

those at Lincoln and Ipswich but this was in itself an indication of the novelty of such efforts. A suggestion made in 1874 that the CWS should organise the circulation of a simple fly sheet explaining the advantages and practicalities of co-operation produced no result. Indeed a corollary of the structure of the movement with societies maintaining an often fierce independence, was a limited interest in wider developments and often a suspicion of proposals that were seen to be replacing the natural process of the development of societies through local initiative. Suggestions of the national organisation of propagandism to reinforce co-operation in areas where it was weakest consequently met with little response.

IV

Appeals for funds for co-ordinated propaganda made in the co-operative press from the eighteen sixties onwards led only to isolated small-scale experiments. One such was the walking tour made by the London co-operator D.P. Foxwell from the capital to Manchester in 1866. Throughout his journey he distributed tracts, but most of his meetings were held in association with existing societies and thus his efforts were most apparent in areas where co-operation was already in operation. Foxwell reflected on the inadequacy of his own efforts in relation to the task of overcoming

the distrust and apathy amongst working men.

There was a need he concluded for

great missionary effort. At least 100 suitable lecturers are wanted to spread information on the subject of co-operation.... [W]ithout the aid of the Press and the Platform, co-operation will continue to peddle on in its present form, thus giving encouragement to the faithless and apathetic to smoke their pipes and say - co-operation will never do.

Foxwell was not alone in his advocacy of nationally organised propaganda. At the first national Congress of 1869 there were similar calls, particularly from the veteran William Pare whose involvement with co-operation dated back to the Owenite period when plans for a national missionary system had been made (Chapter Five). Pare called for the formation of a British and Foreign Co-operative League as an advisory centre for new and established consumers' societies, to disseminate model rules, to arrange annual congresses and to employ a staff of travelling lecturers. Some of these functions were taken up by the Co-operative Central Board but this body was never granted sufficient funds to retain a staff of lecturers. As an alternative it was suggested in 1876 that local activity should be co-ordinated more effectively through a series of lodges allied to a Co-operative Propagandist Society. As critics pointed out this would do little to aid the development of co-operation in new areas; it was in precisely in those districts where local lodges were most needed to counteract prevailing apathy that it would be most difficult to find men to establish them. The plan was still born.

In 1876 the lack of positive action to develop a scheme of national propagandism drew the tart comment

from the amount of talk which has been expended upon it, we ought to have had at the present one of the most effective organisations for propaganda to be found in the country. But the fact is, that, in comparison with other movements, whose objects are more utopian and impracticable, ours in this respect is sadly deficient....⁶³

Invariably it was financial limitations and the unwillingness of societies to subscribe even a small proportion of their own, often substantial local funds for any collective activity that formed the barrier between talk of co-operative propaganda that was a regular feature of conferences and congresses, and practical moves. Discussion at the 1883 Congress reflected the problems encountered by enthusiasts for more active campaigning. Even the relatively modest proposal that two paid agents be appointed to aid the development of societies in the larger towns brought no response. As the proposer of the scheme conceded

It will be said that this is a new departure, and will cause a very considerable increase in the expenditure. I admit that, judging from the revenue of past years, there are no surplus funds wherewith to meet this extra charge, viz. salaries and other necessary expenses of the proposed agents....⁶⁴

Calls for co-operative propagandism reflected a need both

to provide young societies with practical advice and to overcome the negative attitudes of many workers which were seen as a major barrier between the spread of awareness of the idea and its widespread adoption. Some enthusiasts felt hostility towards co-operation was merely a reflection of inadequate understanding of the subject. In 1867 it was reported from Lambeth

The ignorance which prevails here respecting co-operation is really surprising. There is a kind of prejudice against it, and I find that those who are unfavourable to it, really know nothing about it, only
65
by hearsay.

The message was similar nearly twenty years later at the 1883 Congress when one speaker answered his own question

Why so much indifference to a movement so full of blessings? I answer, ignorance of what we aim at, and how we seek it.... They [working men] do not understand the principle and equity which rules and guides our co-operative enterprise.... Some of the sages assert that, viewed as a commercial undertaking, it is unsafe, because it is managed and controlled by working men who are without experience. Others, again, hint that it is only those of the inner circle who profit. The rank and file have to make sacrifices in the quality of goods for the dividend they receive, while some of the more penetrating have discovered that co-operation has

something in common with that socialism which is causing so much turmoil among continental nations at the present moment. I mention these examples to show that many of the elite of the working classes view our co-operative movement with jaundiced eyes....

While some views of co-operation were based on misconceptions of its true nature and probably reflected only the slightest acquaintance with its practical operations, negative perceptions also arose from an all too close association with previous failures. While a minority were inspired with sufficient faith in co-operative principles to weather the setback of the failure of a particular society - as Crossick notes the same names recur as leading the various co-operatives involved in the cycle of foundation and collapse in London⁶⁷ - the more likely reaction amongst the mass of the membership was disillusionment with the idea. The failure of a society, especially if involving financial loss to its members, usually of accumulated savings, made efforts at subsequent refoundations more difficult. It was noted that

When these things occur it shakes and weakens the confidence of the working classes in each other, and they lose faith in the very movement that is destined to confer a great boon on working men.⁶⁸

The collapse of a particular society could turn opinion against co-operation over a wider area for

everyone knows how prejudicially a failure operates against every other society in the district.⁶⁹

In Sheffield the collapse of one of the three stores in the

town during the early sixties seems to have brought the other
two down in its wake ⁷⁰ ; a circumstance very nearly repeated
in Liverpool. The failure of two societies in the city in
1863 and 1865 "had a mischevious effect" on the fortunes of
the remaining Liverpool Provident society which suffered a
fall in membership and sales that was not reversed during
the nineteenth century. ⁷¹

Failures not only affected the fortunes of other extant
societies but also slowed the pace of or totally discouraged
new developments. In north-east England, one of the strongest
areas of co-operation during the last decades of the century,
there was little development between the mid forties and the
late fifties, despite a period of propogandism by the
Christian Socialists. Co-operation was not unknown in the
district, but many held negative perceptions of it. In 1845
it was reported

the very word "co-operative" has something ominous in it
to the ears of the inhabitants of this district....
Within the last three years co-operative stores had been
established under the most favourable auspices at
Newcastle, Sunderland, and [North] Shields, but owing to
the incompetency and dishonesty of the parties
entrusted with the management [they] have failed, and
some who had had shares for which they paid £30 have not
received a single farthing of their money. ⁷²

Such attitudes underlay the lack of working class initiative
to develop co-operation locally in the following years.

Indeed even the reintroduction of co-operation from the late fifties onwards, initially prompted by the enthusiasm of the middle class radical Joseph Cowen Jnr., was slowed by memories of past failures. The early leaders at Sunderland found that local people

having long ago tasted the disadvantages of bad co-operation were sceptical of any good which might be done.

Indeed co-operative stores were branded as "swindling concerns" and an initial year spent campaigning to enroll members produced a modest total of twenty four recruits. ⁷³ It was only once the first societies had shown themselves to be a practical success that it became easier to attract a wider membership. In other areas of the country, particularly in southern England and the West Midlands negative perceptions of co-operation were probably slower to change as there was little countervailing evidence of local success. In some cases failure led to co-operation lying in abeyance for several decades. Again reintroduction may have owed something to the stimulation of middle class enthusiasts channelled through the Guild of Co-operators. Where there were repeated efforts to establish societies the task of capturing public confidence became more difficult. An expectation, based on the past record of co-operation, that a store would fail tended to limit participation in its operations making it all the harder for societies to become established.

Different perceptions of the value of co-operation helped to reinforce variation in the degree of success the movement

achieved both geographically and between different types of community. Conditions were not equally favourable for its progress in all areas, and as will be later detailed its greatest successes were achieved under fairly well defined economic and social conditions. But the experience of individual societies shows that given commitment and enterprise stores could prosper in circumstances quite different from those of the northern industrial communities with which co-operation has been most identified. The leaders of the Banbury society, for example, were proud that their success confounded the doubters who asserted

that artisans can do these things but that agricultural
74
labourers cannot.

That such stores remained relatively isolated individuals reflected partly the power of popular opinion that co-operation was appropriate only under certain conditions, discouraging more widespread experimentation with its development. Working class experience was strongly rooted
75
within its own local arena and there were very real perceptions of the difference between the various parts of the country. At the most basic level there was seen to be a marked contrast between northern and southern England, or as it can also be expressed between the districts of recent
76
industrial development and the remainder of the country. The economic base was quite manifestly different in the two areas, so consequently were social relations and, it was
77
perceived, the very character of working men. Against such

a background the indifferent performance of many of the early societies in southern England can only have had a dampening effect on any thoughts of further activity, reinforcing the view of co-operation as a

78

northern chimera impossible to carry out in the south.

IV

Doubts about co-operation reflected not only its own rather chequered record but also deliberate attempts to influence public opinion against it by those whose interests it threatened. Opposition rested on co-operation's association, recalled even late in the nineteenth century, with the socialism and irreligion of Owenism and the political activism of Chartism as well as with its rôle in retailing. The wider associations of co-operation certainly coloured opinion of existing societies; from Hucknall Torkard in 1877 it was reported that church leaders opposed co-operative expenditure on education fearing that it would

be very likely to lead to the advocacy of a system of socialism which had for its object the overthrow of religion.

79

Similar identification of co-operation with particular political and religious ideas by its opponents may well have discouraged its expansion. Certainly they were ties of which co-operation was anxious to divest itself in the second half of the nineteenth century. As the Manchester co-operator J.C. Edwards told a meeting at Chester in 1861

80

Much had been said about co-operation; its opponents, he thought, had somewhat misrepresented it, though perhaps not wilfully. Many thought it was a scheme of spoilation, - that it was communism in the Owenite sense
81
of the word. It was nothing of the kind.

Co-operative developments were also discouraged by some employers not because of any clearly defined associations with radical views, but because of a fear that they marked the beginnings of working class initiative and self-assertiveness that would be extended to other areas, including protests over wages and working conditions. Some feared, it was suggested, any creation which would

raise men to regard themselves as rather better than
82
hewers of wood and drawers of water.

The capacity for saving and thrift which were amongst the chief attractions of co-operation for many middle class sympathisers were an anathema to some employers. During the eighteen forties one South Wales coalowner justified his animosity towards provident institutions by explaining that they had the effect of

arming the men against myself, and enabling them to strike for wages. I want them to spend their wages and
83
not hoard them.

It was sometimes only gradually that more enlightened attitudes spread later in the century. Thus employers sometimes attempted to influence their workers against co-operation through the spreading of misinformation and by direct obstruction and sanctions, including threats of

dismissal against men who organised or joined societies.

The chief agents of the dissemination of material hostile to co-operation were, however, private traders whose interests were directly threatened. Co-operation was attacked not merely as additional competition for private shopkeepers but as an attempt by those already employed in other fields to deprive traders of their livelihood.⁸⁴ Like the enthusiasts for the movement private traders made use of local newspapers to present their views to the public and they also distributed their own anti-co-operative tracts and bills.⁸⁵ These laid particular emphasis on co-operative failures, sometimes spreading news of the collapse of individual societies over long distances. It was reported that

When it became known in the town that a co-operative store was about being started ... the tradesmen ... published several letters in the local papers, stating that such a thing was not required in Brecon, whatever it might be in other places, and adding that if started it would not stand a month, or three months at the furthest.... They showed that a similar society in Liverpool was about to go through the bankruptcy court....⁸⁶

Shopkeepers also spread misinformation about the workings of the co-operative system which must have helped to create a distorted view of the movement. Allegations were made about the dividend system, the price and quality of goods and the

appropriation of profits by leading society members. ⁸⁷ Thus
it was claimed that co-operation was

honey-combed with corruption and tottering towards its
⁸⁸
fall.

In the face of increasing co-operative success, especially
the extension of the range of goods away from the staples of
grocery into the expanding and more profitable markets in
consumer goods, private traders became more strident in their
opposition. The most organised anti-co-operative effort was
launched from St. Helens during the early years of the
present century. The town's Traders' Defence Association was
founded

To educate the public by means of lectures, literature,
etc., in respect of the injurious effects of co-
operative stores on the private trade of the
⁸⁹
country....

The campaign spread briefly to other centres where co-
operation took a significant share of retail trade, but its
⁹⁰
long term effects were negligible. In a sense this activity
was a measure of the past failure of shopkeepers to counter
co-operatives. It seems likely that less publicised and less
co-ordinated local action against young or prospective
societies was more effective in blocking the path of co-
operation throughout the second half of the century in areas
where the movement failed to gain an early foothold.

Some workers, whether independently or under the influence
of the propagandism of private traders, themselves judged co-
operatives to be unattractive as retailers. This was so even

in Lancashire where leaders of cotton workers trades unions commented on co-operation in their evidence to the 1892 Royal Commission on Labour. Its advantages were claimed to be limited by the prices charged, for

there are many articles you can get cheaper off individual tradesmen than you get at a store.

There was also resistance to a feeling of pressure to restrict purchasing to the store

It is this feeling of purchasing at one place. People always prefer to have a choice of places. I think it is that which keeps the co-operative societies backward.⁹¹

Other workers, particularly artisanal producers, shared the shopkeepers' hostility towards co-operation as a threat to their livelihood. During the depression of the mid eighties it was not the general state of the economy, nor changes in the organisation of his own trade that most concerned the Farnworth area secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Boot and Shoemakers. Instead he asserted

it is the co-operatives that has ruined our trade, and not here alone, but all over Lancashire and Yorkshire, and not in our trade alone, but every other trade and business. Shoemaking is nearly dead to the skilled hands all through the co-operatives.... The tailors is worse fixed than we are. Hatters are completely driven out of the district. Grocers and provision dealers are in a bad way at present.... [E]very business that the co-operatives are in the same trade is depressed, and still

they charge more for their groceries and draperies than any other shop. In men's best boots the co-operative charges 1s.6d. to 2s. more than any other shop in Farnworth; this is how they are able to pay 3s. in the pound [dividend], and spoil the whole trade of the country. The co-operatives is the cause of the depression and nothing else....⁹²

Such views appear rather extreme, not to say eccentric, and the available evidence on co-operative prices suggests that the censure of these several individuals may not have been wholly justified.⁹³ They do illustrate, however, that not all workers were enamoured of the practical results of co-operative trade.

V

Few workers were as strident as the Farnworth shoe maker in their attitudes towards co-operation. Disinterest, a failure of initial awareness to prompt any subsequent information search, rather than opposition was generally more restrictive of co-operative expansion. The local reaction to the introduction of new information reflected not only its content - the description of the idea in principle and, as has been stressed here, of the means of its execution in practice - but also the context of the act itself and the character of the community in which the recipients were located. In some instances opinion was prejudiced against co-operation by the manner of its initiation. It has been suggested generally that inter-personal communication

between near peers has greater persuasive power to encourage adoption than the more neutral presentation in printed sources and the mass media. Some personal sources were, however, too removed from the potential adopters in terms of experience, class or geographical distance to engender conviction.⁹⁴ In the present case such a handicap may have been suffered by the Christian Socialists and the plans of aristocratic and clerical patrons to introduce co-operation amongst rural workers sometimes foundered on the suspicion felt of schemes devised by individuals who were in but not of a village community.⁹⁵

Indeed the spread of co-operation was a process influenced by a number of interacting relationships between information content and sources, and the individual character and socio-economic context of recipients. Even the introduction of a new idea by the most sympathetic of sources did not guarantee its adoption. Its content may not have been seen as immediately appropriate to local circumstances. There were very few locations where the idea of co-operative trading was completely irrelevant; while the degree of home production and barter might vary, in most areas at least part of the food supply was obtained through retail trade. Interest in co-operation would have varied, however, with the importance and state of retail trade and conditions in other spheres into which popular initiative was channelled. In some instances co-operation was crowded out by other issues seen to be of more immediate importance or effectiveness - an

instance of this has been seen already in the outline of co-operative development given in Chapter Two illustrating a degree of alternation in the fortunes of co-operative and political reformism.

The relevance of an idea to a particular community or individual was a reflection not only of its perceived usefulness but also of the power of potential adopters to put it into practice. Much of the recent debate concerning the methodology of geographical diffusion studies, prompted largely by work focussing on developments in the contemporary Third World, has hinged on the patterning of adoption by existing structures of social and economic power. ⁹⁶ In the case of co-operation there was not the same competition between groups for economic advantage in the sequence of adoption or through the restriction of its currency. Groups of workers were interested only in the supply of their own local area; amongst individuals length of membership made no difference to the benefits obtained from a society. Where co-operation brought members of different classes into opposition the issue was not one of advantage in the sequence of adoption but a desire to curtail its spread completely by those, especially private traders, who felt their existing interests to be threatened by a new form of competition. There was, however, variation within the working class in the endowment of resources required for co-operative success; these were partly financial but perhaps more important were the human resources of social spirit and organisational ability.

To place too much stress on the character of potential adopters in isolation is unhelpful. The speed with which individuals respond to the acquisition of knowledge has been found to be related to socio-economic status, personality variables and communications behaviour⁹⁷ but a more complete exploration of the diffusion process needs to include an examination of the system which produced the differences in these variables and any mechanisms for their change. Thus it is insufficient, for example, to note the apathy amongst rural workers during the nineteenth century to which contemporaries attributed the lack of widespread development of co-operative and kindred social movements making agricultural labourers

the most unlikely class in the community to adopt anything new.⁹⁸

It is also necessary to consider those aspects of rural economy and society which caused both material barriers to co-operative development and restricted the growth of any desire to exert pressure for change. In the latter respect the association of co-operation with the expansion of agricultural trades unions, themselves often the result of initiative outside the farming population, is interesting.

The logic of this argument is the need for a complementary analysis of the pattern and process of the spread of co-operation which focusses more directly on the other of the two groups of interacting variables whose existence was outlined earlier. The manner and pattern of information flow

is itself a reflection of the wider structures of the society in which the process of transfer is taking place: the power and resources accorded to particular classes within that society and the presence and change of any restrictions, such as stamp duty on newspapers, which limited the power of certain groups to disseminate their views. However, the introduction of information gives only the potential for innovation adoption. The geography of co-operative growth was a product of the interaction of variations in the ease of practical execution of co-operation and the informational resources available locally to deal with the problems of storekeeping. Chapters Five and Six have focussed on the transfer of information and the location of societies in space, suggesting in particular the difficulties of development of isolated co-operative societies. The extent to which co-operative success was realised was, however, also a product of local social and economic circumstances - the place specific character of the individual communities in which potential adopters were located.

NOTES

1. CN 8 Aug. 1874.
2. See for example the comments of William Butler of the Sutton-in-Ashfield society who considered co-operation to be the only means of emancipating the working class from "degradation, poverty and crime": Co-op. 15 Aug. 1866.
3. The common reality of production by co-operative bodies was, however, rather different being little distinguished from the operations of conventional joint-stock companies.
4. E.g. Holyoake 1882, 41-43.
5. Co-op. 15 Aug. 1867.
6. See the description in Sunderland Co-operative Society 1863, and that of activity at Middlesbrough in Co-op. 1 Sept. 1866; also the general comments of William Marcroft: Co-op. Oct. 1863.
7. CN 9 Nov. 1872.
8. Co-op. 11 Sept. 1869.
9. The collection of society rules from the 1860s in the PRO (FS 8) includes a number that were printed by Cooper: Great Ayton, Cradley Heath, Bridgnorth, Eston, South Norwood, Dartford, Brownhills, the West London Friendly of Kensington and the Eagle society of St. George's East.

10. It is interesting that one of the longer links shown on Fig. 6.1, that between Queenshead and Coventry was also a reflection of the circulation of published material, specifically an article about the success of the former society in Reynolds's Newspaper: Co-op. Sept. 1861.
11. Co-op. 15 Oct. 1865.
12. Holyoake 1882, 43 notes members of the Rochdale society travelling within a thirty mile radius to address groups interested in co-operation. Some, however, must have gone further for in December 1860 it was noted that the Wolverhampton society received a deputation from Rochdale: Co-op. Dec. 1860.
13. Co-op. 15 Aug. 1866.
14. There were exceptions to the regional pattern of supply, goods including tea, coffee, sugar and rice were regularly obtained from merchants in the larger centres to which they were originally imported, principally London, Liverpool, Bristol and Glasgow. During the sixties and seventies certain firms began to develop a wider market for their branded goods including soap, biscuits and cocoa.
15. Co-op. 1 Mar. 1866.
16. Co-op. 15 June 1867.
17. The co-operative at Bowling Old Lane (1861) received its first goods from the Great Horton and Bradford Provident societies; Wilsden (1863) was originally stocked by the Queensbury society. The newly independent store at Barkisland (1864) continued to purchase stock

from its former parent in Huddersfield. Some larger southern societies later came to supply less well established neighbours; the Gloucester co-operative performed this service for those at Corse, Lydbrook and Wotton-under-Edge: Bennett and Baldwin 1911, 52; Wilsden Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd. 1913; Balmforth 1910, 65; Gloucestershire Record Office D2754 1/5 & 1/7.

18. See for example comments from Witney, Highbridge and Shepton Mallet: Co-op. 1 Mar. 1866, 12 June 1869, 15 Aug. 1865.
19. E.V. Neale in Co-op. June 1864.
20. Redfern 1913, 85.
21. Co-operative Union 1876, 54.
22. Co-operative Union 1879, 67.
23. Morrison 1877.
24. Backstrom 1974, 153.
25. Tyne and Wear Archives Department 634/B41.
26. Reports in the Co-operator and Co-operative News for the period 1869-74 show regional conferences in the North-East, West Midlands, West Country and South Wales, county meetings in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cumberland, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, and local assemblies for Airedale and Calderdale, Rossendale, South Lancashire, the areas around Rotherham, Dewsbury and Hebden Bridge.
27. Co-op. 24 Sept. 1870.

28. For example the Rotherham District Association engaged William Bunton of Banbury as a lecturer: Co-op. 11 Dec. 1869, 12 Mar. 1870.
29. Co-op. 11 Sept. 1869.
30. Co-operative Union 1876, 52.
31. Bonner 1970, 82, 116.
32. This did not always produce the positive results hoped for as the Midland Section found in Birmingham and their Western counterparts in Bristol: CN 14 Apr. 1877, 29 Apr. 1876.
33. Co-operative Union 1885, 36; CN 14 Jan. 1888. It seems likely that the Welsh language did not present such a barrier to co-operation as some contemporaries thought. Co-operative weakness in Wales was general and not confined to those areas where the Welsh language predominated. Within the South Wales coalfield there was little suggestion that co-operation enjoyed greater success in the more easterly valleys most subject to English influence.
34. E.g. CN 28 Apr. 1888.
35. CN 6 Oct. 1888.
36. Co-operative Union 1891, 57.
37. Co-operative Union 1893, 70. See Figs. 3.10 and 3.11.
38. See Holyoake 1879 199-200:

London has started more co-operative societies and projects than any city ten times told. If it has not succeeded with them, it has enabled others to do so. It may be held that it has had a real co-

operative enthusiasm and enterprise.... It is the tendency of the metropolis to think more of disseminating true ideas than to profit by them.

39. CN 9 May 1874.

40. Guild of Co-operators 1877, Co-operative Union 1885, 73.

41. Guild of Co-operators 1877.

42. Co-operative Union 1879, 84.

43. Co-operative Union 1884, 76.

44. Co-operative Union 1887, 75.

45. Brown 1928, 87. Overall there were more than 300 societies formed in the Metropolitan, South-East and East/East Anglia regions in the period 1877-96.

46. Any contrasts should not, of course, be attributed to the activities of the Guild alone; as subsequent discussion shows underlying differences in the social and economic character of particular locations influenced the course of co-operative progress. The upturn of foundations in the final decades of the century should also be related to temporal variations in the health of the wider economy. The Guild's establishment coincided with a period of general depression and the subsequent proliferation of new societies may have been as much a response to the improved state of the economy as to co-operative propagandism. It seems likely, however, that the efforts of the Guild helped to sustain this higher foundation rate in the following years.

47. Hopes of the extension of the Guild system to other areas of the country were not fulfilled, the only result being the formation of a rather ineffective body in the Western Section in 1885: *Co-operative Union* 1885, 80.
48. *Co-operative Union* 1879, 82.
49. Lawson et al 1875; Co-op. 1 May 1866, 15 May 1866, 1 Jan. 1867.
50. CN 8 June 1872; *Co-operative Union* 1879, 45.
51. The study of working class marriage patterns by Perry 1969 indicates the predominance of short distance contacts of less than five miles in the years upto the mid eighteen eighties.
52. CN 8 Aug. 1874.
53. Speakers included the Hon. and Rev. J.W. Leigh of Stoneleigh, one of the leading clerical and titled enthusiasts for rural co-operation, who had helped establish the store in his own Warwickshire village and John Butcher, secretary of the Banbury co-operative: CN 8 June 1872; Banbury Co-operative Record June 1872, July 1872.
54. Including Hinton Martell, Dorset: Horn 1971, 39.
55. Russell 1956.
56. CN 16 Nov. 1872, 23 Nov. 1872, 19 Dec. 1874.
57. This was despite the publication in the co-operative press of calls for a general missionary effort in agricultural districts. One such came from Frederick Wilson who had himself aided the establishment of several Warwickshire societies including those at Priors

- Marston, Southam, Emscote, Wellesbourne, Stoneleigh, Warwick, Harbury and Leamington: Co-op. Jan. 1862, Oct. 1862, 27 Feb. 1869, 29 May 1869; CN 11 May 1872, 6 Oct. 1877.
58. The Banbury society was by the late sixties holding recruitment meetings in surrounding villages. They circulated large amounts of printed material including several thousand copies of the Co-operator and their own tracts. 30-40,000 of the latter had been printed by 1870. In 1871 a monthly local journal, the Banbury Co-operative Record was started: Co-op 22 May 1869, 30 July 1870.
59. E.g. Co-op. 11 Apr. 1868.
60. Co-op. 15 Aug. 1866.
61. Co-operative Congress 1869. The influence of the campaigning example of the temperance movement is apparent from the name Pare gave to his projected body. Other advocates of co-operative propagandism invoked the success achieved by the Methodists: CN 3 Apr. 1875, 17 Aug. 1878.
62. Co-operative Union 1876, 33.
63. CN 6 May 1876.
64. Co-operative Union 1883, 55.
65. Co-op. 15 Nov. 1867.
66. Co-operative Union 1883, 55.
67. Crossick 1978, 166-68.
68. CN 29 Apr. 1876.

69. Co-op. 11 Sept. 1869.
70. Co-op. 22 May 1869.
71. Co-op. Sept 1863; Brown 1930, 58-62. The membership of the Liverpool Provident fell from 3,154 to 2,078 during 1864 with a further loss to 924 by the end of 1867. Decline continued at a rather slower pace until final liquidation in 1899: P.P. 1864 XXXIII; P.P. 1865 XXX; P.P. 1867-68 XL; P.P. 1900 LXXXI.
72. N. Star 11 Oct. 1845.
73. Sunderland Co-operative Society 1863, 3.
74. Banbury Co-operative Record June 1872.
75. See Crossick 1978, Jackson 1968, and Clarke et al 1979 on the fragmentation of working class experience and culture by geographical and other variables.
76. The appreciation in contemporary literature of the existence of this divide is clear from the very title of Mrs. Gaskell's North and South and similar contrasts were seen by other novelists. Popular recognition of regional differences was reflected in periodicals, including the reports of the opinions of individual workers who repeated the view of a north-south divide. A relevant recent study is Dellheim 1986.
77. E.g. Co-op. 19 June 1869 which claimed that co-operative success in Lancashire and Yorkshire was "caused chiefly by the vastly greater fitness of the men" who were "made of the real grit".
78. Co-op. 1 Mar. 1866.
79. CN 28 July 1877.

80. During the eighties co-operators found themselves associated with the revolutionary socialism that was gaining ground especially in continental Europe; as late as 1902 it was attacked as "a communistic and anti-Christian movement" in the journal Tradesman and Shopkeeper: Co-operative Union 1883, 55; P.P. 1887 XIII, 609; Winstanley 1983, 83.
81. Co-op. June 1861.
82. CN 6 Apr. 1872.
83. P.P. 1847 XXVII Pt II, 295.
84. See the comments made in the journal of commercial travellers On the Road during 1906, quoted in Crossick 1977, 47.
85. E.g. Co-op. 15 Nov. 1867 detailing the circulation of anti-co-operative handbills at Sawston.
86. CN 12 Dec. 1874.
87. E.g. Wilkinson 1886; A Journalist 1902; Winstanley 1983, 85-90.
88. Wilkinson 1886, 17.
89. A Journalist 1902, 20.
90. Winstanley 1983, 88-89.
91. P.P. 1892 XXXV, 726; see also P.P. 1892 XXXIV, 218.
92. P.P. 1886 XXII Appendix Pt 2, 76.
93. It is difficult to obtain detailed information on the relative levels of co-operative and private prices to set alongside contemporary debate and the claims of private traders that dividends were financed by

overcharging. It does appear that co-operative prices were sometimes above average. Rowntree's study of York at the turn of the century included a survey of the prices of twenty staple items in the working class diet. Six of these could be obtained at below average prices from the town's co-operative. Official surveys of prices paid by working class consumers at around the same period allow some comparisons of prices paid at co-operative and private outlets, although it is not always clear whether goods of comparable quality were being obtained. The total costs given below are for a basket of goods suggested by the CWS as a standard family grocery order, although there were some individual variations in the type of goods purchased: 1lb bacon, 2lb butter, 1/2lb cheese, 12lb flour, 1/2lb lard, 1lb oatmeal, 4lb sugar, 1/2lb tea. The results show instances in which co-operative prices were above those of private dealers and others where the pattern was reversed: Rowntree 1902, 103-04; P.P. 1903 LXVIII, 433-70; CWS 1926, 194-95.

Keighley:	Co-operative Price	53 <u>d</u> .	Excludes butter.
	Private Shop Price	58 <u>d</u> .	
Darwen:	Co-operative Price	86 <u>d</u> . & 87 <u>d</u> .	
	Private Shop Price	81 <u>d</u> ., 85 <u>d</u> . & 100.5 <u>d</u> .	
Tyldesley:	Co-operative Price	91.5 <u>d</u> . & 96 <u>d</u> .	
	Private Shop Price	77 <u>d</u> . & 85 <u>d</u> .	
Ramsbottom:	Co-operative Price	90 <u>d</u> .	
	Private Shop Price	91 <u>d</u> . & 94.5 <u>d</u> .	
S.E. London:	Co-operative Price	72.5 <u>d</u> .	Excludes oatmeal & lard
	Private Shop Price	61.5 <u>d</u> ., 73 <u>d</u> . & 86 <u>d</u> .	

94. Rogers 1983, 16-19, 27-28, 273-91.
95. For example the limited response to the enthusiasm of William Lawson, especially his plans for co-operative agriculture, and the lack of success of the vicar of Hursley, Hants. in stimulating co-operative interest amongst his parishioners: Co-op. 1 June 1866, 18 June 1870.
96. Blaikie 1978; as examples of more specific studies see Blaikie 1973, Yapa 1977 and Yapa and Mayfield 1978.
97. Rogers 1983, 241-59.
98. Co-operative Union 1879, 45.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ATTRACTIONS OF CO-OPERATIVE RETAILING: RETAIL PROVISION,
TRADING MORALITY AND DIVIDENDS.

I

Co-operative retailing offered a means of obtaining items of food and other staple goods on which a high percentage of working class earnings were expended.¹ It therefore addressed issues of widespread relevance and the service it offered might be expected to have been of universal appeal, more generally adopted than the rather restricted geographical spread of successful co-operation shows to have been the case. It has been suggested that the limitations of growth reflected in part the inequalities in the availability of information about its advantages and execution. But interacting with the dynamics of information transfer were circumstances specific to the individual place which, in their condition and rate of change, determined the use made of knowledge introduced from outside. These influenced the view held of an innovation, the desirability or need for its adoption, the probability of practical experimentation and the chances of long term success. Particular aspects of the economy and society of the individual community took on an especial importance in relation to a given innovation. In the present case the success of a store depended on the balance of forces between local workers who were collectively responsible for the organisation, finance and custom of a co-operative, and the economic and commercial establishment, particularly of course private retailers. In Chapter Ten an exploration will be made of the varying capacity displayed by

different groups of workers for collective action, of which co-operation was but a part, and the circumstances of economy and society which influenced the development of working class self-help. Here, however, attention is focussed first on the other half of the equation - the conditions which provoked interest in retailing amongst workers and in Chapter Eight the commercial forces which partly determined the chances of the successful execution of co-operative trading. The state of retail trade in a settlement was an important influence on the probability that the introduction of the idea of co-operation would meet with a favourable response, that any attempt would be initially successful and that a society once established would achieve long term expansion.

II

The establishment of a store demanded that an initial group should be sufficiently motivated to be willing to devote their time and money to the co-operative cause. Efforts to attract membership and capital adequate for the foundation of a society were often only the beginning of a longer term involvement with the operation of a store. This took up much of the scarce free time of workers making up a society's leadership with little return except the satisfaction of keeping it functioning. Although by the end of the century the position of committeeman had become one of considerable local prestige in many communities and the routine operations of the store had passed into the hands of full time employees, conditions were rather different in the

early years of societies founded around mid-century. The working of the Crewe society during the eighteen fifties was typical

To be a member of the committee in those days meant really to be a voluntary warehouseman, nothing was too rough or dirty for members of the committee to do. Going out in the evening to buy fat pigs, hoisting up flour and hanging up bacon, were some of their chief duties, not to say anything of taking stock every six months when ... it used to take us from shop closing time at night until just about four o'clock next morning, when³ we just had time to get ready to go into the works.

It seems sensible to ask why individuals were willing to make such efforts.

The profit making rationale of the capitalist entrepreneur, commonly a dynamic force behind innovation adoption is of limited relevance to co-operation. Although society leaders derived material benefits from stores these were no different from those accorded to ordinary members. Indeed for the more idealistic this contrast between co-operation and capitalism may in itself have provided a motivation for their activities. In theory at least co-operative stores were a means to provide tangible proof of the superiority of collective self-help over the grasping individualism of capitalism and an unnatural system of trade which interposed unnecessary middlemen between the consumer and the producer. The mundane routine of retail trading was

sometimes seen as a means to the wider end of the economic,⁴ social and political advancement of the working class. For some individuals it was, perhaps unconsciously, a reassertion and rechanneling of more traditional values of communality and local endeavour that had been destroyed in some other aspects of everyday life.⁵ A less altruistic, although not necessarily mutually exclusive, argument would be that the individuals organising a co-operative were motivated by the desire to meet their own difficulties in obtaining goods of reasonable quality at acceptable prices. As this end could only be achieved by encouraging mass participation in the operation collective action was valued more for its capacity to meet individual needs rather than for its symbolism of traditional morality.

Whatever the underlying ethos of co-operation the immediate decisions about the founding of individual societies seem often to have reflected local judgements of the relative advantages of co-operative and private retailing. The opinions of ordinary working people about co-operation seem frequently to have been expressed in material terms. Abstract debate about co-operative principles was scorned in favour of more down to earth concerns. As one Oldham co-operator told the 1876 Congress

He was for practical speeches at their meetings, and not for theoretical language which generally ended with the "elevation of the social masses" and that sort of thing.⁶

In his opinion the best speakers were those who offered

effective advice on the improved operations of co-operative business. There were clear echoes of such views elsewhere. Ten years earlier the President of the Huddersfield society had regretted that

There is not more than ten per cent of our members who care for anything besides the mere pecuniary gain⁷ resulting from co-operation.

An initial achievement of many co-operatives was to reduce prices from the levels previously charged by private retailers. During the second half of the century the financial benefits came increasingly in the form of dividend. Societies did not attempt to undercut private traders and⁸ returned the resulting profit to their members. The attractions of the dividend were noted in co-operative literature from at least the eighteen fifties onwards, including Holyoake's history of the Rochdale society, but they assumed increasing importance in encouraging membership of existing societies and the foundation of new co-operatives later in the century as the role of the store as a champion of trading morality diminished with an improvement in the general standard of retail services.

III

Although co-operation had its own intrinsic merits, both idealistic and material, perceptions of its attractiveness and thus the speed and success of its growth might be expected to have been greatest where other means of obtaining supplies, increasingly concentrated in the hands of private

9

retailers, were least satisfactory. Such failings perhaps explain the channelling of any wider spirit of communal self-help into the particular avenue of storekeeping.

One of the clearest associations of co-operative development with the deficiencies of private retailing was made by William Watkins of the National Industrial and Provident Society when he wrote

They [shopkeepers] are in a sense the authors of our existence. If they had but acted honestly towards their customers - that is abstained from overcharging and poisoning the public, the probability is that the National would not have been called into being.

10

Material from other sources confirms the spur to co-operative development given by breaches of trading morality. In 1856 the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Adulteration of Food heard from a number of co-operative officials including the manager of the mill at Leeds whose evidence included the exchange

[I]s there a strong feeling amongst the working classes upon the subject of adulteration? - Very strong, and that is proved by the co-operation amongst them.

11

The suspicion of overcharging and profiteering by private dealers, sometimes in tandem with adulteration, also prompted individual co-operative projects. The combination of the vulnerability of flour to adulteration and a rise in its price during a period of general trade depression lay behind the development of the wave of co-operative mills in the

later eighteen forties. The initiation of many stores followed from similar circumstances. It was reported from Crewe, for example,

The society was formed chiefly to lower the cost of food which was kept at monopolist prices by the usual traders so that Crewe was a byword as being a town where working men could not live on high wages without getting into¹² debt.

The equation between high prices and the start of co-operative trading was common in the middle decades of the¹³ century. Although few stores followed the practice common amongst co-operative mills of selling at the lowest possible prices early societies often successfully undercut private¹⁴ shopkeepers to force a general local reduction of prices.

In 1839 the Chartist inspired store at Winlaton provided goods that would have normally cost twelve shillings for only¹⁵ ten.

The co-operative press in the eighteen fifties and sixties carried reports of the effectiveness of new societies in countering high prices, although few give any numerical¹⁶ estimate of the savings made. A reduction of 10 per cent in

grocery prices was claimed by the Oakenshaw society in¹⁷ 1863. On the single item of flour the Queensbury store

noted that their entry into the market had lowered average¹⁸ prices locally by two and a half pence per stone. Among the

earlier mills that at Lincoln supplied flour at three pence¹⁹ per stone below previously prevailing prices. Particular

local instances of high prices continued to provoke new interest in co-operation throughout the century. The

successful attempt to launch co-operation in Tamworth in 1875 after the failure of previous efforts in 1868 and 1872 was one such example, concern being focussed on meat prices.²⁰ Five years later it was the increased price of bread that lay behind the revival of co-operation in Worcester, where it had been dormant since 1863.²¹

As was suggested in Chapter Five once a locality had passed through the initial stage of awareness of co-operation the timing of subsequent developments often reflected changing circumstances within individual communities. This is illustrated by the wave of foundations on the North-East coalfield in 1872, an area where co-operation had expanded steadily from the early sixties onwards. The new societies followed in the wake of more traditional forms of protest about the cost of food. A dramatic rise in local prices first produced calls for a boycott of traders selling meat, milk and potatoes above levels set at public meetings. As the agitation spread there was advocacy of co-operation as a solution to the immediate problem and the consequent feeling that the relative isolation of the population in some pit villages was being exploited by private retailers who enjoyed a virtual monopoly in certain sectors of the market. Particular grievances were expressed about the price of meat, a trade not pursued by many conventional co-operatives. Thus co-operative butchering societies were registered at Coundon,²² Pelaw Main, Rainton Colliery, Shildon and West Cornforth. Newspaper reports indicate the formation of other societies

never officially registered at Murton Colliery, Prudhoe, Dipton, Brandon Colliery, Burnhope Colliery, Wallsend, West Pelton, and interest was shown elsewhere without producing evidence of practical action. Benefits were quickly apparent; the Dipton society charged one penny less per pound for beef and two pence less for mutton than private butchers. Meat was sold at the lowest possible prices rather than following the usual policy of returning profit as dividend.²³

Elsewhere co-operation was reported as being triggered by other specific incidents in which shopkeepers offended against popular notions of morality and tradition. It was perhaps the case that individually small breaches finally capped other long standing grievances. One such issue was the failure of shopkeepers to give Christmas boxes to their regular customers. This was noted from Sheerness as the immediate cause of the foundation of a new society in the town in 1849 modelled on the the established co-operative store which had served local dockyard workers since 1816.²⁴ Similar circumstances arose at, for example, Merthyr Tydfil²⁵ in the following year and at Briton Ferry as late as 1891.

IV

A poor quality of retail services was sometimes a reflection of the limited number of traders serving a particular community. This not only curtailed the range of goods offered but also allowed individual retailers to exploit their customers in a situation of limited competition. The high prices already mentioned as underlying

co-operative development at Crewe are one instance of the results of limited retail provision. The establishment of a co-operative store in 1845 soon after the foundation of the new community reflected the failure of the Grand Junction Railway Company to encourage sufficiently the development of private retailing to complement the provision of houses, schools, water and gas for its employees. As a result the small number of immigrant shopkeepers were able to exploit the unfulfilled consumer demand.²⁶ Contemporaneous developments at Swindon also indicated the problems created by the lack of planned retail development in a new community. While inns and beershops multiplied to serve the railway workforce, shopkeepers were slower to take advantage of the new market.²⁷ There was thus in the town the combination of a workforce which contained a significant proportion of northern immigrants,²⁸ doubtless including those with previous experience of co-operation, and local need for the services of a store. Significantly the Swindon co-operative dating from 1851 was one of the very few southern societies founded during the fifties which survived to the end of the century.

The food supply of new industrial districts was increasingly left to private retailers and in the face of their inadequate response the initiative often passed to the workers themselves with the development of co-operatives. Although the practice of truck continued in some areas where it militated against co-operative success, the reluctance of many employers to take any interest in retailing in the

communities their activities created was strengthened by anti-truck legislation passed in 1831.²⁹ In some cases the employer attempted to meet the needs of his workers by alternative means such as the provision of cheap transport to neighbouring shopping centres; in the Rhondda valley the women of the collieries at Dinsa and Cymmer were allowed to ride the tramway to visit markets at Newbridge and Treforest.³⁰ Often, however, no responsibility to assist workers in this way was acknowledged.

Other examples show prices to have been higher in small industrial communities than in their larger, and often older, neighbours. The foundation of a co-operative in the expanding steel-making community of Stocksbridge was a reaction to the unattractive alternatives of paying the high prices charged locally or the inconvenience of a journey to Sheffield to obtain goods more cheaply.³¹ A similar situation prompted developments in the footwear producing town of Great Wigston in 1867 where local workers drew unfavourable comparison with the lower prices charged in neighbouring Leicester.³² Mention has already been made of the way in which residents of relatively isolated communities on the north-east coalfield felt their geographical position to be exploited by private retailers. Similar concerns were reported from mining villages on other coalfields.³³

Individual comments repeat the association between co-operative development and the inadequacies of private retail provision, especially in expanding industrial communities.

Reports of co-operative progress in such circumstances indicate the popular appreciation of its worth as a practical solution to local food supply problems. This is confirmed by the particular strength achieved by many of the societies established in medium-sized and smaller industrial settlements. It is also consistent with the common tendency for the relatively rapid proliferation of societies amongst the smaller settlements of industrial districts. The motivation for the formation of a co-operative was strengthened by the lack of alternative provision and the store frequently expanded and prospered for the same reason. A high percentage of the local population became members and the society captured a major share of local retail trade with substantial sales per member. In all these respects it was often the societies of the smaller industrial towns and villages which outshone the performance of their neighbours in the largest urban centres.

It is difficult to obtain precise and comprehensive confirmation of the level of private retail provision in the smaller industrial communities. Evidence on the quality of service provided by individual shopkeepers is restricted to the comments of isolated witnesses. It does appear that many shops in such communities were small, often run from their own homes by working class families to supplement their incomes. ³⁴ The quality of the service offered was often on a par with the scale of the enterprise. Information on the quantity of provision can be obtained from directory listings but it is difficult to interpret. Its use is limited by a

lack of knowledge of the size of the population served by particular shopping centres; this includes both the basic population figures for the smaller industrial communities and the retail catchment areas of settlements. Although food is frequently taken to be the most likely of all classes of goods to be purchased locally, in some circumstances workers looked to more distant suppliers. As examples already given show this was sometimes a reluctant decision forced on the consumer by the inadequacies of local provision making a co-operative a valued alternative. But other workers seem to have seen more positive aspects to the arrangement with the trip to town being treated as a welcome excursion.³⁵ While the introduction of co-operation did sometimes lead to the local concentration of trade it did not cause an immediate change in the shopping habits of all workers. In reporting the opening of a co-operative store in Houghton-le-Spring in 1862 it was noted

The inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood being mostly coal miners, they have been used to go to the towns of Durham, Sunderland and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It will take a little time for them to become dealers at their own shop....³⁶

Fixed shop facilities can be enumerated more generally on the Durham coalfield. Table 7.1 shows for 1858 the number of grocery and general shopkeepers in twenty nine settlements which received co-operatives by 1870. These included towns such as Crook and Seaham Harbour both of which had over

Table 7.1. Private Grocery and General Shopkeeping Provision in 1858 for Communities on the Durham Coalfield Receiving Co-operation by 1870.(37)

No. of Private Grocers/ General Shopkeepers	No. of Settlements
0	4
1	2
2	4
3	2
4	-
5-9	5
10-14	7
15-19	-
20-29	3
30+	2

thirty existing shops of this type. There was also a group of communities with little or no provision of their own. In some instances, however, the lack was more apparent than real. The population of Ryhope, for example, could supplement their own two shops with the range of over 380 outlets in Sunderland some three miles distant. Indeed as was shown in Chapter Three the spread of co-operation may have reflected existing shopping practices with the population of pit villages joining co-operatives in their habitual urban market rather than immediately founding a store in their own community. Thus at Ryhope the first experience of co-operation was through the Sunderland society.

Such cases illustrate the difficulties of evaluating the level of retail provision from the viewpoint of the local population. The limited recorded provision in smaller settlements should not be viewed in isolation, but once the narrow local horizon is abandoned it is often hard to identify correctly the full range and accessibility of shops

available to individual consumers. In the absence of precise information the very success often achieved by co-operatives does suggest that the quantity, quality and convenience of private retailing accessible to residents in many smaller industrial communities did not fully meet consumer expectations.

Evidence on the growth of shopping facilities in the older and larger shopping centres where co-operation took root early is equivocal. The figures given by Alexander can be used to calculate changes in the ratio of food shops to population between the eighteen thirties and late forties or early fifties, during which period there were co-operative foundations in at least eight of the nine towns involved.³⁹ As Table 7.2 shows the growth in the number of private food shops outpaced that of population in all cases except Liverpool and Leicester.⁴⁰ Shaw's aggregate figures for ten northern towns show a relative as well as absolute improvement in retail provision during the first half of the century, against which background there were co-operatives established in six of the towns during the eighteen forties and early fifties.⁴¹ More detailed evidence for the Calder Valley area suggests that the growth of the number of food shops was faster than that of the total retail sector.⁴² However, as Shaw himself acknowledges the increase in shop numbers cannot be assumed to have been steady and at times its growth would have lagged behind that of population with a deleterious effect on the adequacy of retail provision.⁴³

The warning sounded by Shaw is reinforced by other more

Table 7.2. Food Shop Provision in Selected Urban Centres:
Persons per Food Shop \underline{c} 1834/9-1848/51.(44)

	Date	Persons per Food Shop	Date	Persons per Food Shop
Carlisle	1834	105	1848	82
Liverpool	1834	138	1851	146
Manchester	1834	123	1851	97
Bolton	1834	171	1851	129
Leeds	1834	159	1848	138
York	1834	83	1848	64
Nottingham	1835	57	1850	52
Leicester	1835	85	1850	87
Norwich	1839	125	1851	106

detailed studies. Scola's work on food retailing in Manchester and Salford during the nineteenth century suggests, in contrast to Alexander's figures (Table 7.2), a relative deterioration in services during the first half of the nineteenth century. Scola concluded that the rapid population growth of the eighteen twenties and thirties outpaced the proliferation of shops. The falling food shop:population ratio during these years and the slow pace of its subsequent recovery meant that the ratio achieved in 1811 was not bettered until the eighteen fifties. Thus early co-operative developments took place against a background which Scola describes as follows

The quality of life must have worsened in so far as shops and markets became much more crowded and there must have been a significant shift in economic power away from the consumer towards the retailer, affecting
45
both the quality of service and of the goods sold.

Such circumstances might provide a stimulus for the establishment of co-operative retailing, although other

conditions of the economic and social life of a large city tended to militate against it achieving an impact of similar proportions to many stores in smaller communities.

The divergence between Scola's and Alexander's findings for Manchester is explained by their use of different sources. The latter used commercial directories which excluded many small shopkeepers in the early years of the century. Their subsequent notice suggests a false increase in retailers from the eighteen twenties. Scola's data deriving from more detailed local directories show the presence of general shopkeepers in significant numbers from at least as early as the seventeen nineties. From this higher early base the increase in their numbers was less marked than Alexander's figures suggest.⁴⁶ This case illustrates the difficulties in making comparisons over time and space based on directory information of variable comprehensiveness. The detailed local evidence does also cast doubt on the pattern of improving shop:population ratios shown for other centres by more general studies.

Interpretation of the figures is further complicated by debate concerning the changing role of fixed shops, markets and itinerant traders during the nineteenth century. Although it seems likely that during the first half of the century, at least, the role of the different sectors was complementary some of the growth of fixed shop numbers may not have represented a real addition to provision but the replacement⁴⁷ of other forms of retailing.

Whatever the relationship between shop numbers and

population it is possible to question the quality of many of the new shops. Various studies consistently show much of the increase in food retailing to have been achieved through general shopkeepers. These were frequently small operations run by individual working people in an attempt to supplement a low family income. In the main, Winstanley suggests, the service offered by these shops was inferior to that of the larger grocers as regards price, the range and quality of goods stocked and ability to offer credit.⁴⁸ Much of this stemmed from the small size of the shops; thus the need to maintain a large profit margin to remain viable on their miniscule trade⁴⁹ and their lack of direct access to wholesale suppliers, being usually reliant on purchases from larger retailers. These shops probably survived because they were convenient, both geographically, serving a very local market, and in their willingness to stay open long hours. They also drew workers' custom because of antipathy to larger shopkeepers as a class rather than from any clearly defined local cause; a force which also helped to attract support for co-operation.⁵⁰ Small shopkeepers cannot, however, have been a particularly attractive source of supplies; in many cases they suffered the drawbacks against which those founding co-operatives protested. As a contribution towards the real improvement of retail provision and the diminution of the desirability of action to arrange alternative services, the effect of small general shops was probably more limited than their large numbers would suggest. For groups newly

introduced to the idea of co-operation the picture it was possible to paint by the eighteen fifties of the success of larger stores elsewhere was far more glowing than the local reality of the service offered by small private shopkeepers. The existence of these working class shopkeepers does indicate a basic spirit of enterprise on which co-operatives could sometimes build. It has been suggested that co-operation was a natural development from individual working class shopkeeping and the difficulties experienced in establishing a successful operation on the resources available to a single family.⁵¹

V

The foundation of individual co-operative societies was clearly prompted by the failings of private retail provision. The limited available evidence suggests that a similar low quality of service may have prevailed in many of the communities in which early and successful societies were established. Later in the century with an improvement in trading standards such circumstances were less commonly the spur for co-operation and its immediate benefits were often seen to rest chiefly with dividends. Their importance is examined in Section VI. It is, however, worth noting first that co-operation was not an automatic or universally successful response to poor private retailing. Such problems were not confined to areas where co-operation was strongest. In the towns of southern England co-operation was often introduced during the eighteen sixties against the background

of complaints of the high prices charged by private traders, but enjoyed nothing like the long term expansion of the northern stores.⁵² There is other evidence of concern over food costs in southern English towns, but popular reaction was not the formation of co-operatives. Instead resort continued to be made to alternative more traditional forms of protest, long since abandoned as ineffective in the rather different social climate of the industrial north.⁵³ In Devon rapid increases in the price of basic foodstuffs sparked off riots in several towns including Exeter in May 1847, January 1854 and as late as November 1867. Indeed at this last date disturbances were widespread throughout the county and there⁵⁴ were also outbreaks in Somerset, Dorset and Oxfordshire. It was not that there was a complete lack of awareness of co-operation in these areas; in 1854 the troubles in Exeter led to suggestions that local benefit societies should form a co-operative bakery.⁵⁵ By 1867 co-operative stores had been attempted in some of the larger towns which experienced disturbances including Exeter, Oxford and Torquay. In this last town there was a society actually trading in that year. Yet co-operation failed to become established and popular faith continued to be placed in older forms of action.

There is little collated evidence of the price paid for staple goods by workers in different parts of the country. Craft's regional examination of prices for 1843 suggests that there were no major differences in the cost of most of the groceries studied. There was no general tendency for prices to be significantly higher in the industrial northern areas

where co-operative development was focussed, than elsewhere
in the country.⁵⁶ Hunt's work on the second half of the
century also shows regional variations in food prices to have
been relatively small.⁵⁷ The regional framework of these
studies, which may disguise considerable local variation and
thus the problems of particular communities, is not ideal for
comparison with the pattern of co-operative development.⁵⁸
However, the restricted geography of co-operation clearly
cannot be explained as a simple reaction to high prices
charged by private traders.

Adulteration was similarly widespread. Its incidence was
not restricted to the industrial north. During the mid
eighteen fifties the Select Committee on the issue heard
evidence of its prevalence in London and several West Midland
towns.⁵⁹ Indeed the committee concluded that adulteration

prevails more or less in all districts
especially amongst traders serving working class consumers.⁶⁰
Other sources suggest that adulteration was at its peak
during the middle decades of the century when it was
practised in almost all cases where it would prove
remunerative.⁶¹

Contemporary discussion of the extension of co-operation
also noted that there were areas where private retail
provision was poor but stores were comparatively rare.
Consideration of progress in rural areas often emphasised the
especial benefits that would attach to co-operation as
against existing services. In part comparison made by urban

co-operators between their own experience and that in rural areas reflected a lack of understanding of the different nature and importance of the retail system in the two types of area. Fixed shops were often less important in rural districts, partly because of the services offered by itinerants, carriers and the delivery carts of traders from neighbouring towns.⁶² But also because of the greater capacity for food production by the individual consumer, more immediate access to other producers and the associated survival of the more informal barter component to the local economy.⁶³ Thus the necessity for and appropriateness of co-operation may have been exaggerated in some accounts. However, Blackman suggests that farmers were increasingly selling their produce through urban middle-men leaving a vacuum in the supply of food to the rural population.⁶⁴ Also some goods, particularly imported groceries, had to be supplied through formal retail trading. Thus small general shops were an established feature of most rural communities by at least the eighteen twenties.⁶⁵ It was the advantages of co-operation over these operations that was emphasised by supporters of stores established in rural areas. As one of the leaders of the store at Clipstone in Northamptonshire noted

I believe that co-operation does more good if possible in a small village than a large town;... in a large town the amount of capital embarked in business is so large, and the competition so great, that goods may in general be bought cheap. On the other hand in small country

villages many of the shopkeepers themselves are poor, and in debt with the wholesale dealers; who ... push upon them the worst description of goods. These goods, bought at so great a disadvantage, have to be retailed to the poor labourers, who thus obtain many of the necessities of life on the very worst terms. When a co-operative store is formed in a village, it concentrates the business together; and by trading for ready money is able to command a much better market.⁶⁶

Individual stores were successful in reducing prices. At Whitfield in Northumberland where villagers had been paying "enormous" prices the formation of a store meant that

we were selling flour and groceries, at prices something more like what they could be obtained at Newcastle or Carlisle.⁶⁷

A similar improvement could doubtless have been obtained in other rural communities but co-operatives remained isolated individuals in the countryside, a position which was largely a reflection of social conditions that were unfavourable to any independent working class initiative.

VI

Changes in retailing during the second half of the century shifted the ground on which the attractions of co-operation were judged. During the major expansion of foundations in the middle decades of the century, the practical benefits of co-operation were often reported in terms of price cutting and freedom from adulteration. Such concerns were of lesser

importance with the subsequent checking of the worst abuses of retail trade, partly by increased competition in which co-operatives themselves played a rôle, and partly by legislative action.⁶⁸ Growing emphasis became placed on the financial return to co-operative members represented by the dividend.⁶⁹ The initial success of the larger northern societies allowed them to pay rising dividends, a factor which contributed significantly to their subsequent further expansion. A desire to emulate such achievements led to continued efforts to start societies elsewhere.

Although co-operative leaders and theorists often attempted to play down the importance of the dividend - Holyoake, for example, claimed that

An early sign by which a true co-operator is known, is that of not being a seeker after dividends merely.⁷⁰ - it was vital in attracting and retaining custom and membership. As the movement expanded there were worries voiced that it was becoming

literally too successful, attracting to itself at the present day through the mere love of gain, men who know nothing of its struggles, and understand nothing of its principles.⁷¹

This was confirmed by the testimony of some individual members who recalled what had first attracted them

I had been told about the wonderful dividend and the interest on share capital, but nothing about the

principles that should govern the co-operative movement.... I was so interested in getting the "divi" that I walked two miles to the store every time I wanted a few things.⁷²

The officials of local societies on occasion echoed the arguments of co-operative idealists in condemning concentration on dividends. Yet committee men were also under pressure to increase their level both to retain the established membership and to attract new custom. Over time there was a general progression towards the payment of higher dividends by successful societies

Every new society started with a small dividend. As it grew, and its business increased, the desire on the part of each succeeding committee was to make a little larger dividend. If they did not make large dividends they [the membership]⁷³ turned them [the committee] out.

Hopes that even members attracted merely by financial gain could be educated to a wider appreciation of co-operative aims and values once inside a society were largely unfulfilled. Against such a background it is not surprising that co-operative propaganda was sometimes quite blatant in its emphasis of the financial benefits of membership. Discussion of the promotion of the extension of co-operation often concluded that this was best achieved by the example of the success of established stores, and in particular by the payment of generous dividends.⁷⁴ Copies of societies' quarterly balance sheets were printed for public circulation as proof of the financial success of co-operation. The

message was sometimes further emphasised, as on the fourteenth report of the Nelson society which included a small verse celebrating the dividend beginning

One and sixpence! spread it wide!

Sound it in the poor man's ear;

Let him take it for his guide,
75

And join us in our new career.

Such was the importance of a good dividend to the popular success of a society that some temporarily made artificially high payments. Established societies drew on reserve funds to maintain dividends during periods of poor trade. Newly founded societies attempted to increase their attractions by paying dividend from the outset, sometimes before any profit had been made. The Edmonton society, for example, anxious to make an impact in the competitive metropolitan market, paid its earliest dividends from the share capital of committee members during an initial period of trading loss.

The attention accorded to dividends reflected their importance in the family economy of many co-operative members. In 1850 Lloyd Jones claimed

One man told me he ... kept his family one week in every quarter of the year from the profits he derived from his interest in the concern [the Rochdale Pioneers' society].
78

In 1861 Watts suggested that workmen spending twenty shillings per week at a store could receive an annual total of four pounds in dividend. This represents a dividend on
79

Table 7.3. Co-operative Retail Society Dividends 1860 and 1862.(80)

Dividend Declared in the £ (<u>s</u> / <u>d</u>)	Number of Societies Paying Given Dividend in 3rd or 4th Quarter of 1860		Number of Societies Paying Given Dividend in 1st or 2nd Quarter of 1862	
		%		%
0 - 0/6	1	1.9	4	2.0
0/6¼ - 1/0	7	13.5	61	30.8
1/0¼ - 1/6	24	46.2	89	44.9
1/6¼ - 2/0	16	30.8	36	18.2
2/0¼ - 2/6	3	5.8	7	3.5
2/6¼ - 3/0	1	1.9	1	0.5
Total Societies for which Data Available	52	100	198	100

all purchases of around one shilling and sixpence in the pound, a level achieved by a number of societies at the time (Table 7.3). The evidence of contemporary family budgets suggests, however, that many co-operators would have had a lower weekly bill at the store. The trend in dividend payments was upwards in the remainder of the century. In 1887 it was claimed that for a working class family

it must be a small case where they would not make £3 a year, and in the north they will have £10, £15 or £20 a year coming in.

Dividend was particularly valued as a means of amassing a small capital sum. The more affluent kept dividends invested with their society, where it received a flat rate of interest, usually around 5 per cent, providing a means of painless long-term saving. Other members used the dividend to pay some of their larger bills such as rent. After the initial cost cutting impact made by some of the societies

founded around mid century the impetus in price reduction often passed to the new multiple grocers. This aspect of the operation of such traders did offer a particular challenge to stores as to all other shopkeepers. Even in districts where co-operation was strong there was by the end of the century some consequent loss of custom.⁸³ However, the bulk of members saw the dividend as of greater benefit than the immediate smaller savings of price cuts. The latter were too easily frittered away without providing lasting benefit. Thus it was reported from Bacup that

wives say if they did not pay higher prices there would be nothing left, their husbands would drink it. But now they could get it back at the end of the quarter to buy⁸⁴ clothes.

As a result arguments against high dividends met with little popular support. Initial attempts during the sixties and seventies to obtain local agreement on the co-ordinated reduction of dividends arose from concern that they were becoming the grounds for unhealthy rivalry between neighbouring societies, perhaps presaging the lowering of trading standards in a scramble to attract custom.⁸⁵ Equally undesirable was the local inflation of prices,⁸⁶ allowing private shopkeepers to make a substantial profit. A revival of debate on the level of dividends during the eighteen nineties focussed more specifically on their effect on prices. High dividends were equated with relatively high prices and thus the exclusion of the poorest workers from co-operation.⁸⁷ The issue was debated at national and district

level but only isolated societies made any practical attempt
88
to change their trading policy.

VII

If dividends were an important factor in drawing popular support for co-operation it might have been the case that variations in the size of dividends help to provide an explanation of the differential pace at which societies grew. At the local level it has been suggested that

where a consumer has a choice between competing co-operative societies, the dividend is and was the most
89
powerful factor in influencing that choice.

There is evidence that members were aware of the relative rates paid by the various societies in a local area. Members of the Newcastle and Blaydon societies, for example, noted with aggrievance the higher rates paid by the Gateshead store
90
and threatened to transfer their custom. Indeed in areas where there were several neighbouring societies some individuals were members of two or three stores and switched their trading between them depending on the amount of
91
dividend declared. It seems unlikely that this individual juggling of trade would have had a consistent long term effect on the growth of most societies. This was especially so as the difference in dividend paid by near neighbours was often small and there was short term variation in the relative performance of the several societies. This perhaps partly explains the lack of correlation at the local level

between membership growth rates and the size of dividend found in an exercise for the societies of North-East Lancashire during the eighteen eighties.⁹² Moreover, it is difficult to evaluate any possible effect of variation in the rate of dividends in isolation from the many other factors which may have influenced the rate of growth of societies.

It seems likely, however, that an examination of the different rate of dividends paid in relation to the geography of national co-operative growth will prove more revealing. As the rate of dividend paid increased during the second half of the century there emerged a clear distinction between the performance of the high dividend, expansive societies of the north and the rather hesitant progress in both membership and dividends of southern societies. The upward trend in the size of dividends is confirmed by Table 7.4 which compares the available information on levels paid in 1862 with those of the turn of the century. In 1896 just over 30 per cent of the co-operative membership was receiving dividends of three shillings in the pound or more, a higher level than recorded as being paid by any society in 1862. At this earlier date the average dividend was one shilling and five pence compared with the two shillings and eightpence farthing of 1896.

There was no attempt to publish regularly collected figures of the dividends paid by individual societies until the advent of the annual reports published by the Co-operative Union from 1881 onwards. The value of the earliest of these is unfortunately limited by the failure of many

societies to comply fully with the request for information. However, it is possible from the returns of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies to calculate for a rather larger number of societies the level of profitability (profit as a percentage of sales) from 1862 onwards. Profits and dividends were obviously related and the former can be used as a guide to the latter. A rank correlation of the

Table 7.4. Co-operative Retail Society Dividends 1862 and 1896: Proportion of the Membership in Receipt of Any Given Rate of Dividends.(93)

	1862 England & Wales	1896 UK
Total No. Extant Societies	633	1,428
Total No. Societies for which Data Available	180	757
Total Membership Extant Societies (000s)	119	1,356
Total Membership Societies for which Data Available (000s)	56	1,059
Rate of Dividend Paid on Main Volume of Trade (s/d)	Percent of Total Membership of Data Societies	
	1862	1896
0 - 0/6	0.8	0.3
0/6% - 1/0	24.5	0.9
1/0% - 1/6	47.6	2.8
1/6% - 2/0	15.1	11.2
2/0% - 2/6	11.8	16.5
2/6% - 3/0	0.1	38.0
3/0% - 3/6	-	20.4
3/6% - 4/0	-	8.7
4/0% +	-	1.1

profits made and the dividends paid by Lancashire societies in 1886 gives a satisfactory result of $\rho_s = +0.85$. The discrepancy largely reflects the varying range of other commitments which individual societies met from their

profits. These included both long term expenditure, for example on education and the maintenance of a reserve fund, and short term calls on resources, perhaps to help finance new premises.

The increasing pressure put on many societies to pay high dividends underlay the rise in the average rate of profitability recorded by individual societies (Table 7.5). Not all societies participated equally in the general

Table 7.5. Profits as a Percentage of Total Sales Recorded by Retail Co-operatives in England and Wales, 1862, 1882 and 1901.(94)

Date	No. of Societies for which data are available	Average Percentage Profits
1862	307	6.4
1882	838	8.6
1901	1192	11.0

growth of profitability. A regional breakdown shows an increasing divergence of experience in line with the degree of popular support co-operation enjoyed. In 1862 there was little inter-regional variation in the average levels of profitability or the range of values recorded by individual societies (Table 7.6). The subsequent shift towards higher profitability shown by societies in the three northern regions and between 1882 and 1901 by those of the Midlands and Wales was not matched in much of southern England. Indeed in London recorded profit levels slumped.

Although there was intra- as well as inter-regional variation in profit levels, Table 7.6 shows there to have been a clustering of the performance of individual societies

Table 7.6. Co-operative Retail Societies Profits as a Percentage of Total Sales by Region, 1862, 1882 and 1901.(95)

		Percentage of All Societies for which Data Available with Profits of a Given Percentage of Sales									
		Loss	0- 2.4	2.5- 4.9	5- 7.4	7.5- 9.9	10- 12.4	12.5- 14.9	15- 17.4	17.5- 19.9	20+
North	1862	-	9.4	25.0	31.3	25.0	9.4	-	-	-	-
	1882	0.8	2.4	5.6	12.9	22.6	33.1	16.9	4.0	0.8	0.8
	1901	1.4	1.4	0.7	4.8	8.3	9.7	16.6	22.8	26.9	7.6
North West	1862	0.9	4.6	20.4	31.5	23.1	13.9	4.6	0.9	-	-
	1882	0.5	2.5	5.0	6.9	20.3	22.3	23.3	11.9	4.0	4.5
	1901	0.5	-	1.9	0.5	5.3	7.7	27.3	39.2	12.0	5.7
Yorks	1862	-	12.0	40.0	34.0	12.0	-	-	-	-	2.0
	1882	-	2.7	3.4	14.4	28.8	29.5	12.3	4.8	2.1	2.1
	1901	-	-	1.1	3.9	4.5	14.5	24.6	35.2	10.6	5.6
North Midlands	1862	-	10.0	30.0	30.0	20.0	-	-	-	10.0	-
	1882	5.0	13.3	8.3	26.7	26.7	11.7	6.7	-	1.7	-
	1901	1.2	-	8.5	8.5	26.8	25.6	15.9	9.8	3.7	-
West Midlands	1862	4.8	28.6	19.0	23.8	9.5	9.5	-	-	4.8	-
	1882	7.0	9.3	23.3	32.6	14.0	9.3	2.3	2.3	-	-
	1901	-	3.1	11.1	15.9	20.6	30.2	12.7	3.2	3.2	-
S. E. Midlands	1862	-	10.0	30.0	20.0	10.0	30.0	-	-	-	-
	1882	3.3	4.9	13.1	26.2	27.9	16.4	4.9	1.6	1.6	-
	1901	1.4	1.4	5.5	5.5	28.8	32.4	19.2	2.7	2.7	-
East/ East Anglia	1862	-	-	42.9	28.6	-	14.3	-	-	14.3	-
	1882	-	11.8	26.5	32.4	11.8	14.7	-	2.9	-	-
	1901	4.1	9.5	12.2	12.2	32.4	21.6	6.8	-	-	1.4
South East	1862	-	14.3	14.3	28.6	28.6	-	14.3	-	-	-
	1882	5.7	2.9	31.4	25.7	28.6	5.7	-	-	-	-
	1901	7.4	-	18.5	27.2	22.2	19.8	4.9	-	-	-
London	1862	-	15.0	40.0	20.0	10.0	5.0	10.0	-	-	-
	1882	13.6	27.3	27.3	18.2	13.6	-	-	-	-	-
	1901	27.9	9.3	16.2	18.6	23.3	2.3	2.3	-	-	-
South West	1862	-	5.0	40.0	30.0	15.0	-	5.0	5.0	-	-
	1882	2.4	9.8	36.6	12.2	19.5	12.2	7.3	-	-	-
	1901	3.8	1.3	12.5	18.8	35.0	17.5	5.0	5.0	1.3	-
Wales	1862	-	-	50.0	25.0	12.5	-	12.5	-	-	-
	1882	12.5	12.5	25.0	25.0	12.5	12.5	-	-	-	-
	1901	1.2	5.9	9.4	10.6	12.9	32.9	14.1	9.4	2.4	1.2
England and Wales	1862	0.3	9.3	28.8	29.8	17.8	8.6	3.4	0.7	1.0	0.3
	1882	2.4	5.7	11.6	16.7	22.5	20.8	12.2	4.9	1.8	1.4
	1901	2.7	2.0	6.6	8.9	16.0	17.5	16.7	18.1	8.3	3.1

around the regional average. Thus by 1901 there were very few low profit societies in the three northern regions, which contained by contrast almost all of the most profitable stores. These were particularly concentrated on the North-East coalfield. This area alone accounted for over 40 per cent of the most profitable societies (defined as those above one standard deviation from the national average) compared with the share of 13 per cent of all societies in England and Wales contributed by the counties of Northumberland and Durham as a whole. The association of areas where low rates of profit and thus of dividend prevailed with those experiencing only halting growth is clear enough. It was a parallel drawn by contemporaries who recognised the difficulties of attracting members to societies which seemed to offer only modest financial benefits. Speaking in 1872 specifically of the slow growth of co-operation in the southern section E.O. Greening opined that

the first and greatest of all hindrances is the smallness of the dividends; that the most striking way that most people could be appealed to was through their pockets; and though there may be a great enthusiasm amongst small numbers of people whom they imbue with their principles, yet to have a great success there must be some material as well as moral inducement held out to them.⁹⁶

Indeed it was felt by some co-operative leaders that the increasingly high rates of dividend paid by northern stores

made it more difficult to attract membership to societies elsewhere. The northern stores inflated expectations of co-operation and established levels of material success which it was impossible to repeat in many circumstances. As a London co-operator told the 1876 Congress

They might in a southern society make dividends of 1s 3d or 1s 6d; and somebody might get hold of a Bacup balance sheet, showing a much larger dividend, and they at once attributed the smallness of their own dividend to bad management, and didn't believe the explanations of their own committee The policy of paying high dividends had proved a great injury to them in the south. ⁹⁷

This popular perception of societies as failures made it all the harder to maintain and expand them or to found new ones.

VII

The levels of profit and dividends had an impact on the future success of a society as a determinant of its attractiveness. They were also measures of the past achievements of co-operatives and the differential ease with which they became established and expanded. To say that low dividends stunted co-operative growth is a partial explanation; but a more interesting question remains. Why were some societies able quickly to enhance their popular appeal through a rapid increase upon their initial modest dividends whilst others remained trapped? For the latter their slow growth was associated with low dividends; in the absence of anything to draw in large numbers of new members

individual co-operatives remained small and stagnant, often indeed sinking into disillusionment and failure.

The answer lies with a wider examination of the balance of commercial and social forces as noted in the introduction to this chapter. Where workers were only weakly organised and the middle class interests with which co-operation came into conflict were strong the potential for its development and success was not fully realised. This chapter has dealt in large part with working class views of the value of co-operative stores including the stimulus given by perceptions of the inadequacies of the pre-existing retail system. It seems logical therefore next to consider the manner in which commercial conditions acted in some cases not as an encouragement to co-operation, but as a depressant working against its initial establishment and acting as a curb on its ability to develop an attractive and expanding retail business.

NOTES

1. See Chapter One, note 19.
2. E.g. McCullough Thew 1985.
3. Richard Whittle, then secretary of the Crewe society: quoted Chaloner 1950, 253-54.
4. E.g. Acland and Jones 1884, 125.
5. Calhoun 1982. Also see for example discussion of the earlier struggle to maintain local control over Poor Law administration: Edsall 1971, Knott 1986.
6. Co-operative Union 1876, 27.
7. Co-op. 1 Aug. 1866.
8. This can be contrasted with the price cutting policies of the developing multiple retailers during the final decades of the nineteenth century.
9. Co-operatives were essentially an alternative to existing fixed shops in the grocery and provisions trade. They were of lesser importance in fresh foods, including meat, fish and vegetables that were largely supplied by market traders. See Chapter One note 25.
10. National Co-operative Leader 7 Dec. 1860.
11. P.P. 1856 VIII, 109. Although co-operatives were generally associated with the provision of pure goods evidence to the Commission suggests that, at least initially, this was not always the case. It was difficult to obtain some imported goods in an unadulterated form and it was suggested that inexperienced committeemen lacked the knowledge to

distinguish pure articles even when they could be purchased: P.P. 1856 VIII 199, 201.

12. Co-op. June 1863.

13. Ludlow and Jones 1867, 132 noted "co-operative stores were meant chiefly as a defence against the inroads of the distributing classes on the working man's pocket...".

14. Ludlow noted low price co-operatives during the early fifties including the neighbouring stores at Leigh, Lowton, Lowton Chapel and Golborne, Lancashire. There were also more limited joint-purchasing schemes which did not operate a store but simply divided a bulk purchase up amongst their membership. Such operations may have curbed the pace of development of more formal co-operative societies. Ludlow reported the lack of a store in Blackburn in 1851, for example, but noted several clubs which supplied food cheaply. The price reduction could be quite substantial; joint purchasing amongst the workforce of the Chorlton Mills in Manchester led to a 40 per cent saving on tea and coffee and 20 per cent on other goods: Ch. Soc. 11 Oct 1851, 18 Oct. 1851; Leader 1 June 1850.

15. Charter 23 June 1839.

16. E.g. reports from Loughborough, Swindon, Hershaw, Hastings and Preston Bissett: Co-op. Apr. 1863, Oct. 1864, 15 June 1865, 15 June 1867, 15 Aug. 1868.

17. Co-op. Dec. 1863.

18. Co-op. Feb. 1863.

19. Bruckshaw and McNab 1961, 17.
20. Harding 1910, 21.
21. Saxton 1902, 3.
22. P.P. 1873 LXI, P.P. 1874 LXII, P.P. 1875 LXXI, P.P. 1877 LXXVII.
23. Newcastle Daily Chronicle June, July, August 1872.
24. Ch. Soc. 8 Nov. 1851.
25. It appears that any store at Merthyr was not formally registered: Razzell and Wainwright 1973, 257; Briton Ferry Co-operative Society Ltd. 1943.
26. Chaloner 1950, 250.
27. Crittall 1970, 110.
28. Turton 1969, 121.
29. At Crewe the sensitivity of the railway company to charges of complicity in truck dealing led to the barring of their employees from shopkeeping. Co-operators were formally exempted from this regulation in 1857, although the company had not taken previous action to block the society's progress: Chaloner 1950, 251.
30. Lewis 1963, 181.
31. Co-op. Sept. 1863.
32. CN 26 Jan. 1878.
33. E.g. Wyndham Row, Cumberland and Annesley, Nottinghamshire: Co-op. 4 Dec. 1869.
34. Benson 1980, 89-90; Benson 1983, 98-127.
35. Durham Record Office D/MRP 21/1, Metcalfe 1982, 488-90.
36. Co-op. Sept. 1862.

37. Kelly 1858.
38. Sunderland Co-operative Society 1863, 8.
39. In York there was no recorded co-operative store but a mill society was formed in the city in 1849: Journal of Association 28 June 1852.
40. Alexander 1970.
41. The co-operative towns were Halifax, Leeds, Huddersfield, Oldham, Rochdale, Preston, and those without stores were York, Hull, Blackburn and Lancaster: Shaw 1982, 174.
42. Wild and Shaw 1975, 203.
43. Shaw 1982, 174.
44. Alexander 1970, 241-55.
45. Scoble 1982, 161.
46. See also Mitchell's discussion of retail provision in Stockport and Macclesfield during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Mitchell 1981; Schola 1975 & 1982; Alexander 1970.
47. A recent summary of the debate is given in Winstanley 1983, Chapter One.
48. Winstanley 1983, 15.
49. A surviving ledger for a small grocer in Sheffield during the eighteen forties shows an average of just over 100 transactions per month: Blackman 1967, 116.
50. Winstanley 1983, 15.
51. Benson 1983, 98-127.
52. The comments of William Watkins whose National Society was unsuccessful also seem likely to have derived from

- experience in southern England where most of his branch stores were located.
53. Stevenson 1974. In Oldham, for example, food riots were a phenomenon of the second half of the eighteenth century, occurring during the crisis years 1757-58, 1766, 1773 and 1782: Foster 1974, 31.
 54. Swift 1980, Storch 1982, Horn 1981.
 55. Leader 16 Sept. 1854.
 56. Crafts 1982; Foster's comparison of Oldham with Northampton and South Shields during the later eighteenth forties indicates that living standards were on average better in the Lancashire town reflecting a more favourable balance between the higher wages paid and prices: Foster 1974, 95-99.
 57. Hunt 1973, 104.
 58. Also potentially problematic is the derivation of the material used in these studies from the records of large institutions. Given allegations of profiteering by individual retailers such sources may not be an accurate guide to the prices actually paid by working class consumers.
 59. E.g. P.P. 1854-55 VIII, 281, 316 on London; P.P. 1856 VIII 304-05 on Midland towns.
 60. P.P. 1856 VIII, iv.
 61. Burnett 1959.
 62. Chartres 1981; Winstanley 1983, 199-215; Everitt 1985.
 63. Reed 1984 discusses the limitations of the monetary economy in rural areas during the first half of the

century. While the survival of such a system might have worked against the introduction of co-operation into rural areas, some societies were flexible enough to marry some of its elements to their own operations. Country members of the Lincoln co-operative bartered their agricultural produce, which was sold in the society's urban stores, for grocery supplies: Co-operative Union 1895, 13.

64. Blackman 1967, 116.

65. Chartres 1981, 303.

66. Co-op. Nov. 1864. In their proposal of 1873 that the Gloucester Society establish a branch in their village the residents of Corse "instanced the differences in prices of the various necessary articles obtaining in the country and the town.": Gloucestershire Record Office D2754 1/4.

67. Co-op. Nov. 1864.

68. Winstanley 1983, 63-65.

69. The dividend as a means of accumulating capital was, of course, a feature of early co-operative propaganda.

70. Holyoake 1891, 172.

71. Spectator quoted Co-op. 24 July 1869.

72. Llewelyn Davies 1931, 38.

73. Co-operative Union 1876, 16.

74. E.g. discussion at the conference of the Calder and Airedale Co-operative Association in July 1872: CN 13 July 1872.

75. Quoted Hamilton 1910, 27.
76. As for example at Hurst Brook during the depression of the late sixties in north-west England: Co-op. 8 Aug. 1868.
77. Bishopsgate Institute: Edmonton Co-operative Society Minute Book 11 Feb. 1890.
78. P.P. 1850 XIX, 267.
79. Watts 1861, 75.
80. Co-op. Mar. 1861, Oct. 1862.
81. See Chapter One , note 19. It is difficult to estimate money received in dividend from average weekly expenditure because of the complexities of the system operated by many societies. A survey of nineteen societies in Airedale found that only ten paid a uniform rate of dividend on all goods. The remainder paid a lower rate or no dividend at all on selected items including flour, offals and feeding stuffs, fresh butter, eggs, yeast and tobacco. Thus one society paid dividend on only half the range of articles sold: CN 21 Dec. 1878.
82. P.P. 1887 XIII, 606.
83. E.g. the expansion of the private firm of Brough's on the north-east coalfield from the mid eighteen nineties: Mathias 1967, 82-86.
84. Co-operative Union 1876, 16.
85. See the leader in CN 20 Nov. 1875.
86. See the comments of "A New Pioneer" in CN 30 Nov. 1878.
87. Co-operative Union 1891, 13-17.

88. Darvill 1954, 172-89 examines the limited moves made by societies in the North-East.
89. Darvill 1954, 42.
90. Durham Record Office D/Co/B1 7; Tyne and Wear Archives Department 120/5.
91. Durham Record Office D/MRP 21/3.
92. The average rate of dividend paid in 1886 by individual societies was correlated with their growth of membership during the decade of the eighteen eighties, membership expansion in 1887 and their increase of sales in the latter year. The respective ρ_s values were 0.0, 0.0 and -0.2.
93. Co-op. Oct. 1862; P.P. 1898 LXXXVIII, 740.
94. P.P. 1863 XXIX; P.P. 1883 LXVIII; P.P. 1902 XCVI.
95. P.P. 1863 XXIX; P.P. 1883 LXVIII; P.P. 1902 XCVI.
96. CN 11 Apr. 1874.
97. Co-operative Union 1876, 17.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CO-OPERATIVES AS RETAILERS: OPPORTUNITIES, COMPETITION AND
COSTS IN THE COMMERCIAL REALM.

I

Although co-operatives were unconventional retailers in their ownership and organisation they were inevitably forced into rivalry for custom with private retailers. It may have been that most substantial shopkeepers paid only limited attention to early co-operative developments and made no especial attempts to block their progress. Co-operation probably appeared to pose little threat to their hold over the most remunerative sections of what was, after all, an expanding market. Some may have underestimated the capacity of societies to survive and prosper. The previous co-operative record against which societies founded in the northern towns in the eighteen forties and early fifties were judged included a substantial number of failures and the success of the most enduring societies was on a scale that was modest by comparison with subsequent developments. Shopkeepers may therefore have seen new stores as leading to no more than the temporary loss of a section of their working class custom. More determined action to combat co-operatives followed only when the growth of early stores made clear the threat posed. But the very success that caused this reaction meant that it was too late for shopkeepers to undermine effectively the operations of what had become securely established stores. The balance of power between co-operative and private traders may often have been rather different in the subsequent spread of stores outside the initial northern core. In these later developments, while

potential co-operators were inspired by the example of northern successes, the same vision of co-operative expansion may have spurred shopkeepers into greater efforts to stifle local developments at birth. Determination to curtail co-operation may have been strengthened in many towns with a fairly stable population by the realisation that given the limited growth of trade co-operation could only succeed through a real reduction in private turnover.

The attempts of private shopkeepers to challenge societies took various practical forms in addition to the propagandism noted in Chapter Six.² One of the simplest responses was the temporary reduction of prices, perhaps to unremunerative levels,³ to undercut the stores. Private dealers also attempted to replicate some of the attractions of co-operation. Thus individual shopkeepers followed the line of many societies in abandoning credit, with ready money dealing allowing price reductions.⁴ Some private traders gave bonuses on purchases and there were abortive attempts to organise local associations to oversee a system of dividends.⁵

Other action took the form of boycotts. Some retailers totally refused to serve co-operative members, hoping to force them to give up stores which could not alone serve all their needs.⁶ There were also collective attempts to induce local wholesale suppliers to stop serving co-operatives by the threat of withdrawal of custom by private shopkeepers.⁷ Against the background of such action which enjoyed some local success the trade journal the Grocer launched what was

to be an abortive campaign for a national boycott by wholesalers in 1870.⁸ As trade increased co-operation was able as a movement to make a more effective resistance to this form of pressure. Suppliers became reluctant to lose a growing and remunerative business with co-operatives. Moreover, the dependence of societies on outside sources of supplies decreased with the extension of the wholesaling and manufacturing operations of the CWS. The greater strength of co-operation in general was in some respects a shield for individual societies that were young and/or weak, although it could not guarantee universal success.

The level of existing competition was an important influence on the need for and ease of entry into the market of any new retail outlet, private or co-operative, and on its subsequent chances of prosperity. Not only was co-operation an attractive project where existing retail provision was unsatisfactory, but often it was easier for a society to become commercially established. Individual retailers did not have the power or the desire to block the transfer of trade from the private to the co-operative sector. Indeed the most successful co-operatives enjoyed a cumulative growth of trade and influence in local retail markets. As independent local foundations societies invariably started from a position of weakness with a small membership and limited resources of capital. They thus often required a degree of latitude to penetrate the market. These same conditions gave co-operatives subsequent freedom to establish their own trading policies. They were able to tailor their operations to

produce the combination of prices, profits and thus dividends most appealing to local consumers and consequently likely to lead to further expansion. In more hostile commercial conditions would-be co-operators found that no amount of enthusiasm on their part could win over the custom of the mass of workers who were often strictly practical in their assessment of the merits of local stores both compared with private shopkeepers and societies elsewhere.

II

Co-operatives perhaps enjoyed greatest commercial freedom in the smaller industrial communities in which they often became firmly entrenched. Discussion in Chapter Seven suggested that the establishment of a store would have particular appeal in locations where alternative retail provision in the immediate vicinity was inadequate. Equally such circumstances often meant that co-operatives were able to grow into established concerns with relative ease and speed. Their expansion was both a reflection and a cause of the limited growth of private shopkeeping. This point can be illustrated by further material relating to the Durham coalfield. Table 7.1 detailing retail provision in 1858 prior to the spread of co-operatives gave some indication of the latitude available for new entrants into the trade. Figures for 1879 (Table 8.1) by which time the major round of co-operative foundations had been completed, show a similar picture. Some of the stores by now established and successful

Table 8.1. Private Grocery and General Shopkeeping Provision in Communities on the Durham Coalfield with Co-operative Stores, 1879.(10)

No. of Private Grocers/ General Shopkeepers	No. of Settlements
0	3
1	6
2	3
3	4
4	2
5	2
6	3
7	-
8	1
9	-
10-14	8
15-19	1
20-29	6
30+	4

were operating in relative freedom from private competitors
⁹
in their own communities.

Co-operative success was not, however, restricted to those small communities ill-served by private retailers. In the larger towns of the Durham coalfield such as Bishop Auckland and Crook co-operation was part of a fairly large retail sector which also served surrounding villages. But still co-operation was able to grow to become an important influence in local trading. Similar achievement was reported from other more substantial industrial settlements. In some cases, including Crewe, co-operation had entered a new community at an early stage in the absence of significant private retail provision, and the society had grown with the town. Thus in 1894 it was estimated that around 75 per cent of Crewe's
11
retail trade passed through the society's hands. But co-operation also took root in many other industrial towns which

were of much older foundation with their own established private retail sector. Indeed it was in such towns in the textile districts that some of the earliest and most successful stores were located. Figures indicate that after around half a century of growth societies in individual of the textile towns had made major inroads into the local retail trade. In 1892 it was noted that 75 per cent of workers in Oldham dealt with the five societies trading within the borough.¹² By 1909 the Bolton society had captured a similar percentage of the town's total retail trade.¹³ Comparison of the level of co-operative membership as a percentage of total population in the Oldham and Bolton enumeration districts with neighbouring areas suggests that co-operation was equally successful in other towns including Bury, Rochdale, Dewsbury, Halifax and Huddersfield.¹⁴

It cannot be that co-operative progress was achieved in the virtual absence of competition from other traders in the textile towns. Chapter Seven included discussion of one aspect of private retail provision in established centres. The number of private shops and the quality of service they provided failed at times to meet the expectations of a growing population, but the evidence is equivocal as to precisely when and where such problems were met. But a more basic point cannot be doubted; as population increased so did total consumer demand, providing scope for new entrants into retail trade. Doubts as to the comprehensiveness of data make it difficult to quantify changes in shop numbers exactly and

comparisons across space as well as time are likely to cause particular difficulties. The quoted figures are more a guide to the scale of change than an exact delineation. The most likely outcome of data deficiencies is the exaggeration of the size of any increase; real growth being compounded by improvements in the coverage of successive directories. However, the overall trends are clear.

Aggregate figures for the growth of shop numbers in six northern towns including some of the earliest and strongest co-operative centres, show an increase of over 135 per cent 1821-51 and a further 70 per cent growth in the following thirty years.¹⁵ Some individual centres showed even greater increases. Between 1823 and 1851 the number of shops recorded for Huddersfield grew from 185 to 618; in the thirty years to 1881 the latter total nearly doubled to reach 1,206.¹⁶ Food shops, serving the market which co-operation chiefly penetrated, made a significant contribution to the general increase. Table 8.2 calculated from data presented in Alexander 1970 for ten urban areas shows that in most cases the increase in food shops was similar in percentage terms to the proliferation of all shops.

Where growing shop numbers reflected an expanding market, it was easier for co-operation, like any new retailer to attract trade and thus establish itself. Although there was obviously a decline in the share of the market held by private retailers in toto, there was still scope for individual traders to increase their takings. Thus young co-operatives may not have been pitched into direct

Table 8.2. Growth of Shop Numbers, Ten Selected Towns, c1834-50.(17)

A) All Shops

Town	Date	No. of Shops	Date	No. of Shops	% Increase
Liverpool	1834	3401	1851	5734	69
Manchester	1834	3233	1851	6633	105
Leeds	1834	1572	1848	2547	62
Bolton	1834	491	1851	881	79
York	1834	682	1848	1120	64
Carlisle	1834	394	1848	616	56
Leicester	1835	1080	1850	1564	45
Nottingham	1835	1795	1850	2351	31
Norwich	1839	1029	1851	1409	37
Merthyr	1835	199	1850	618	211

B) Food Shops

Liverpool	1834	1645	1851	2570	56
Manchester	1834	1613	1851	3137	95
Leeds	1834	772	1848	1242	61
Bolton	1834	262	1851	472	80
York	1834	324	1848	535	65
Carlisle	1834	190	1848	303	60
Leicester	1835	536	1850	690	29
Nottingham	1835	885	1850	1078	22
Norwich	1839	496	1851	641	29
Merthyr	1835	117	1850	343	193

confrontation with established traders. Moreover, co-operatives were not necessarily a major threat to the largest and most commercially influential grocers. Rather they fought for custom with other recent and potential entrants into the trade. In serving working class markets stores were often competing with the small general shopkeepers who made up a substantial proportion of the growth in shop numbers. If, as was suggested in Chapter Seven, the increase of small private shops did little to decrease the attractions of the

foundation of a co-operative, then equally their commercial weakness and the low quality of the service most offered made them ineffectual obstacles to the deepening of co-operative penetration of local trade.

A steady expansion of retail trade was by no means found in all towns. There is some suggestion of this in the lower level of increase of shop numbers recorded on Table 8.2 for Leicester, Nottingham and Norwich; all locations in which attempts to establish co-operatives during the eighteen forties and early fifties were unsuccessful. Shop numbers were also slow to expand in many of the towns of southern England in which success eluded co-operation during the late fifties and sixties. The examples given on Table 8.3 show that opportunities for all new entrants into the market were limited. Annual growth rates of shop numbers for most such southern towns were clearly lower than those recorded for

Table 8.3. Growth of Food Shop Numbers, Selected Towns.(18)

	Date	No. of Shops	Date	No. of Shops	Annual % Change
Bedford	1847	117	1864	147	1.5
Dorchester	1848	53	1855	59	1.6
Exeter	1856	418	1883	476	0.5
Oxford	1847	199	1864	168	-0.9
St. Albans	1845	57	1866	87	2.5
Southampton	1848	244	1855	317	4.3
Winchester	1848	95	1855	101	0.9
Manchester	1840	1,530	1861	3,291	5.4
Leeds	1834	772	1848	1,242	4.4
Bolton	1834	262	1851	472	4.7
Seven Yorkshire Towns: All Shops	1823 1851	2,825 6,703	1851 1881	6,703 12,399	4.9 2.8

the several northern examples. Indeed in Oxford the recorded number of food shops actually fell around mid century. One of the several consequences of the limited economic dynamism of many southern towns which impinged upon co-operation was their small share in the population growth and increased prosperity of individual workers that stimulated retail markets elsewhere. Moreover, the slow growth of shop numbers meant that trade was more concentrated in the hands of established grocers, a group less easily displaced by co-operatives than were the small general shopkeepers who had proliferated in expanding industrial centres.

The initial leeway for co-operative establishment provided by an expanding market was a vital element in the long term success enjoyed by many societies. The pattern of society failures show that most were of societies which were still small and young (Table 4.13). Where stagnant markets were controlled by established shopkeepers or where fierce competition had already forced down prices and profit margins co-operation found it harder to offer any initial advantage in the form of price reductions or substantial dividends. Thus societies remained weak; they continued to be forced to work within the constraints set by the overall conditions of the local retail market. There was little they could do to increase their appeal to the mass of consumers and failure often followed.

III

In locations where a co-operative did become firmly established the progressive expansion of a society's trade itself eased the trend of future growth. Increasing turnover and membership allowed societies to exploit economies of scale in their operations yielding the potential for expanding profit margins; thus the payment of higher dividends as an increasing financial inducement to co-operative membership. Even in some quite large towns the progressive expansion of societies meant that co-operation exercised a growing influence over the conduct of all local retail trade. Society leaders were then in a position where they were no longer so narrowly restricted by the externally set norms of the market but could themselves establish the conditions within which they and others would work.

By the mid eighteen seventies it was reported that co-operatives were the dominant influence on the retail trade of many of the textile towns. At Oldham, for example, co-operatives were setting the price level for other traders in the town. Conditions were similar at Rochdale where

the store led the price; the private shops had once competed, but had long since left off doing so. They found they could not do so successfully and they were content to share the general custom.

Control over prices and profits allowed co-operatives in such communities to offer attractive dividends. Table 7.6 showed a clear north-south differential in profit margins. Northern co-operatives generally made healthy profits irrespective of

the size of settlement in which they were located. But amongst these societies most of the very highest rates of profit were recorded in the smaller and medium-sized communities, particularly on the north-east coalfield. In this district the large profits partly reflected consumer preferences for a generous dividend financed by relatively high prices. Dividends were used as a means of saving against the expectation of future stoppages in the pit, balancing out the relatively good wages of miners in times of prosperity with the hardship of depression or industrial action.²⁰ Such a policy was more likely in occupationally homogenous communities dominated by workers who were comparatively well-paid while in full employment. The attention given to price levels would have been greater in settlements where generally lower wages prevailed. The chances of occupational homogeneity decreased with increasing settlement size. It was partly to meet the wishes of workers with a range of incomes that the balance between prices and dividends was struck at a rather lower level in most larger urban centres.

The range of levels of profitability reflect not prices and sales alone but the balance between society income and costs. The latter were also variable, following differences in the scale of operations of individual societies, in the size of their parent communities and the balance between the two. The increase in profitability recorded by most societies during the second half of the century arose from the growth both of their individual strength and the greater maturity of

the wider co-operative system. Widening profit margins partly reflected the increasing cost efficiency with which co-operative trade was conducted. The growth of societies was both a result of and an encouragement to a more professional conduct of their business affairs. Where societies enjoyed long term success they developed the human resources of committeemen with extensive experience in retailing. Their services were increasingly complemented by paid managers drawn originally from private retailing, but later including a growing number of men whose training had been within co-operation. It was perhaps easier for the committee to put pressure on paid employees to produce the expected commercial performance. Managers and storemen were brought before the committee to defend their conduct if levels of sales and costs proved disappointing. Efforts to reduce costs sometimes included a reduction in the wages and privileges of staff.²¹

Increased efficiency and thus greater profitability of trade were, other things being equal, more easily achieved where societies could readily seek outside advice. The benefits of the local experience of other societies and inter-co-operative information exchange have already been noted as smoothing the path of society foundations. Communication between societies also played a rôle in subsequent co-operative success. Society minutes record consultation about various aspects of the routine operation and expansion of co-operative business. These included the extension of trade into new lines, the operation of clubs to allow members to purchase more expensive items by

installments, the most efficient means of recording individual member's purchases for the calculation of their dividend, the best and cheapest source of supplies, suggestions of joint purchasing of particular items in bulk, methods of accounting and stocktaking, and consultation about trading costs covering matters such as wages, rent and rates.²² Information on general points could also be obtained from printed material and nationally acknowledged sources of advice. These became increasingly well organised in the later decades of the century, especially with the advent of the Central Board. However, the value of locally specific advice remained as a factor in the differential ease of expansion between areas of existing co-operative strength and weakness.

The very presence of neighbouring societies helped keep managing committees alert. Even where geographical distance prevented any major transfer of business between societies, members were aware of the differential performance of local co-operatives. Any consequent complaints raised at quarterly members' meetings led to enquiries into the conduct of business, usually with the aim of cutting costs, improving the quality of goods sold and increasing the rate of dividends.

A reduction in costs would also have followed from the increasing potential for the exploitation of economies of scale as societies grew. Individual co-operatives benefitted from the lower unit costs of bulk orders and the relative diminution of the burden of fixed costs. The process was

carried a stage further with the development of co-operative federations; these included several ventures for the production and wholesale supply of stock for member stores. All began at the district or regional level, but the organisation that eventually became the CWS progressively expanded its operations to serve societies throughout England and Wales. The CWS was never the sole source of goods for co-operatives, but it was an additional supplier which could be used selectively in combination with private dealers to obtain stock on the most advantageous terms. The potential for a consequent reduction in trading costs was probably greatest for smaller societies. Problems of obtaining small orders on favourable terms were sometimes compounded by an especial antipathy towards co-operation displayed by some private dealers and manufacturers. The availability of supplies from the CWS may thus have been one of the factors which during the later years of the century allowed smaller societies in areas of co-operative strength to narrow the margin by which their rates of profit fell behind their larger neighbours; indeed in many cases exceeding the performance of the larger stores.

If the development of co-operative wholesaling helped to reduce distinctions between societies of different sizes it may have at least initially contributed to the regional differentiation of co-operative progress. The advantages of trade with the CWS were not immediately available to all societies. Many co-operatives were unable or unwilling to deal with the first CWS depot at Manchester. The desire to

support this extension of co-operation either as a matter of principle or as a means of obtaining goods more cheaply was negated by high delivery costs to more distant societies. Initially trade was very much confined to the societies of Lancashire and to a lesser extent the West Riding and Cheshire.²³ The situation was subsequently eased with the opening of branch depôts, at Newcastle in 1872 and the revitalisation of London co-operative wholesaling when a small and struggling independent venture was replaced by a branch of the CWS in 1874. This still left some areas which felt they derived only limited benefit from the CWS, especially in south-west England and South Wales. Later developments thus included the establishment of a number of smaller salerooms in Liverpool (1875), Leeds (1882), Bristol (1884), Huddersfield and Longton (1885), Nottingham (1886), Blackburn and Northampton (1890), Cardiff (1891) and Birmingham (1892).²⁴ The early geography of co-operative wholesaling is further instance of the self-reinforcing effect of spatial differentiation in rates of growth. The successful establishment of a retailing base in a region itself directly eased the path of further expansion. It also allowed the development of institutions such as the CWS which further aided the growth of co-operatives in the initially geographically restricted areas they served.

The degree of variation in profitability between small and large societies itself showed regional differentiation. By the end of the century there was no easily discernable tendency for profitability to increase with society size in areas where co-operation was generally strong, particularly in the three northern regions (Table 8.4). The societies with limited memberships in these areas were often located in smaller communities where they played a locally important role in retail trading. Thus they had a degree of latitude in the conduct of their trade and were able to tailor their prices and profits to meet the commonly expressed demands of their members for high dividends. In southern England there were many more cases where the small size of a society reflected not the scale of the local market but the failure of co-operation to successfully penetrate the retail trade of a larger urban centre. In such circumstances societies had much less commercial freedom with the result that their profit margins were often squeezed. Thus in the southern regions there was rather greater evidence of differentials in rates of profitability between small and large societies.

All retailers in larger urban centres had to contend with above average costs in operating their businesses and these must have exacerbated the problems experienced by small co-operatives in such situations. In the previous section attention was given to the internal characteristics of co-operative operation which affected profitability. Here the

	Membership Totals						No. of Societies	
	0-99	100-199	200-299	300-499	500-999	1000-2999		3000-6999
South-East								
Loss	1	1	4	-	-	-	-	-
0.0-2.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.5-4.9	5	2	4	2	1	1	-	-
5.0-7.4	5	1	3	6	3	4	-	-
7.5-9.9	2	-	1	4	4	5	2	-
10.0-12.4	1	1	-	4	4	6	2	-
12.5-14.9	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	-
>15.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Metropolitan								
Loss	3	4	2	1	2	1	-	-
0.0-2.4	2	2	1	-	-	-	-	-
2.5-4.9	-	1	3	-	3	-	-	-
5.0-7.4	3	1	-	3	2	1	-	-
7.5-9.9	2	1	1	-	1	2	-	2
10.0-12.4	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
12.5-14.9	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
>15.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
South-West								
Loss	2	1	-	1	-	-	-	-
0.0-2.4	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.5-4.9	4	5	1	2	-	-	-	-
5.0-7.4	4	3	3	3	1	1	-	-
7.5-9.9	2	5	6	6	8	4	-	-
10.0-12.4	-	3	1	2	3	3	1	1
12.5-14.9	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	-
>15.0	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	1
Wales								
Loss	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
0.0-2.4	2	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
2.5-4.9	4	2	1	1	-	-	-	-
5.0-7.4	1	3	3	1	1	-	-	-
7.5-9.9	1	4	3	1	2	-	-	-
10.0-12.4	6	7	2	6	4	2	1	-
12.5-14.9	1	5	2	4	-	-	-	-
15.0-17.4	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	-
17.5-19.9	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
>20.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

other half of the balance outlined will be considered - the force of external conditions on the operating costs of retailing. Higher rates of profit on the North-East coalfield compared with the area's larger towns reflected not only the economic circumstances of individual members but

the fact that in Newcastle and even in smaller towns the rents, taxes, &c. were so much heavier than in the colliery districts.²⁵

Other costs were noted as being higher in the largest urban centres. Comparison of conditions in Manchester with those in the smaller cotton towns in 1876 drew attention to differences in the cost of distributing goods to customers and the wage bill. Overall, while the expenses of management were quoted as ninepence in the pound at Oldham, costs reached one shilling in the pound at Manchester.²⁶

Variation in the cost of obtaining premises would have been on a scale comparable with the figures given for private traders earlier in the century by Alexander.²⁷ The higher rent, rates and taxes of the larger urban centres were compounded by the cost of the land on which societies built their own stores. Discussion at the 1876 Congress contrasted the position in Manchester with one of its smaller neighbours the land in Manchester on which their central store was built cost them 2s.6d. per yard. Was there any land near the Oldham store which had cost so much?²⁸

Moreover it was particularly important to the success of a society in a larger urban centre that it should establish itself as quickly as possible in substantial, well sited and

therefore expensive premises. While in smaller towns and villages the foundation of a society was an event likely to attract local attention, it was much easier in a city for the opening of a new store to pass virtually unnoticed by the public. Thus the greater need for premises that would attract passing trade. The failure of many stores established in larger centres was partly attributed to their problems in obtaining a suitable shop.

In many southern centres including London itself the difficulties of societies in obtaining suitable premises for long term operations were felt to be compounded by the system of land tenure. By contrast with most Midland and northern counties where land was available freehold or on 999 year leases, short or ninety nine year leases prevailed in much of southern England and South Wales. Indeed in some cases premises were available for a few years only on the tail end of a lease. This, suggested Benjamin Jones of the CWS in his evidence to the Select Committee on Town Holdings, placed societies at a considerable disadvantage in that they were unable to consolidate any initial progress by long term investment in the impressive and attractive premises that were both the symbol of the success of their northern counterparts and a factor aiding their further expansion. Jones claimed the lack of suitable premises was crippling the expansion of societies in southern towns and some rural districts. In London he considered that the tenure system had a "considerable influence" on co-operative difficulties.

Perhaps this was special pleading for the benefit of the Committee, but the tenure system was certainly one factor amongst the many complicating co-operative development in southern England.²⁹

Higher costs made it more difficult for societies to become first established in the larger cities. The raising of initial capital by subscription became a protracted process and thus more likely to be abandoned in disillusionment where the target was of necessity high. Moreover, an attempt to start without adequate capital was more likely to fail in a larger centre because of the greater difficulties of a project easing itself progressively into full scale operations. While in 1887 it was considered possible to launch a limited joint purchasing exercise amongst rural workers on a subscribed fund of five to eight pounds, using this as a means of accelerating the accumulation of capital to establish a store, it was suggested that in London societies should not attempt to begin operations before they had amassed a membership of 120 and £120 capital.³⁰ The high failure rate of metropolitan societies (Table 3.5) which invariably started trading on a much smaller scale (Table 4.15) perhaps confirms the wisdom of this advice, but such a plan would have led in many instances to the abandonment of co-operative projects without any practical result.

When societies did commence trading their modest performances - low profits, low sales, low recruitment - were partly a reflection of the high degree of retail competition which prevailed in the larger centres. Societies however well

managed would have found it impossible to repeat the success achieved by stores in smaller communities. Their relative failure, made all the more apparent in the minds of some consumers by unfair comparison with northern stores was, like the success achieved elsewhere, self-reinforcing. Initial struggles did not allow a society to offer particular enticement to recruit new members and this failure to achieve growth kept its chances of improving its financial position slim. The sheer scale of retail trading in the larger cities, with their multitude of shops reinforced with markets and in London especially, street traders ensured fierce competition.³¹

Local co-operators rightly regarded their task as particularly difficult. From Birmingham it was noted in 1868

There is no town in England, I believe, where the competition in the general grocery and provision trade is more keen than here. If co-operative stores are to succeed here they must be managed with exceptional care and good judgement.³²

A contemporaneous report from the Belmont Amicable Unity society of Vauxhall explained their failure to return a quarterly dividend with reference to both the general depression of trade and competition in the local retail market which was felt to be much keener than was usually the case in the smaller towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire.³³ One particular consequence of the degree of competition was the generally lower level of prices in the largest urban centres.

It was suggested in 1876 that prices in Manchester were
around one shilling in the pound below those in Oldham. ³⁴

Prices were also considered to be lower in London than
obtained by co-operatives in the towns of the industrial
north. ³⁵ Thus profits and the ability to pay attractive
dividends were reduced both by higher costs and lower
incomes.

The difficulties of co-operative development were
exacerbated by the organisational structure of the movement.
Local societies were invariably independent ventures; always
starting from a point of weakness. The importance of local
independence and democracy which was one of the movement's
greatest strengths in its general operation and popular
appeal was also a commercial weakness in the largest urban
centres. One consequence of the limited capital resources of
individual infant co-operatives was to increase their
difficulties in obtaining premises. Thus a paper on the state
of co-operation in the largest cities given at the 1883
Congress noted that

the general practice has been to establish any number of
societies in the most dingy looking stores, put small
stocks into smaller shops, then let them struggle away
as best they can. No attractiveness, nothing to arrest
the attention of the passer-by, no inducement to enter
and inquire what meaneth this system of co-operation. ³⁶

Figures for the size structure of metropolitan societies
(Table 4.15) confirm that co-operatives were small and
commonly failed without making significant progress. In

London, and to a lesser extent Birmingham, the proliferation of limited ventures, none of them individually capable of making any popular impact or exerting any influence on the retail market, helped to keep co-operation weak. Thus as early as 1875 there were suggestions that a single society should be established with branches throughout London.³⁸ It was also mooted that bodies such as the Co-operative Union should give some stronger guidance to London co-operation

they ought to use their moral influence for years to come against the establishment of any more societies in London.... That the societies at present existing in London are quite enough and that intending co-operators³⁹ should be induced to join existing societies.

As annual totals of foundations in London show this advice seems to have done little to change the course of regional co-operative development (Table 3.2).

The importance of the scale of individual enterprises as an influence on their success is illustrated both by comparison between co-operative fortunes in the various large cities and with private retailers. Although co-operation in the large centres never matched the peaks of relative success achieved elsewhere it was markedly more successful in some northern cities than in London or Birmingham. In part this reflected differences in the regional success of co-operation and thus popular perceptions of its worth, and in the social and economic character of particular centres. However,

something of the greater co-operative strength in cities including Manchester, Newcastle and especially Leeds can be attributed to the concentration of co-operative effort into one dominant society in each case. ⁴⁰ These societies, with their chains of branch stores, were amongst the most substantial ⁴¹ of local retailers. Although, because of the sheer size of the market, they were unable to develop the degree of influence enjoyed by societies in some smaller towns, they could compete on equal terms with private grocers in a manner that quite eluded the multitude of small London stores. A single strong co-operative could not be undermined by private competition in the way that individual small societies could be forced into collapse.

v

The experience of some private shops, particularly the rapidly developing multiple food retailers showed that even a market as large and competitive as that of London could be penetrated if operations were started on a sufficient scale. When the firm of Lipton opened its first and immediately successful London store in 1888 the company was already a large national concern. With a turnover that reached £1.5 million in the following year it was well able to afford a substantial investment in attractive and well-sited premises in Bayswater, followed by a shop in Islington opened in 1889. Further, considerable effort and invention was put into publicising the opening of the new shops. Such a beginning helped to establish the initial base of custom and trade was

also attracted by the low prices charged. The scale of the company nationally and its concentration on a limited range of basic provisions meant that goods could be offered at prices that were as little as half those previously prevailing.⁴² The efforts of small metropolitan co-operatives, a third of which had fewer than 100 members as late as 1901 with annual sales that were rarely more than a few thousand pounds, seem by comparison insignificant and destined for the failure which was commonly their fate.

Indeed there was an increasing recognition amongst co-operators later in the century that the movement's organisational structure and its stress on local initiative and democracy were handicaps to its extension. The independent foundation of local societies made it impossible to make a strong and confident entry into settlements where commercial or social circumstances made development difficult. As an alternative it was suggested that existing bodies, especially the major federations of the CWS and CU should build upon their roles in serving and advising local societies to become active in the development of new co-operatives. The direct investment of capital in new stores by the CWS was first canvassed at the 1879 Congress when special attention was paid to agricultural villages.⁴³ The following year it was proposed that the CWS devote £10,000 in loans to local groups interested in co-operation to enable the establishment of around twenty societies in areas lacking previous success, particularly the largest cities and country districts.⁴⁴ The localities for the new stores would be

decided jointly by the CWS and the CU but there would also have to be some indication of local initiative with a percentage of capital coming from the purchase of shares by members. Until the initial loan was repaid the CWS would retain an interest in the management of the society.⁴⁵

A plan that departed so radically from prevailing co-operative practices was bound to be controversial. No decision was taken on its implementation at the 1880 Congress. Discussion during the following year showed that while southern societies were generally in favour of the scheme many northern co-operators were indifferent or even hostile. This perhaps indicates a lack of appreciation of the different conditions under which co-operative development was being attempted in southern England and the consequent problems faced.⁴⁶ Their attitude was that their own success had been achieved without expenditure on the "hot house forcing" of societies and therefore there should be no necessity to resort to the artificial creation of co-operatives in any district.⁴⁷ There were concerns also that the promotion of new stores would give the CWS too much influence in the development of the movement, perhaps threatening the independence of existing local societies.⁴⁸ Paradoxically there were also fears that confidence in the CWS would be shaken and the society financially weakened by investments in stores that were bound to fail.⁴⁹ More accurate was the concern that the planting of co-operatives might be self-defeating as it would undermine the development

of a spirit of local initiative in the management of a society and local identification amongst its membership that were important in the achievement of long term success.

The lack of support from individual societies for the scheme of outside investment in new stores led to its abandonment. Although discussion at the 1883 Congress resulted in the passage of a motion endorsing investment in the establishment of stores in the largest towns there was no subsequent action. The plan was revived at the 1887 Congress when an investment by the CWS of only £2,000 was approved.⁵⁰

Given the rather half-hearted approach of the movement to such schemes of extension it is not surprising that the impact in the years to the end of the century was minimal. In 1892 only the Bootle and Seaforth, Hull, Oakengates, Penrith and Stoke societies were directly associated with the CWS scheme although it was reported that associated propagandist efforts had led to the establishment of new branches by several existing societies and the independent foundation of a number of co-operatives including those at Burton-on-Trent, Spalding, Uttoxeter and Mold. Overall it was reported that

the experiment of advancing money to start co-operatives⁵¹
has failed to produce the results expected from it.

By 1894 nine societies were worked under the scheme: Stoke had become independent and the co-operatives at Chesterfield, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Shrewsbury, Wednesbury and Wellington (Salop) were the additions to the list of two years earlier. Individually they were not particularly successful, only the Hull society was showing any substantial recruitment of

membership and those at Oakengates and Wellington were actually trading at a loss.⁵² Moreover unfavourable comparisons were drawn between CWS funded stores and independent foundations in the degree of interest displayed in their own society by members, confirming earlier fears of⁵³ the lack of development of local initiative and energy.

Despite the original intention to aid the development of co-operation in the largest centres there were no immediate moves to establish CWS funded developments in London. Representatives of the CWS were involved together with men from the Central Board and London consumers' societies in the Metropolitan Combined Committee, a body founded in 1892 to assist struggling societies in the capital. Help was provided with routine matters such as book-keeping and stocktaking, and the committee assumed complete responsibility for the running of the societies at Norwood, Kensington, Harlesden, Bermondsey and King's Cross; a move which did not save the last four from failure during the mid eighteen nineties. Efforts were also made to publicize co-operation more⁵⁴ generally in the capital. In June 1893, however, the London branch committee of the CWS resolved to ask the society to devote £3,000 to the creation of a single powerful society with branches throughout the capital in an extension to the established programme. Agreement for the plan, named the People's Co-operative Society, was reached in early 1894 with⁵⁵ initial branches sited at Deptford and New Cross. Early growth was steady and by 1897 the society had 3,385 members,

a total larger than other metropolitan societies excepting the long established operations at Woolwich and Stratford. But even with the backing of outside finance the co-operative system of management did not encourage the entrepreneurial flair and exhibitionism that made a large contribution to the success of private multiple retailers in London. Too much reliance was perhaps placed on the development of a local loyalty to the society which was hard to generate in the social atmosphere of a large city and especially where a store was not wholly a product of local enthusiasm. Like societies elsewhere operating in association with the CWS the People's society failed to generate the communal identification and initiative associated with the most successful of stores. Membership began to decline; in 1899 it was liquidated and the eleven branches established as independent societies. Only one of these subsequently showed any signs of flourishing; the Willesden store which started in 1899 with 203 members had expanded to 6,800 by 1919.⁵⁶ The failure of the People's society and the limited success of stores financed elsewhere reflected divided opinion within the movement as to the wisdom of such schemes. In consequence their execution was often half-hearted and carried little of the drive and enthusiasm of private entrepreneurs. But it seems likely that the scheme was deeply flawed as an uneasy hybrid of co-operation and more conventional business investment. It was the difficulty of reconciling the desire and need for local involvement of the component communities within a large city with operation on a sufficient scale to

ensure commercial survival that made co-operative development perhaps more problematical than that of any other form of retailing.

VI

This chapter has considered in general terms the rather different commercial circumstances experienced by co-operatives in settlements of varying sizes and socio-economic character. The business considerations of the operation of a retail store were an important influence on the progress made by co-operation in the individual settlement and thus collectively on the national geography of the movement. The bulk of members made regular use only of their society's store and popular judgements of co-operative success generally reflected simply its performance as a retailer. Moreover, the range of educational, social and welfare activities developed by the more enterprising societies were largely funded by the returns from storekeeping.

In part the weakness of co-operation in much of southern England and in the largest cities was a reflection of conditions that would have worked against the easy progress of the majority of new entrants, of whatever type, to local retail markets. The size of the market, the degree of competition amongst existing traders and the extent of any change in the volume of consumer demand were influences on the operations of all retailers. Equally the effects of variation between and within settlements in costs such as the

purchase of building land, rates and wages were amongst the determinants of profit margins for shopkeepers in general. Unfortunately these are variables about which it is often difficult to obtain precise information. Studies of private retailing have been handicapped by such difficulties and it may be that co-operative records, a source as yet largely untapped, will yield more detailed data. There remain, of course, limitations to the use of such co-operative material; its survival while often better than that for private traders is still fragmentary. The bulk of the record is provided by society minute books which usually contain isolated financial details rather than comprehensive accounts. There are also simple practical difficulties involved in the amassing of sufficient material from the scattered local records to make the wideranging comparisons of commercial costs and profit margins that would be required to add greater detail to a geographical overview of co-operation such as attempted here. With this in mind, the records of local co-operatives are noted more as a source repaying further investigation, probably within a spatially more restricted district or regional framework, rather than one which has been exhaustively mined in the present national study.

While co-operatives shared some of the problems of all shopkeepers there were, however, commercial implications arising from the distinctive character of co-operative retailing. The positive aspects of the structure of the movement with its emphasis on the initiation of local

groupings and their independent organisation are commonly stressed. Where co-operation was most successful it built upon and helped to reinforce an established sense of group or community identity. Indeed some members felt a degree of identification with their society that went beyond the normal ties between customer and shopkeeper. In practical terms this could be expressed in a loyalty to the store in purchasing that helped to provide a solid core of custom. Yet a structure which was the basis of the strength of co-operation in many smaller and medium-sized settlements could render the penetration of the more competitive markets particularly difficult. Societies were independently financed and thus the modest resources which an infant co-operative was able to muster were often more akin to those of the individual working class general shopkeeper than the major multiple retailers who were of growing importance in the later years of the century. The distinction of available financial resources goes a long way towards explaining the fact that private multiple retailers were much more successful than co-operators at establishing a firm footing in the largest urban markets.

NOTES

1. The most co-ordinated efforts to reverse the trend of co-operative expansion were the Traders' Defence Associations formed in towns including St. Helens, Wigan, Hull, Leeds, Barrow, Newcastle, Plymouth, Ilford (Stratford) and Blackburn, with a strong society early in the present century. Shopkeepers claimed to have been finally provoked into action by the threat to their livelihood posed by the expansion of co-operative trade both in the long standing staples of groceries and other household necessities, and into new lines. There was particular resentment that societies were capturing profitable trade in luxury goods, including middle class custom, rather than confining themselves to the basics of working class demand: A Journalist 1902; Winstanley 1983, 88.
2. Not all private traders were anti-co-operative. Some specialized dealers sought links with societies rather than opposing them. In an attempt to attract the custom of co-operative members and to deflect or postpone any direct competition from stores private traders entered into agency agreements with societies. Co-operative members were either given a direct discount on purchases or a percentage of the retailer's takings on trade with co-operators was handed over to the society to be returned as a dividend. This allowed stores effectively

to extend the range of their sales. Originally the lines most frequently involved were meat, drapery, clothing and sometimes medicines. Their number subsequently grew to include items such as paints and wallpapers, jewellery, pianos and bicycles. Some societies also arranged with local dentists for the treatment of their members. See for example: Co-op. Dec. 1863, Jan. 1864, 5 Sept. 1868; Gloucestershire Record Office D2754 1/6; Durham Record Office D/Co/B1 8, D/Co/Da 10; Barker and Harris 1959, 478.

3. The Quornden society reported in 1863 that it had successfully weathered such a challenge from other retailers. At Shepton Mallet four years later a more specific struggle with local bakers was noted: Co-op. Feb. 1863, 15 May 1867.
4. E.g. Clayton-le-Moors: Co-op. Sept. 1864.
5. E.g. Whitwood and Gloucester: Co-op. 6 Nov. 1869; Banbury Co-operative Record Oct. 1874.
6. E.g. Whitwood: Co-op. Apr. 1863.
7. The Windsor society reported the consequent refusal of their custom by suppliers in Slough. Similar problems were experienced at Leek: Co-op. 15 Oct. 1865, 9 Jan. 1869.
8. Cole 1944, 174.
9. Of the twenty nine settlements included in both Tables 7.1 and 8.1 six had a declining number of private grocers and general shopkeepers in the period 1858-79, perhaps in part as a consequence of co-operative

expansion. In most cases, however, there was a parallel and sometimes substantial growth of private and co-operative trade in communities that were themselves increasing in population.

10. Kelly 1879.
11. Chaloner 1950, 265.
12. P.P. 1893-94 XXXIX Pt I, 85.
13. Winstanley 1983, 38.
14. See Fig. 4.10.
15. The six towns were Halifax, Huddersfield, Hull, Oldham, Rochdale and York: Shaw and Wild 1979, 280.
16. Wild and Shaw 1979, 39.
17. Alexander 1970, 241-55.
18. Kelly 1845; Kelly 1847; Kelly 1848; Kelly 1855; Kelly 1856; Kelly 1864; Kelly 1866; Kelly 1883; Schola 1975, 159; Alexander 1970, 241-55; Wild and Shaw 1979, 39: the seven towns were Leeds, Hull, Halifax, Huddersfield, York, Wakefield and Beverley.
19. Co-operative Union 1876, 16.
20. Darvill 1954, 168-70.
21. At Blaydon during a period of dull trade in the summer of 1878 counter and warehouse men's wages were reduced by 5 per cent and those of most of the managers of the society's several departments by 10 per cent: Durham Record Office D/Co/B1 2.
22. The subjects are derived from examples in the records of societies in Newcastle, Blaydon, Darlington and Cramlington: Tyne and Wear Archives Department 120/1;

Durham Record Office D/Co/B1 3, D/Co/Da 2;
 Northumberland Record Office 821/1, 821/5.

23. After two years operations the regional distribution of the Wholesale society's trade for the half year 24 October 1865 to 24 April 1866 is outlined below, this may be compared with the regional retail sales figures shown on Table 4.9.

Region	No. Societies Dealing with Wholesale Society	Wholesale Society Trade (£)	% of Total Trade of Wholesale Society
North	16	2,700	4.2
North-West	70	45,651	71.7
Yorkshire	27	11,968	18.8
N. Midlands	9	2,391	3.8
W. Midlands	5	307	0.5
S.E. Midlands	3	344	0.5
East/East Anglia	1	15	0.02
South-East	1	8	0.01
Metropolitan	-	-	-
South-West	2	33	0.1
Wales	1	237	0.4
Scotland	5	53	0.1
Total	140	63,707	100

: CWS Fifth Report, 1866.

24. Bonner 1970, 103.

25. Tyne and Wear Archives Department 634/B41.

26. Co-operative Union 1876, 16.

27. Alexander 1970, 199-202.

28. Co-operative Union 1876, 16.

29. P.P. 1887 XIII 593-605, 610-18.

30. P.P. 1887 XIII 593. The capital resources commanded by provincial societies when beginning to trade varied considerably. Some, including Bishop Auckland, raised around £200 through subscriptions and loans. Others

launched a store with more limited resources; not untypical were the co-operatives at Stocksbridge, Tanfield and Middleton which started with £30-40 each. Some groups began trading in a very modest fashion without shop premises. Bulk purchasing was started as on resources as slender as the 37s. subscribed at Leigh: Bishop Auckland Industrial Co-operative Society 1910, 59; Co-op. Oct. 1863; Wade 1968, 50; Partington 1900, 26; Boydell 1907, 92.

31. Grady 1980; Scola 1975; Green 1982; Hardy 1902.

32. Co-op. 24 Oct. 1868.

33. Co-op. 14 Dec. 1861.

34. Co-operative Union 1876, 16.

35. Co-operative Union 1876, 17.

36. Co-operative Union 1883, 55.

37. There were at least fourteen attempts to establish co-operative stores in Birmingham in the second half of the century, with none achieving lasting success until the Birmingham Industrial society of 1881. Even this had a membership that was modest for a large city, of only 5,108 in 1901. Figures from 1862 onwards show that the largest recorded membership for any of the earlier societies was the total of 190 recorded for the Ladywood co-operative in 1867: P.P. 1902 XCVI; P.P. 1867-68 XL.

38. CN 2 Oct. 1875.

39. Walter Morrison addressing a conference of societies in the Southern District of the Central Board: CN 10 Oct. 1874.

40. One expression of the different scale of co-operative enterprise is provided by a comparison of Leeds and London. In 1901 the forty six societies in the Metropolitan region had a total membership of 48,967. The single Leeds society whose operations extended into smaller neighbouring communities including Farnley, Garforth, Idle, Otley, Pudsey and Yeadon had only seven fewer members. The Manchester and Salford society had a membership of 15,454 in 1901 and that of the Newcastle co-operative was 17,662: P.P. 1902 XCVI.
41. In 1900 the Leeds society had eighty stores, Manchester forty and Newcastle eighteen: Co-operative Union 1900.
42. Mathias 1967, 96-98.
43. Co-operative Union 1879, 48-49.
44. There was an earlier, although not entirely encouraging precedent for such investment in the attempts of E.V. Neale to stimulate co-operative developments in London by himself providing much of the capital for a model store in October 1850: St. Andre 1854, 20.
45. Co-operative Union 1880, 54.
46. During discussion at the 1883 Congress of the need for propagandism William Nuttall noted a feeling amongst some delegates:
- What did the co-operators of the north know about those in the south?
- Co-operative Union 1883, 57.
47. Quarterly Meeting CWS Manchester: CN 12 June 1880.

48. Conferences Northern and North-Western Sections: CN 6
Nov. 1880, 20 Nov. 1880.
49. Quarterly Meeting CWS Manchester: CN 12 June 1880.
50. CN 21 Jan. 1888.
51. Co-operative Union 1890, 88 and 1892, 76.
52. Co-operative Union 1894, 70.
53. Co-operative Union 1892, 75.
54. Co-operative Union 1892, 77.
55. Co-operative Union 1893, 80 & 1895, 73; Redfern 1913,
195-96.
56. Webb and Webb 1921, 23.

CHAPTER NINE

CO-OPERATIVE MEMBERSHIP AND THE OCCUPATIONAL GEOGRAPHY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES.

I

Chapters Seven and Eight attempted to put co-operative growth into its commercial context, stressing the pre-eminently practical concerns which often underlay the foundation of societies and their success in the subsequent recruitment of members. The material in these chapters revealed some variety of experience; ostensibly favourable commercial circumstances, particular breaches of trading morality did not always lead to the strong development of stores. In part this was a reflection of forces internal to co-operation itself; geographical differences in knowledge and experience of the idea. In some areas an established tradition made such a form of self-help an almost automatic response to any new deterioration in the conduct of private trade. Elsewhere the advantages and execution of co-operation were less well understood (see Chapters Five and Six). The geographical variations in the development of the movement also indicates the need for a closer examination of the resources, social and material, of workers in different areas and types of community. It was suggested that the presence and success of co-operative development was often a reflection of the balance of forces between the social, economic and commercial power of the middle-class establishment and the collective capabilities of workers. It is to the wider aspects of this balance that attention is now turned, focussing in particular on the economic and social circumstances of the workers involved in local societies. The

forces outlined here often acted to reinforce the effects of those discussed in the past chapters; it was commonly where there was least commercial scope for penetration of the retail market that the collective power of the working class in all spheres was at its weakest. In part these are different aspects of the same underlying pattern of the changing economic geography of England and Wales - the structure and dynamism of local and regional economies.

II

Much of the argument that follows in Chapter Ten suggests the importance of different circumstances deriving ultimately from the experience of work within a local community as an influence on co-operative development. It is necessary, therefore that attention is first given to the occupational composition of co-operation and the more general relationship of the geography of the movement's development with national economic structure. Chapter Three indicated that interest in co-operation was geographically widespread from the later eighteenth century onwards. Consequently, it seems likely that attempts to develop societies involved workers from a wide range of trades. Comprehensive data on their occupational make-up is, however, lacking. The limited survival of membership records of individual societies provides not a balanced overall coverage but a scatter of spatially and temporally isolated details. In the main these refer to the large, successful and, usually, northern societies. Very few

records survive for areas where nineteenth century co-operative development was punctuated by society failures and refoundations. Thus the information displayed on Table 9.1 is particularly valuable for the geographical range of its coverage; although as would be expected the majority of individuals included were connected with the more numerous northern stores. The material derives from the occupational details recorded for officials of 320 societies extant during the eighteen fifties and sixties, but which failed during the remainder of the century. These made up only a small part of the total number of societies trading during this period and were not an entirely representative sample of the whole; the dearth of societies from the North-East coalfield is the most obvious omission. Within Yorkshire there is probably an over-representation of societies from the metal working districts where co-operative development included a higher percentage of failures and an inadequate contribution from the textile districts where progress was relatively untroubled. Long-lived societies from the North-West and Yorkshire were not, however, totally excluded as some were technically dissolved during the fifties and sixties to allow immediate re-registration under new Industrial and Provident Society legislation. The figures should also be regarded with some caution because of the difficulties of clarifying the degree to which officials were representative of the bulk of co-operative members. This record provides evidence for no more than a handful of individuals from any single society. It is possible that workers with greater status deriving from

Table 9.1. Occupational Composition of a Sample of Co-operative Retail Society Officials in England and Wales, c1850-65.(1)

	Labourers	Textiles	Dress	Building & Woodworking	Engineering, Tools & Metals	Printing	Food & Drink Production	Other Manufacturing	Mining/Quarrying	Clerical/Professional	Managerial	Dealers	Warehousing	Transport	Other Services	Agriculture	Total
North	3	1	3	11	20	1	1	5	7	10	-	6	-	4	-	6	78
%	4	1	4	14	26	1	1	6	9	13	-	8	-	5	-	8	100
North West	10	125	9	36	30	7	2	11	5	17	5	14	7	5	2	7	292
%	3	42	3	12	10	2	1	4	2	6	2	5	2	2	1	2	100
Yorkshire	6	35	17	11	35	-	5	8	6	15	1	20	3	3	2	10	177
%	3	20	10	6	20	-	3	5	3	8	1	11	2	2	1	6	100
North Mids.	2	17	1	6	11	2	-	3	5	2	-	5	-	4	1	1	60
%	3	28	2	10	18	3	-	5	8	3	-	8	-	7	2	2	100
West Mids.	4	13	11	17	42	1	1	28	5	5	-	-	1	4	-	1	133
%	3	10	8	13	32	1	1	21	4	4	-	-	1	3	-	1	100
S.E. Mids.	2	-	15	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	5	1	1	27
%	7	-	56	4	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	19	4	4	100
East/ E. Anglia	4	6	6	7	8	-	1	4	-	5	1	3	1	-	1	1	48
%	8	13	13	15	17	-	2	8	-	10	2	6	2	-	2	2	100
South East	1	-	3	14	10	-	2	4	-	4	1	1	-	1	-	-	41
%	2	-	7	34	24	-	5	10	-	10	2	2	-	2	-	-	100
Metropolitan	3	5	33	58	63	13	10	22	-	16	-	17	7	9	5	8	269
%	1	2	12	22	23	5	4	8	-	6	-	6	3	3	2	3	100
South West	7	4	4	10	9	1	-	4	-	11	2	3	2	2	-	2	61
%	11	7	7	16	15	2	-	7	-	18	3	5	3	3	-	3	100
Wales	1	-	-	8	15	1	2	3	8	1	1	-	-	6	-	1	47
%	2	-	-	17	32	2	4	6	17	2	2	-	-	13	-	2	100
England & Wales	43	206	102	179	243	27	24	92	36	86	11	70	21	43	12	38	1233
%	3	17	8	15	20	2	2	7	3	7	1	6	2	3	1	3	100

their occupation may have been over-represented in positions of responsibility within co-operatives. Some societies looked to non-working class patrons as trustees which inflated the size of the clerical and professional category on the table. It is reassuring, however, to find a wide range of trades covered, including some unskilled general labourers.

While it is unwise to regard the material shown on Table 9.1 as a definitive guide to the occupational composition of co-operation it does reveal the range of workers involved. The basic categorisation by trades simplifies a record in which 1233 individuals were entered under 280 different job titles. Some trades were of particular importance; frequently recorded as officials were workers from the textile, metal, engineering, building, woodworking, clothing and footwear trades. These categories were, of course, significant in the national male workforce but comparison of percentage contributions suggests that they were over-represented amongst officials, considerably so in the case of the first three groups. The regional sub-totals reveal a pattern of variation which relates in a fairly straightforward way to the economic structure of the country around mid century. Nowhere else were textile workers so predominant as in the North-West, although they were important also in Yorkshire and the North Midlands. Workers in the metal and engineering trades displayed a geographically more wide ranging contribution that was significant but rarely dominant. Partnered by textiles in the north, in the more southerly

regions their contribution was balanced by that of workers in the craft trades of building, woodworking, clothing and footwear.

While the extension of interest in co-operation beyond the types of industrial community with which it is conventionally associated has been stressed, the basis of this more restricted view of the movement is clear from the variable record of success achieved by societies in different economic and social circumstances. Co-operatives founded in the southern towns in the late fifties and early sixties, chiefly supported by craftsmen who were an important element in the local workforce, were prone to failure. As one contemporary noted

co-operation began and thrives best in the iron and
²
coalfields.

This view was amplified by E.O. Greening who considered that co-operation

depends for success upon circumstances arising out of
³
the factory system.

If co-operative membership is grouped using the bold categorisation of counties by employment structure developed by Lee its consistently greater strength in areas classified as characterised by textile manufacture compared with the remainder of the country is clear.
⁴
The development of co-operation on the North-East, East Midland and South Wales coalfields, most notably in the first of these areas, is reflected in the marked improvement in figures for the mining counties. Much less progress was made in rural counties and

in the service led Metropolitan economic region (Table 9.2).

Table 9.2. Co-operative Retail Society Membership - Distribution by Occupational Regions.(5)

Region	1862		1901	
	Total Membership	Members/ 1000 Population	Total Membership	Members/ 1000 Population
Rural+	654	0.65	40388	35.68
Secondary* Rural	3651	1.28	47757	17.97
Textiles#	80200	15.06	779235	91.90
Mining~	8022	3.65	284824	80.03
Metro-** politan	7801	2.39	201279	17.96

+: Cambridge, Huntingdon, Suffolk, Lincoln, Rutland

*: Buckingham (1862 only), Oxford (1862 only), Norfolk, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, Hereford, Salop, Westmoreland, North & West Wales

#: Lancashire, West Riding, Cheshire, Nottingham, Derby (1862 only), Leicester (1862 only)

~: Durham, Glamorgan/Monmouth, Cornwall (1862 only), Stafford (1862 only), Northumberland (1901 only), Derby (1901 only)

** : London, Middlesex, Surrey, Kent (1901 only), Sussex (1901 only), Berkshire (1901 only), Essex (1901 only), Gloucester (1901 only), Hertford (1901 only), Hampshire (1901 only), Buckingham (1901 only), Bedford (1901 only), Oxford (1901 only)

A more direct focus on the urban centres which were the seat of most co-operatives reveals a similar distinction (Table 9.3). Of the six crude categories of town (those included are mapped on Fig. 9.1) it was centres in the textile districts which consistently showed greatest strength of membership - with the performance of the woollen towns outstripping those associated with cotton. Of the other four categories, roughly equal in 1862, the greater growth of co-operation in towns with a base in metals and engineering and

Table 9.3. Urban Co-operative Retail Society Membership: Distribution by Economic Base of Town. (6)

	A) 1862			B) 1871		
	North	South	National	North	South	National
County & Assize Towns						
Co-op Membership	501	1,575	2,076	1,455	2,588	4,043
Population (000s)	67	441	508	75	542	618
M'ship per 1,000	7.5	3.6	4.1	19.3	4.8	6.5
Population						
Ports						
Co-op Membership	6,779	2,052	8,831	13,226	3,418	16,644
Population (000s)	967	582	1,548	1,248	724	1,972
M'ship per 1,000	7.0	3.5	5.7	10.6	4.7	8.4
Population						
Cotton						
Co-op Membership	14,893	-	14,893	37,009	-	37,009
Population (000s)	1,035	-	1,035	1,179	-	1,179
M'ship per 1,000	14.3	-	14.3	31.4	-	31.4
Population						
Wool						
Co-op Membership	14,436	787	15,223	27,755	2,337	30,092
Population (000s)	492	126	617	675	138	813
M'ship per 1,000	29.4	6.3	24.7	41.1	16.9	37.0
Population						
Coal						
Co-op Membership	2,437	399	2,836	14,583	1,091	15,674
Population (000s)	394	338	732	478	372	850
M'ship per 1,000	6.2	1.2	3.9	30.5	2.9	18.4
Population						
Metals & Engineering						
Co-op Membership	9,991	371	10,362	25,199	1,191	26,390
Population (000s)	1,040	385	1,426	1,326	462	1,788
M'ship per 1,000	9.6	1.0	7.3	19.0	2.6	14.8
Population						

C) 1881

	North	South	National
County & Assize Towns			
Co-op Membership	2,725	10,225	12,950
Population (000s)	101	862	963
M'ship per 1,000	27.0	11.9	13.4
Population			
Ports			
Co-op Membership	19,009	11,801	30,810
Population (000s)	1,526	932	2,459
M'ship per 1,000	12.4	12.7	12.5
Population			
Cotton			
Co-op Membership	79,772	-	79,772
Population (000s)	1,540	-	1,540
M'ship per 1,000	51.8	-	51.8
Population			
Wool			
Co-op Membership	65,482	4,361	69,843
Population (000s)	843	154	997
M'ship per 1,000	77.7	28.4	70.1
Population			
Coal			
Co-op Membership	30,146	1,565	31,711
Population (000s)	582	481	1,063
M'ship per 1,000	51.8	3.3	29.8
Population			
Metals & Engineering			
Co-op Membership	61,613	1,560	63,173
Population (000s)	2,313	587	2,900
M'ship per 1,000	26.6	2.7	21.8
Population			

D) 1891

	North	South	National
County & Assize Towns			
Co-op Membership	8,519	17,020	25,539
Population (000s)	110	764	874
M'ship per 1,000	77.3	22.3	29.2
Population			
Ports			
Co-op Membership	47,565	33,945	81,510
Population (000s)	1,706	1,099	2,804
M'ship per 1,000	27.9	30.9	29.1
Population			
Cotton			
Co-op Membership	124,251	-	124,251
Population (000s)	1,748	-	1,748
M'ship per 1,000	71.1	-	71.1
Population			
Wool			
Co-op Membership	95,176	6,827	102,003
Population (000s)	952	168	1,120
M'ship per 1,000	100.0	40.5	91.1
Population			
Coal			
Co-op Membership	58,122	9,453	67,575
Population (000s)	706	520	1,226
M'ship per 1,000	82.3	18.2	55.1
Population			
Metals & Engineering			
Co-op Membership	106,001	10,603	116,604
Population (000s)	2,057	671	2,728
M'ship per 1,000	51.5	15.8	42.7
Population			

E) 1901

	North	South	National
County & Assize Towns			
Co-op Membership	18,039	35,904	53,943
Population (000s)	128	858	967
M'ship per 1,000			
Population	140.4	41.8	54.7
Ports			
Co-op Membership	109,837	64,791	174,628
Population (000s)	2,070	1,403	3,473
M'ship per 1,000			
Population	53.1	46.2	50.3
Cotton			
Co-op Membership	181,083	-	181,083
Population (000s)	1,938	-	1,938
M'ship per 1,000			
Population	93.4	-	93.4
Wool			
Co-op Membership	139,271	13,829	153,100
Population (000s)	1,117	179	1,296
M'ship per 1,000			
Population	124.7	77.2	118.1
Coal			
Co-op Membership	97,598	14,613	112,211
Population (000s)	833	599	1,432
M'ship per 1,000			
Population	117.2	24.4	78.4
Metals & Engineering			
Co-op Membership	168,847	12,646	201,493
Population (000s)	2,362	466	2,829
M'ship per 1,000			
Population	79.9	27.1	71.2

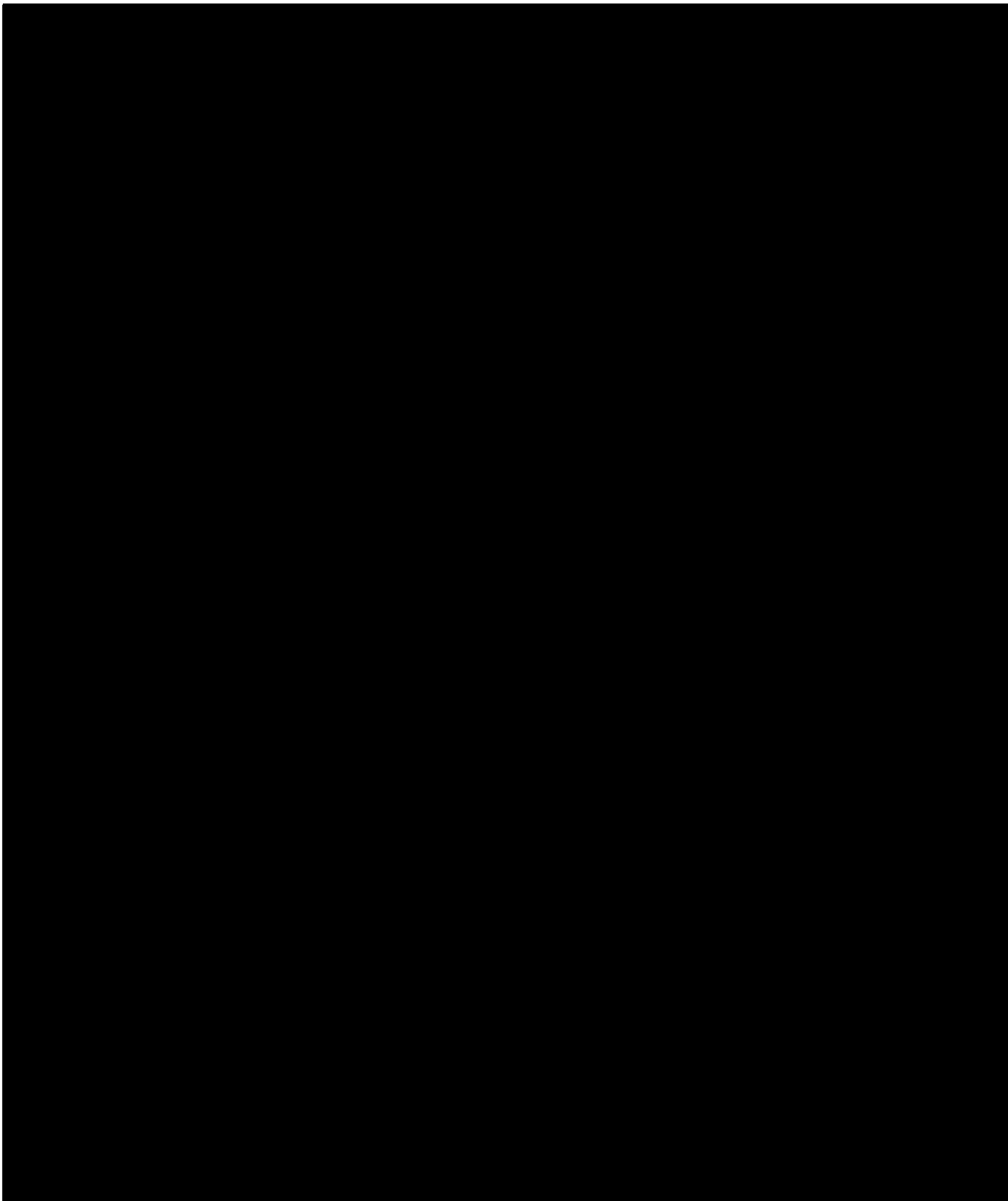


Fig. 9.1. Selected Towns Classified by Economic Base.

Source: P.P. 1873 LXXI Pt II, 39.

especially those on coalfields distinguishes them from the county and assize towns where the new industrial trades were generally less well represented, and the ports. Indeed of the six categories it was this last in which co-operation made least progress by the final quarter of the century.⁷ With the exception of the ports which showed an almost uniformly poor performance (although in some of the naval dockyard towns, especially Plymouth, which are included in this category there were stronger societies) there were, however, clear geographical differences in the degree of penetration achieved by co-operation. This is shown in outline on Table 9.3 by separate figures for northern and southern halves of the country.

III

It is with workers employed in textiles, metals, engineering and mining that co-operative success during the nineteenth century is generally most associated. These were important trades in the northern districts which contributed so largely to co-operative strength. The few societies founded before or during the eighteen sixties outside the northern co-operative core that survived to the end of the century were also commonly located in settlements that had a local concentration of employment in these basic trades; although as Table 9.3 and indeed Figs. 4.6 to 4.10 make clear their strength of membership was rarely comparable with districts further north. Co-operatives endured in the silk producing towns of Essex and Staffordshire (Braintree,

Chelmsford, Halstead, Leek). The workforce of the tweed mill at Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire supported a store and there were also long-lived societies in the Wiltshire textile towns of Bradford-on-Avon, Trowbridge and Wilton. One of the few locations in mid-Wales to develop co-operation was Newtown, the centre of the small local woollen industry. Co-operation was present in secondary mining districts including the Dean and Somerset coalfields and the metal mining areas of Devon and Cornwall. Societies also survived in centres with engineering employment, including towns serving the railways such as Swindon and Gloucester and those like Banbury, Leiston and Lincoln whose industry was geared to the production of machinery for surrounding agricultural districts.

At a county level the degree of penetration of the population by co-operative membership shows a not unexpected covariation with the distribution of employment in the textile, metal, engineering and mining trades - for brevity these will subsequently be referred to as the "staple" trades.⁸ The results of a series of calculations of correlation using the Pearson's correlation coefficient are shown on Table 9.4. During the sixties and seventies co-operative expansion from its confinement in the North-West and Yorkshire consolidated its strength in areas with a strong representation of workers from the staple trades. The decline in the value of the later coefficients coincides with the period of renewed growth in southern England, increasing

Table 9.4: County Level Correlation of the Strength of Co-operative Membership as a Percentage of Total Population with Employment in the Staple Trades as a Percentage of Total Population, 1861-1901.(9)

	10	
1861/62		= +0.504
1871		= +0.700
1881		= +0.745
1891		= +0.699
1901		= +0.635

co-operative strength in counties where the staples played a lesser part in the local economy.

The correlation found at the county level does, however, disguise more detailed discrepancies which warn against any simplistic explanation of the geography of co-operation. Its strength was not a direct function of the local occupational structure and areas with an economic base which contained common elements showed different patterns of society developments. Comparison of areas with a large mining population, for example, shows that in no other coalfield did co-operation match the success achieved in the North-East. Its growth was halting in South Wales and the lack of development in south-west Lancashire offered a marked contrast to its strength in the adjacent cotton districts (Figs. 4.6 to 4.10). Even at the county level it is clear that the workforce in the staple trades was not everywhere penetrated by co-operation to an equal extent. A crude expression of this is presented on Table 9.5 which for 1881, the year in which the original correlation exercise produced the most positive result, expresses co-operative membership

as a proportion of the male workforce in the staple trades.
Co-operative weakness in several southern counties, in the

Table 9.5. Co-operative Retail Society Membership as a Proportion of Adult Male Employment in the Staple Trades by County for England and Wales, 1881.(11)

County	Co-op Membership as a % of Total Adult Male Employment in Staple Trades	County	Co-op Membership as a % of Total Adult Male Employment in Staple Trades
Cumberland	44.2	Bedfordshire	3.4
Durham	36.2	Cambridgeshire	34.5
Northumberland	40.7	Essex	24.5
North Riding	26.6	Hertfordshire	10.8
Westmorland	72.0	Huntingdonshire	1.8
Cheshire	22.0	Norfolk	5.6
Lancashire	23.0	Suffolk	19.6
East Riding	40.3	Berkshire	23.2
West Riding	29.7	Buckinghamshire	7.2
Derbyshire	25.8	Hampshire	5.1
Lincolnshire	26.4	Kent	15.1
Nottinghamshire	14.9	London	8.4
Shropshire	2.1	Middlesex	5.4
Staffordshire	2.1	Oxfordshire	68.1
Warwickshire	6.1	Surrey	4.0
Worcestershire	9.9	Sussex	8.7
Leicestershire	24.6	Cornwall	5.5
Northamptonshire	59.9	Devon	30.1
Rutland	0.0	Dorset	6.4
		Gloucestershire	14.0
		Herefordshire	2.9
		Somerset	9.4
		Wiltshire	17.6
		Glamorgan & Monmouth	5.3
		North & West Wales	2.8

West Midlands, particularly Shropshire and Staffordshire, and in Wales was a reflection as much of failure to spread co-operation amongst the workforce in the staples as of an

absence of employment in these sectors. Nowhere, of course, was co-operative membership restricted to the staple workforce but the high ratios of membership to workers recorded in some southern counties are a reflection of particular success in the development of co-operation amongst other local trades. In Oxfordshire, for example, over 40 per cent of the county total was accounted for by the society in Oxford city which had been initiated by building craftsmen, railwaymen and workers in the locally important printing¹² trade. The contribution of the Banbury co-operative society was only slightly smaller. From an urban base of artisans and men employed in the town's agricultural machinery trade this society actively recruited rural workers with the result that by 1872 the complement of agricultural labourers enrolled numbered around 450, making up over 35 per cent¹³ of the total membership. In neighbouring Northamptonshire the rather larger co-operative membership was largely concentrated in the footwear producing communities of the county - another trade not included in the correlation exercise. Specific evidence from the society at Long Buckby for the period 1869-74 shows that in addition to the 62 per cent of a membership sample of 185 who were footwear producers the other substantial occupational concentration was the 19 per cent contributed by agricultural¹⁴ workers.

Comprehensive occupational statistics are not available from the printed census returns at a finer spatial scale than that of county totals. However, some details were provided in

1861 and 1871 of significant concentrations of employment in particular trades by registration districts. ¹⁵ While the partial coverage of these figures makes them less than ideal for the present purpose the data for 1871 have been used to attempt a correlation of the concentrations of employment in the staple trades with co-operative membership by registration district. The resultant coefficient of $\rho = +0.631$ is slightly lower than obtained using county totals. In the light of obvious discrepancies in the East Midlands the occupational group was extended to include concentrations of workers engaged in hosiery and footwear production giving a minor improvement in the coefficient to a value of $\rho = +0.647$.

While generally supportive of the association of co-operation with staple employment the finer scale correlation does reveal that in individual instances the association suggested at the county level is fallacious. In Warwickshire, for example, the absolute co-operative membership of the districts of Coventry, Nuneaton and Foleshill where over a quarter of the adult male population worked in the staple trades, was considerably exceeded by that of Southam and Warwick where no such employment was recorded. These and other cases where there was significant local discord between employment structure and co-operative strength are shown on Fig 9.2. The map distinguishes areas where there was a positive and negative deviation from the regression equation, emphasising those where the discrepancy was of more than one

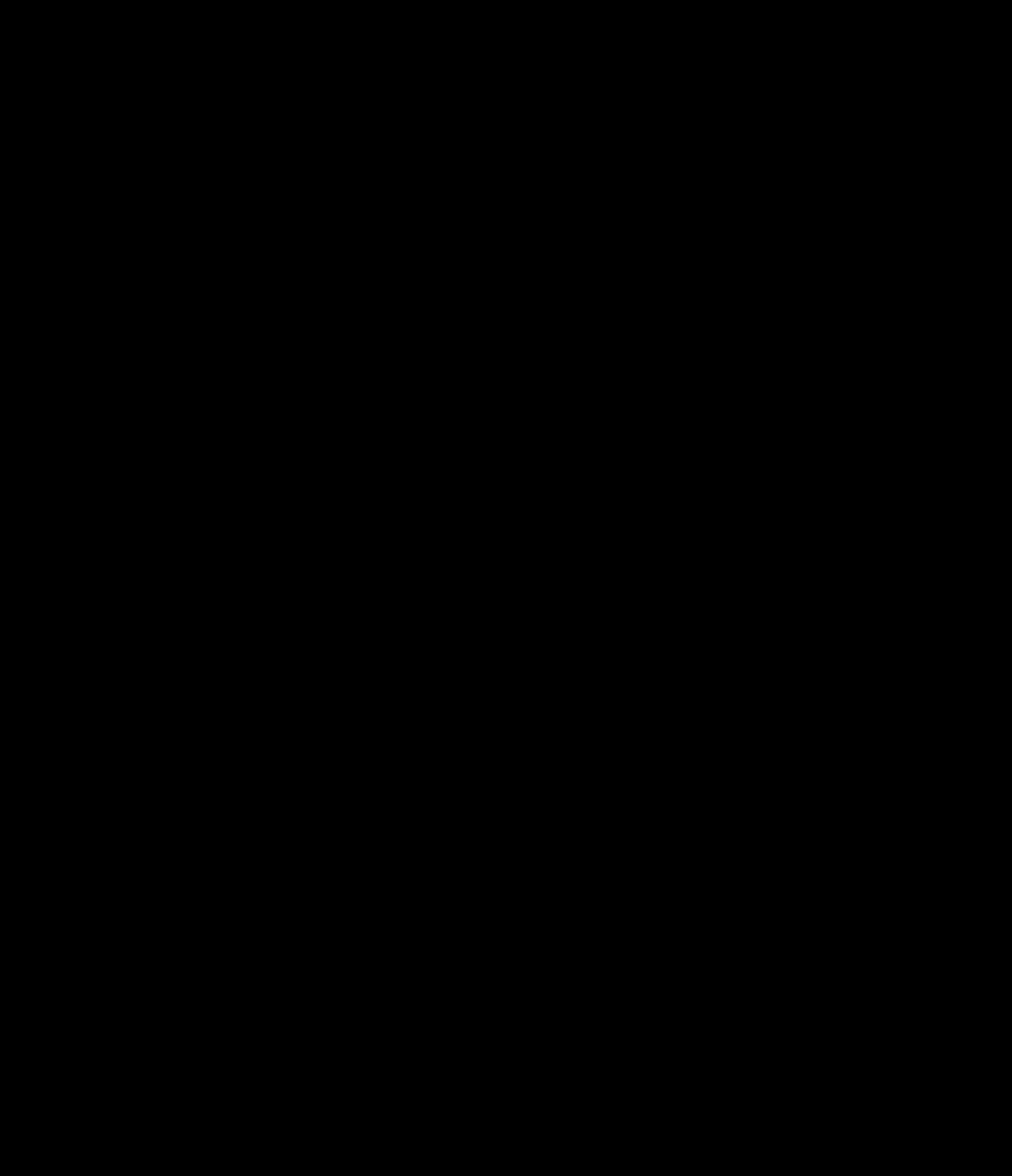


Fig. 9.2. Distribution of Positive and Negative Residuals from a Correlation Between the Occupational Composition of the Workforce and Co-operative Retail Society Membership, 1871.

Source: Calculated from Data in P.P. 1872 LIV and P.P. 1873 LXXI Pt II, 116-22.

Positive Deviation: District co-operative membership higher than would be expected from the proportion of the local adult male population employed in "staple" trades.

Negative Deviation: District co-operative membership lower than would be expected from the proportion of the local adult male population employed in "staple" trades.

standard deviation. This reinforces the impression of co-operative weakness in the West Midlands, particularly parts of Staffordshire, and South Wales despite an ostensibly favourable occupational structure. In other areas with a significant mining population there was also a failure of co-operation to fulfil expectations of its expansion. This was true of parts of Cornwall and North Yorkshire, and the districts of Chesterfield and Wigan. It is apparent that in northern textile areas there was no consistent relationship between co-operative strength and employment structure. While societies achieved great success in several districts (particularly Bury, Haslingden, Rochdale, Saddleworth and Todmorden) there was a much lesser penetration of the staple workforce of the fine-spinning town of Bolton, or the weaving centres of Burnley and Preston at this date.

IV

This exercise confirms that while there was a general relationship between the presence of staple trades and co-operative success the pattern of its development was a reflection of more than the bold outlines of the country's economic structure. Given that there was no geographically consistent relationship between the occupational make-up of a particular district and its experience of co-operation it is still worth considering the evidence for chronological coincidence between economic change in the various regions and co-operative progress. Particular attention will be devoted to the movement's record in the West Midlands and

Wales, and the economic circumstances of the wave of reintroductions of societies to many southern English towns in the final quarter of the century.

National figures for the growth of membership and sales (Figs. 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3) showed the coincidence of variation in the pace of co-operative growth with cyclical trends in the national economy. Figure 4.5 provided some indication of the regional variation in the impact of the depression of the late seventies and early eighties in particular. This is made clearer by the plotting of annual figures for deviation from the regional mean growth of membership (Fig. 9.3). The impact of the economic down turn on northern regions was marked but concentrated in a single year - 1878 in the North, during which year there was an absolute loss of membership, and 1879 in the North-West and Yorkshire (Fig. 9.3A). In the Midlands the negative deviation from the mean was smaller reflecting the generally slower pace of previous growth but the lowest levels were maintained over a longer period (Fig. 9.3B). As Fig. 4.5B showed the episode had a particular effect in the West Midlands which recorded an absolute loss of membership in the years 1878, 1880 and 1883. The renewed economic downturn of the later eighties was also associated with a reduction in membership in 1887. The experience of Welsh co-operation was similar with membership loss in 1876, 1878, 1879, 1880, 1882 and 1883 (Fig. 9.3D). The relative weakness of co-operation in these two regions, with individual societies being generally smaller and thus more

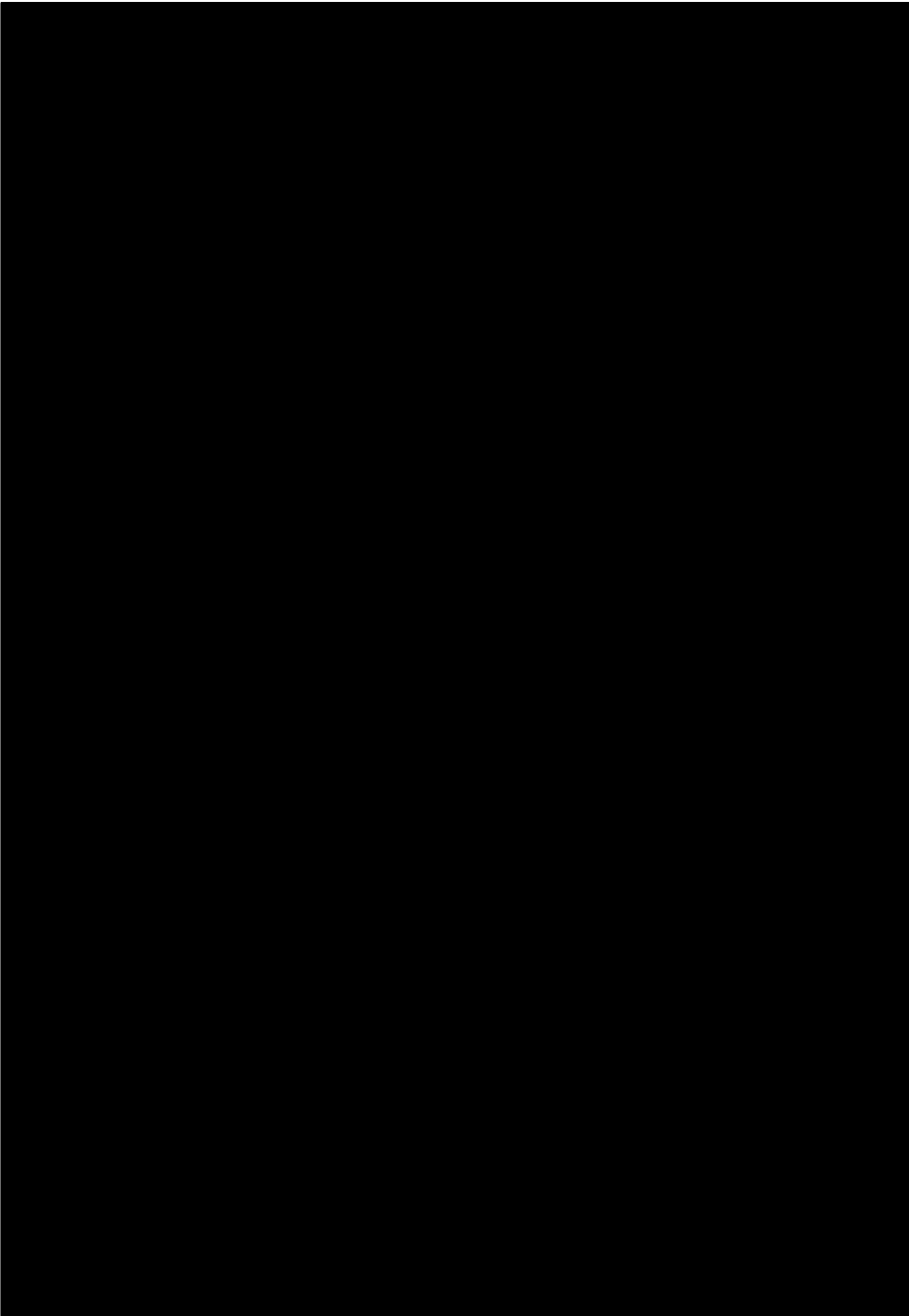
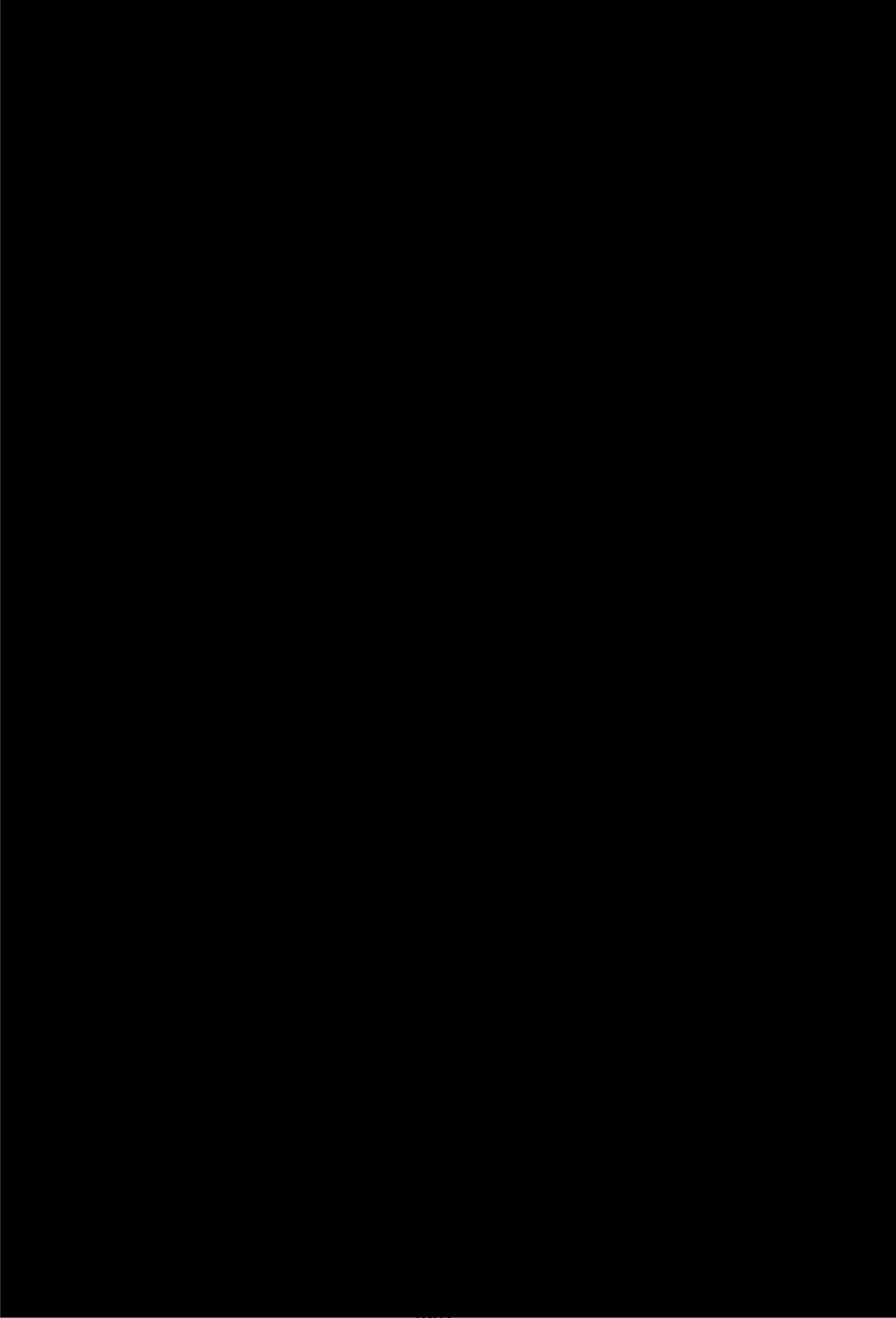


Fig. 9.3. Co-operative Retail Society Regional Membership Totals:
Absolute Annual Growth 1862-99 Expressed as Deviation from
the Annual Average Growth for the Period as a Whole.

A) North, Yorkshire, North-West.

B) North Midlands, West Midlands, South-East Midlands.

Source: Calculated from Data in Annual Returns of Funds and
Effects of Industrial and Provident Societies for 1862-67
and 1870-99.

- 
- C) South-East, Metropolitan, East/East Anglia, South-West
D) Wales, West Midlands.

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vulnerable than those in the north of England (Table 4.14) contributed to the difficulties of these years. However, the internal structure of co-operation served only to reinforce the effects of the particular economic experience of these two regions where existing centres of co-operative development included districts in which cyclical downturn was compounded by longer term structural changes. In these areas the slump of the late seventies was severe and marked the beginning of a permanent decline of some major sectors of the local economy. Particularly hard hit was the iron industry of the Black Country and of the heads of the valleys in South Wales. In both districts there were permanent closures of works and consequent employment loss as part of the process of relocation of the iron and steel industry to new coastal plant.¹⁶ The situation in the Black Country was exacerbated by the decline in the local hardware trades and the closure of coal mines. Thus several districts suffered an absolute loss of population during this period.¹⁷ In South Wales the coal trade was more buoyant but employment was reduced and wages were depressed, not only by the cyclical slump but also by the surplus of labour displaced from the iron trade. Wages fell sharply from their peaks during the boom of the early seventies to levels below those paid in the late sixties.¹⁸

In South Wales there was also population loss through outmigration, a process which could precipitate co-operative failure. The dissolution of the Brynmawr society in 1877 was explained as follows

The ironworks in the locality stopped the previous year, and several of the large collieries in the neighbourhood were closed at the close of 1876 and the beginning of 1877, which caused a large number of members to
19
emigrate.

Even where labour migration was intra-regional, for example from the declining districts of South Wales to more prosperous areas such as the Rhondda, there could still be a long lasting interruption to co-operative development. Societies failing in the older industrial areas were by no means immediately replaced elsewhere. Thus economic change within particular districts had a lasting effect on co-operative progress in these two regions.

As Fig. 9.3C reveals the southern regions displayed little reaction to the economic events of the late seventies and early eighties. There was little sign of the further reduction of a pace of growth that was anyway very limited. It was only in the last two decades of the century that membership increase was consistently above the regional averages for the whole period. This is also reflected in the marked concavity of the growth paths plotted on Fig. 4.5C. Given the fact that material in Chapters Three and Four suggested that this growth pattern was not a simple reflection of a process of diffusion of awareness of co-operation (although the caveats of Chapter Five and Six should be recalled) it seems worth examining whether it had any basis in structural changes in the economy of southern England. There is little sign of the dramatic transformation

of the occupational structure of these regions during the final quarter of the century to one more akin to that which fostered co-operation elsewhere. Indeed the series of correlations (Table 9.4) reveal the period of greater southern expansion as one in which co-operation showed a declining association with staple employment. As Table 9.6 indicates large scale manufacturing industry and mining were no more important in the economy of southern England at the turn of the century than they had been fifty years earlier. Indeed in the South-West there was a decline both in absolute employment in these trades and in the percentage they contributed to the total male workforce. Employment continued to be dominated by clothing, footwear and other craft production, construction, transport and general services.²¹

Table 9.6. Percentage Contribution of Large Scale Manufacturing and Mining Work to Adult Male Employment Totals by Region, 1851 and 1901.(20)

Region	1851 %	1901 %
North	26.2	37.4
North-West	45.4	39.9
Yorkshire	47.4	41.6
North Midlands	27.2	32.8
West Midlands	34.7	37.0
South-East Midlands	26.4	19.2
East/East Anglia	8.4	10.8
South-East (including London)	10.3	10.2
South-West	15.2	12.9
Wales	24.4	34.2

The figures on Table 9.6 , however, reveal nothing of the chronology of growth, in particular the increasing dynamism of the southern economy, reflected in greater employment in

the later decades of the century. Although manufacturing and mining did not expand their share of the workforce the absolute numbers employed increased substantially during the second half of the century, notably in the South-East and to a lesser extent in East/East Anglia. As Fig. 9.4 shows this was concentrated in the final two decades - also the period in which co-operation made greatest advance.

Within the service sector there were some specific changes in the employment structure of southern towns which may also have aided co-operative progress. Newton's study of Exeter, for example, draws attention to the local increase in railway employment during the final quarter of the century and the general importance of these men in the cultivation of social and political independence by workers in the town.²² Indeed railwaymen were involved in the foundation of the Exeter society of 1884.²³ Although they were a rather larger sector of the Exeter workforce than in most towns railway workers were a group whose increasing strength may have aided the renewed development of co-operation more widely. They were active in the development of societies not just in the obvious railway centres but also in towns where they formed a smaller section of the workforce. In southern England these included Ipswich, Watford, Worcester, Hendon and Twerton.²⁴ Further, they were recognised by the Southern Section of the Co-operative Central Board as a group to be actively canvassed. In 1875 it was noted

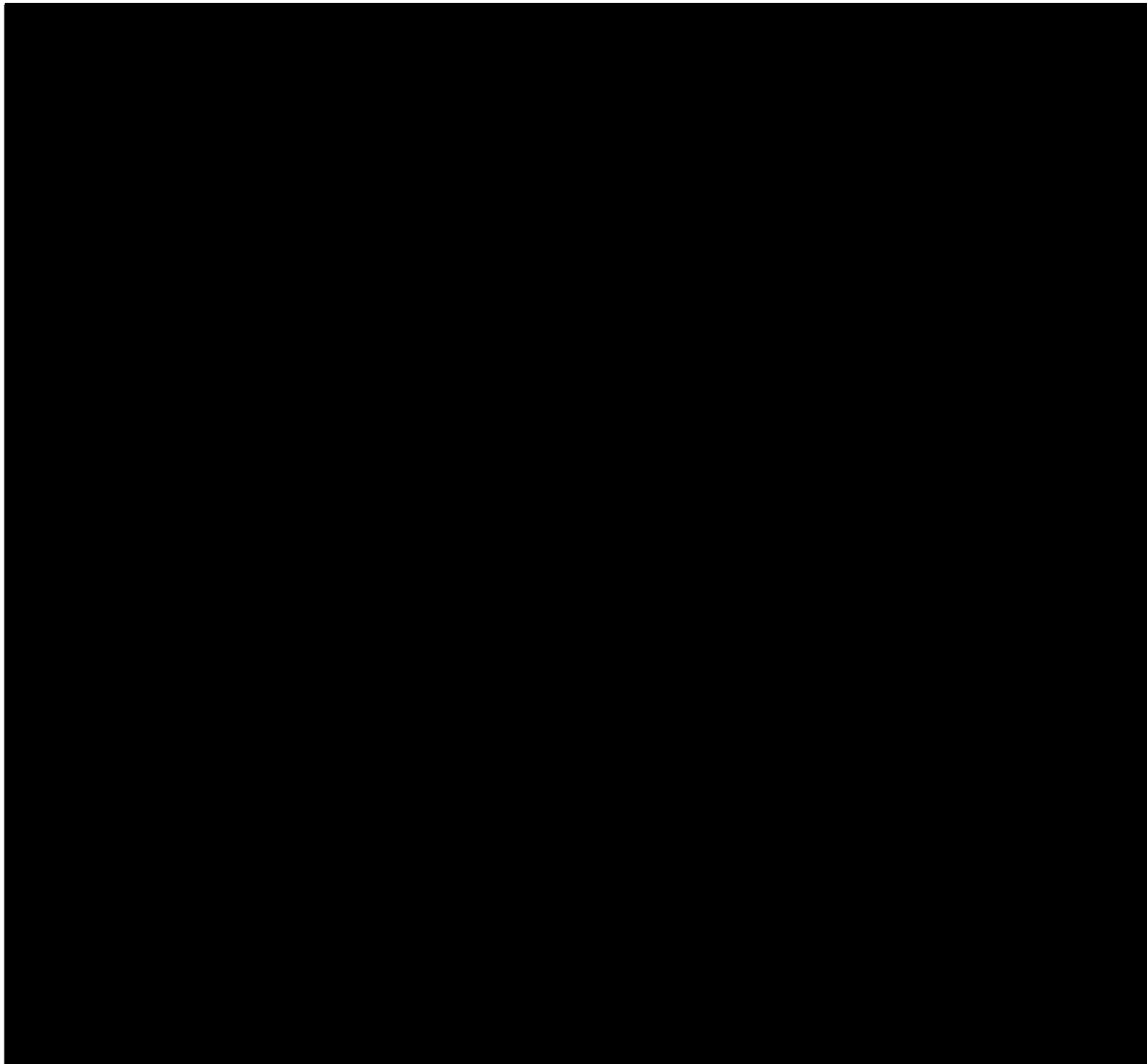


Fig. 9.4. Indices of Growth in Manufacturing Employment for Selected Regions, 1851-1901.

Source: Lee 1979.

Railway employees are among the most intelligent of working men and we should perhaps find it especially advantageous to take means to supply them with a quantity of co-operative literature.

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v

Any explanation of the changing fortunes of co-operation must look perhaps more to subtle reforms than wholesale economic changes. In some areas within a fairly static occupational framework there was a recasting of the social and economic circumstances of many workers. There was an increasing prosperity for established trades, a growth of greater self-awareness amongst workers and a consequent desire and capacity to develop for themselves organisational expressions of this identity - co-operation was not an isolated example of new working class initiative, indeed in some instances it developed from advances in other areas such as trades unionism. In the present case it is important also to recall changes within co-operation itself; the desire some enthusiasts felt for a nationally successful movement, the increased confidence and growing organisational structures produced by past progress elsewhere which could be enlisted to assist and advise new and expanding societies and specific promotional efforts by groups such as the Guild of Co-operators.

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The relationship between occupational structure and co-operative success is indeed interesting; both its overall strength and its failure in individual details prompt further

questions. It is right that this should be so for there is
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little merit in crude economic determinism. A more precise
investigation of the social and economic circumstances of
groups of workers would aid an understanding of the
association of co-operation with certain occupations. From
such a starting point it should be possible to refine any
argument to reveal forces which account for the breakdown of
the generally observed relationship in particular
communities.

The progress of co-operation can be better understood by
locating individual societies and local groups more firmly in
the context of their parent communities. These need to be
considered as places in which to live and work. This should
go beyond conventional geographical studies of the
distribution of population and industry to examine variations
in the manner in which the basic functions of daily life were
organised.

NOTES

1. PRO FS 1, FS 8.
2. CN 2 Jan. 1875.
3. Co-op. 28 Nov. 1869.
4. Lee 1981.
5. Lee 1981; P.P. 1863 XXIX; P.P. 1902 XCVI.
6. The classification of towns follows that set out in the 1871 census P.P. 1873 LXXI Pt. II, 39. While this cannot have been drawn up using the sophisticated statistical techniques available today to allocate towns to particular categories it seems no more insensitive than any such system which attempts a simple classification of often economically diverse centres. This diversity is reflected in the inclusion of several towns in more than one category. Those appearing in other categories have, however, been excluded from the class of county and assize towns here.
7. See also the poor performance of individual ports on Fig. 4.11
8. Details of the distribution of employment in these sectors have been derived from Lee 1979. The categories included were: 2) Mining and Quarrying, 6) Metal Manufacture, 7) Mechanical Engineering, 10) Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering, 11) Vehicles, 13) Textiles.
9. Lee 1979; P.P. 1863 XXIX; P.P. 1872 LIV; P.P. 1882 LXVI; P.P. 1892 LXXIII; P.P. 1902 XCVI.

10. As statistics for co-operative membership are not available for 1861, the figures for 1862 were compared with census material for the previous year.
11. Lee 1979; P.P. 1882 LXVI.
12. Ledger 1972, 3
13. Crossley 1972, 16.
14. Northamptonshire Record Office SL 396 cross checked with 1871 Census Enumerators Returns.
15. P.P. 1863 LIII Pt. I 133-38; P.P. 1873 LXXI Pt. II, 116-22.
16. Allen 1929, 233-34; Morgan 1981, 63.
17. Allen 1929, 233-37.
18. Thomas 1969, 42; P.P. 1878-79 XXVIII, 147.
19. P.P. 1878 LXIX, 415.
20. Lee 1979. This uses a wider definition than that of the staple trades, in addition to the categories listed in note 8 the following are included: 4) Coal and Petroleum Products, 5) Chemicals and Allied Trades, 8) Instrument Making, 9) Electrical Engineering, 16) Bricks, Pottery, Glass, Chemicals, Etc., 19) Other Manufacturing.
21. Cf. Lee 1981.
22. Newton 1968, 245-47.
23. Exeter Co-operative and Industrial Society Ltd. 1935.
24. Ipswich Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd. 1928, 13 ; Alford 1945; Saxton 1902, 2; CN 15 May 1875; Brown 1939a.
25. CN 10 April 1875.
26. Exeter Co-operative and Industrial Society Ltd. 1935. See also Table 10.1.

27. See Chapters Six and Eight.

28. The comments of Briggs 1959b, 3-4 with regard to
Chartism are equally relevant here.

CHAPTER TEN

CO-OPERATION AS SELF-HELP; COMMUNAL IDENTIFICATION, GROUP
STABILITY AND WORKING CLASS ATTITUDES.

I

The general geographical coincidence of the greatest strength of co-operation with areas in which large scale manufacturing industry and mining occupied a substantial proportion of the workforce is easy to demonstrate. More complicated is the explanation of this relationship. This involves an examination of the social and economic circumstances of workers in these districts and a search for contrasts with other areas with a different economic base. More specifically attention will be devoted to the basis of group association - in the workplace, the residential community and a range of popular organisations - the material and social resources available to workers and the influences shaping individual and group attitudes to collective activities such as co-operation.

II

Co-operation derived much of its early appeal as a response, variously conceived as a mixture of the practical and the ideological, to the stresses of economic change and the consequent disruption to the lives of ordinary people. Thus it gained strength in those districts most affected. During the first half of the century and to a decreasing extent on into the eighteen fifties and sixties co-operative support came from the threatened trades of small scale craft

production as well as from workers in the new factory industries. Inevitably it was with the latter group that progress in the second half of the century was chiefly associated.

It was commonly the case that the capacity and demand for working class self-help was greatest in the newer, but not the most raw, industrial settlements. Here there was a combination of the need for action to improve the dismal physical environment and the poor provision of facilities, the social freedom for such action and, often extending from the workplace, the basis of association from which initiative could develop. These circumstances were, of course, inter-related. That any initiative rested chiefly with workers themselves reflected the failure of other groups. Settlements with a growing industrial population were often handicapped by an archaic system of local government that was unable to contribute to the solution of problems associated with expansion. Middle class concern was reduced by their limited presence in the smaller centres and their increasing residential segregation in the larger towns.¹ Employers even if cast in the paternalistic mould described by Joyce, usually made provision for their workers only in certain limited spheres.² Moreover, the inadequacy of shopping facilities could not be tackled directly by employers, in however generous a spirit, without risking legal action and the hostility of their workpeople.

The lack of alternatives which made workers reliant on

their own collective efforts also gave a freedom of action in communities that were socially and often geographically discrete. Individual instances can, of course, be cited in which the hostility of the employer frustrated local co-operative development. Even during the early decades of the present century societies were refused premises in some of the new villages of the Dukeries coalfield and miners recalled a feeling of moral obligation to deal at the coal companies' stores. It was only pressure from the CWS, a major customer for local coal, which eventually led to the entry of co-operation into these settlements.³ Such determined opposition was not, however, widespread and rarely caused total and permanent exclusion from a locality. A restrictive clause in the estate deed forbidding additional shops in the Northumberland coal mining village of North Seaton led not to the abandonment of co-operation during the early sixties but to the siting of a store in nearby Newbiggin. The original problem was overcome by the end of the century and the many North Seaton members of the society were able to shop at their own branch store.⁴

Seeley notes that on the North-East coalfield as a whole the attitudes towards co-operation of many colliery owners changed from hostility during the eighteen sixties to greater encouragement by the seventies.⁵ Certainly in 1873 the Cramlington society had sufficient expectation of a favourable response to organise a deputation to the owners of Pegswood Colliery

to ascertain what assistance they will give to the proposed branch store, in the way of granting premises⁶ or otherwise aiding the establishment of it. . . .

A minority of employers and managers were themselves active⁷ in the introduction of co-operation amongst their workforce. Sometimes it was seen as a means of shedding the responsibility for the food supply of more isolated settlements; thus some company stores including those at Denaby Main on the South Yorkshire coalfield and the Cheshire mill village of Styal were turned over to co-operative⁸ ownership.

III

Co-operative societies were part of a more extensive development of popular initiatives during the nineteenth century. In many instances these also drew strong support in the very industrial areas where co-operation was best represented. Indeed contemporaries saw the various institutions as a response to common social and economic conditions and assessed the chances for co-operative success against the record of other activities. Contrasts were drawn, for example, between Kidderminster and more northerly textile districts

teetotalism, mechanics' institutions, building societies, &c. with which your part of the kingdom is so rife, are almost unknown here. . . . The Church of England

is the dominant religious party here...; dissenters are few.... With these facts before you, you will of course understand that co-operation will not just yet attain to anything like the status it has secured in the northern
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counties.

Existing organisations were evidence of working-class initiative and the social freedom to exercise it; but their presence could also increase the strength of collective identity by giving greater density and variety to the network of associations which tied individuals living and working together. Popular institutions provided a venue for the airing of common problems and the discussion of new ideas. As the members of the group were already known to each other and had displayed a capacity for joint organisation it was more likely that in cases such as co-operation discussion would be followed by practical action. The establishment of stores by existing Owenite and Chartist bodies shows the adoption of co-operation as a means towards the achievement of established aims. Table 10.1 records some later examples in which other working class institutions provided the basis for co-operative developments often as a departure not directly related to their original purposes. In some instances the input from earlier bodies was not just that of personnel and organisational experience but was also financial. The Huddersfield society, for example, originated in discussion within a lodge of the Bolton Unity of Oddfellows and raised part of its initial capital by loans

totalling over £250 from that and six other friendly society lodges. Several stores including Rochdale received money from trade societies. At Sherburn Hill in County Durham £30 was loaned by the local Orange Lodge.

Whilst throughout the country there was a certain sense of communality and informal association amongst local groups of workers spawning primitive institutions, their strength rarely matched that achieved in the northern industrial districts. Nor did they individually develop the formal administrative structure that was the hallmark of successful co-operation. The particular organisational demands made by this last reflected its dual nature as both an exercise in working class self-help and a venture that had to survive in commercial competition with private retailers. Therefore even if the necessary information could be obtained to test the relationship it would not perhaps be expected that the

Table 10.1. Existing Working Class Groupings Recorded as a Source of Collective Identity for the Establishment of Co-operative Retail Societies. (10)

Individual Workplace	52
Occupational Grouping	22
Trade Union	15
Friendly Society	8
Mutual Improvement/Discussion Groups	3
Mechanics' Institutes	2
Working Men's Clubs	1
Christmas Savings Clubs	1
Temperance Societies	8
Religious Groupings	5
	<u>117</u>

distribution of co-operation would show a particularly close correlation with that of overall working class initiative.

Individual instances for which some indication of the national pattern of strength is available show that there was no consistent geographical coincidence of activity in the various spheres of popular initiative. Many bodies showed particular development in the industrial areas where co-operation was strong, especially the textile districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire.¹⁴ Institutions such as teetotal and temperance societies, mechanics' institutes and friendly societies were well represented in these areas.¹⁵ Yet elsewhere the experience of the various bodies diverged. Temperance organisations, for example, were well supported in areas of nonconformist strength outside northern industrial England where co-operation made limited headway. Nonconformity itself is often quoted as supportive of the development of working class initiative.¹⁶ In the textile districts and the industrial North-East chapels did indeed provide co-operative leaders.¹⁷ Yet there were no similar links in strongly nonconformist Cornwall or Wales, even amongst a population which like that of the North-East contained a large number of miners. It seems that the local character of nonconformity partly explains such differences of experience. The suggestion has been made, for example, that in Wales it worked against the development of popular institutions in general

it may be worth considering whether the Calvinist view of salvation, as essentially individualistic rather than social may have tended to produce a type of character

which has adopted as its motto "each by himself" rather
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than "each for all and all for each".

It was perhaps less to be expected that the general social climate in older centres of dissent in the more rural counties of eastern England including Huntingdon, Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire would foster a strong co-operative body.¹⁹ Although in the last named the county's religious character did have an impact on the development of agricultural trades unions, bodies which were themselves involved in the promotion of co-operatives (Chapter Six).

Friendly societies were the most widespread popular institutions during the nineteenth century, present in many centres without successful co-operatives. Thus a county level rank correlation of the degree of penetration of the population by co-operative and friendly societies in 1862 shows a low value of $\rho_s = +0.24$. There were, however, instructive internal contrasts within the body of friendly societies. It seems no coincidence that the largest of the affiliated orders with their more sophisticated organisational form should have developed in the same areas of south-east Lancashire that gave strong support to co-operation. Thus a similar correlation for the affiliated orders while by no means perfect, yielded the higher figure²⁰ of $\rho_s = +0.49$.

More detailed studies confirm that many individual friendly societies were organised on quite a different scale and basis from most successful co-operatives. Bramwell's work on localised communities within Birmingham emphasises the

prevalence of institutions such as friendly societies and money clubs but notes that most were small bodies - usually with under 100 members - whose operations depended more on trust and familiarity amongst members than any formal organisation.²¹ While they were able to endure, if not thrive, on such a basis, co-operation which faced obvious commercial competition made greater demands. Long term survival depended on a degree of business knowledge and formal organisational skills amongst its leadership. It also required the recruitment of a sufficient membership to make trading viable. Co-operatives with a membership of less than 100 had only a limited chance of survival (Table 4.13). The very number of small friendly and benefit institutions within a centre such as Birmingham and their resistance to amalgamation raises questions as to the ease with which the basis of association could be extended beyond the very localised communities. There were perhaps especial problems in a city where the workforce was employed in a network of small workshops rather than concentrated in individually larger units.

The small and informal basis of much popular activity helps reconcile the apparent contradiction between the limited development of co-operation in Birmingham and other characterisations of the city such as the mid century observation that

there is perhaps no town in England in which the principle of association for mutual benefit ... is

carried on to so great an extent as in Birmingham.

Other contemporary comment drew attention to the prevalence of friendly and benefit societies in the city and its role in the development of the building society movement.²³ In some other industrial cities it was also true that it was not the complete lack of working class activity as much as the manner of its organisation that helped to limit the impetus for successful co-operative development. For example, Pollard characterised the trade societies of the light trades of Sheffield as

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unstable, parochial and often poorly administered.

There is some indication too, that the sectionalism of the small trade society may have been carried over into attempts at co-operation. One of the early stores in Sheffield restricted its membership to spring knife cutters.²⁵ While such a group may have provided a coherent base for a society they were not themselves sufficient to sustain an operation at a scale that was commercially viable.

Some contemporaries also argued that the presence of a range of popular institutions fragmented and thus weakened working class initiative in the larger centres. In 1862 the Mayor of Manchester at a meeting of the Equitable co-operative society in the city contrasted their position with that of neighbouring Rochdale where he claimed the co-operative

arose without mechanics' institutions, and in great measure supplied their place; in Manchester there were so many institutions of this character that the

influence on the people for their improvement was fractionally divided, and hence lost much of its power.
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Distinctions in the experience of urban centres of different size were not as clear cut as this might suggest but it does seem likely that difficulties caused by a fragmentation of working class initiative increased with settlement size as one aspect of the more general problem of the focussing of group identity within the larger cities. Such a suggestion, albeit vague, does add further reason for caution in proposing any simple links between the various forms of popular initiative. The apparent variety of relationships between different bodies would seem to be an area repaying more detailed local study.

Smaller towns retaining a more traditional economic and thus social structure were not without institutions such as friendly societies, indeed in the early decades of the century they were numerous in the older industrial areas of the South-West and East Anglia.
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However, in many urban centres amidst the de-industrialising and rural counties the development during the second half of the century of any distinctive and co-ordinated working class collectivity capable of sustaining an institution such as co-operation was hampered by a stronger survival of middle-class social control. As a result there was commonly widespread popular association only at times of extreme tension. Workers emerged as an often destructive force at periods of crisis rather

than developing any sustained organisational pressure for constructive change. At its most extreme this was the world in which problems of food supply were met by the short-term anger of riot not the more permanent alternative of co-operation.²⁸ Particularly relevant in the present case was the status sometimes assumed by the more substantial traders. Their economic and social power extended beyond retailing to an influence over employment, both directly and as a market for the output of craft producers. Thus it was considered that

In the southern counties ... where the great mass of people depend for support on the shopkeepers of the towns, it was next to impossible to carry out the principle [of co-operation].²⁹

This last example points back towards the interaction of working class initiative with the commercial forces discussed in Chapter Eight as an influence on the local progress of co-operation. It was often the case that the two sets of influences were mutually reinforcing. The same underlying economic conditions which produced a stagnant retail trade did little to encourage the development of independent working class action. By contrast the industrial dynamism that produced increasing commercial opportunities also provided a new basis for a more conscious and organised working class. As this distinction between types of settlements implies the arena within which workers felt a group identity was often geographically restricted. While there was a flexibility in the basis of association depending

on circumstances - opposition to a commonly perceived outside threat could unite people over a range of social strata and geographical areas - in the course of everyday life it was frequently the conditions of the immediate locality that assumed the greatest importance. It seems therefore necessary to explore in more detail the variable record of co-operative success in the social and economic context of the settlements in which it was attempted. Attention will first be devoted to the forces and structures within individual settlements which are considered to be of wider importance in the development of a spirit of local communality.

IV

Co-operation itself generated interlinkages between its members in a way that conventional shops did not and did not seek to. In part this reflected participation in fields including education, entertainment, welfare and housing. But even amongst the majority of co-operators whose involvement with their society rarely went beyond custom at the store there was often a sense of loyalty and identification that arose from the individual's share, however limited, in the ownership and management of his or her "own" society. Indeed loyalty was commonly quite specific to the local store rather than the movement as a whole.

Where co-operatives were successful the identity displayed amongst the membership was commonly but one facet of a wider

communality. Indeed the very development of co-operatives reflected the power of the idea to harness this existing force within a settlement to a specific end. Where there was a sense of common purpose, a willingness and sufficient mutual trust to work together even on projects which involved sacrifice of time and potentially at least placed invested money at risk, there was the basis for the establishment of a society. Without previous points of contact the translation of individual enthusiasm into group action was a much more difficult process. The recruitment of the early membership was perhaps the most critical phase of development; certainly it was at this initial stage that most failures occurred. The slower a society's progress towards commercial viability the lesser the chances of the eventual achievement of this goal. While societies might hope to attract a wide-ranging membership once a successful business had been established an infant store was unlikely to survive and prosper on casual trade alone and the resultant haphazard recruitment of members. The forging of new links was a part of the early extension of membership; societies attempted to draw general attention to their presence through means including the press, public meetings, bill sticking and personal canvassing. But relatively rapid success was most likely where there were existing links amongst sections of the local population.

As Table 10.1 shows the most commonly recorded basis of association between workers forming early membership was occupational. A single, usually large, workplace was a

frequent focus from which societies developed. Thus co-operation can be identified not just with the factory system but also with individual factories. Histories of co-operatives in the textile districts sometimes name the mill which was a society's original stronghold. ³³ Stores were also started by workers in other sectors of the dominant local trade such as the dyeworks which were the foci at Bowling and Brighthouse ³⁴ and by men in the large engineering works which grew alongside the textile sector. The major group amongst the early membership of the Oldham Industrial society ³⁵ founded in 1851, for example, were Platt Bros. employees. A slightly earlier store in the town had been set up by the Auxiliary Mutual Association, a body originally established ³⁶ in 1847 to relieve unemployed iron workers. In the North-East too engineering works were co-operative centres. At Newcastle it was suggested that propaganda should be concentrated on the workforce of the large engineering works of Hawthorne, Stephenson and Armstrong. Indeed the first of ³⁷ these had its own butchering society by the mid sixties. Elsewhere in the North-East it was inevitable that co-operative development should be focussed on the workforce of particular collieries. Records of societies in pit villages confirm the extent of domination by workers from the major local industry. At Sherburn Hill in County Durham 70 per cent of a membership sample taken for the years 1874-79 were miners. A slightly higher figure of 77 per cent was found amongst the new membership of the West Cramlington society

1869-72, although these men were drawn from several pits. Many of the wood and metal workers who made up much of the remainder would also have been employed about the pit.³⁸

The association of co-operation with larger individual workplaces was not restricted to the staple trades of textiles, engineering, metals and mining, nor to the areas of the movement's greatest strength. Even in districts where co-operation was weaker larger factories and works often provided the basis for the more successful societies. Several ventures in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were connected with naval dockyards, amongst the largest employment units of their day. Figures for 1814 show the workforce of six southern yards to have ranged from 888 at Sheerness to 4,257 at Portsmouth, both of which supported co-operatives around this period.³⁹ The town's dockyard must also have contributed significantly to the membership of the large Plymouth society later in the century. Societies in the second half of the century grew from a variety of workplaces including a cement works at Greenstreet, Kent, Carr's Pottery at North Shields and a linseed oil mill at nearby Wallsend.⁴⁰ The settlement dependent on Price's Candle Works at Bromborough Pool, Cheshire, supported a co-operative and the Battersea and Wandsworth society was founded by workers from the firm's London plant. Nor was the importance of the large workplace restricted to manufacturing industry. Railway stations and depôts were the birthplace of several co-operatives and the Edmonton store was started by workers from a large tramshed.⁴¹ Even the rather unlikely situation of a

jail produced societies - amongst the warders rather than the inmates - at Woking and Portland, albeit with no long term success.

Workplaces successfully fostering societies varied considerably in size. Some were amongst the largest units in the whole country, others were important only in the very local context of an individual industrial village. At one extreme were major engineering concerns such as Armstrong's Elswick works on Tyneside which had 6-7,000 on its payroll during the eighteen sixties.⁴² Railway workshops also included substantial units; the Great Eastern works at Stratford was employing 2-3,000 men when the local co-operative was founded in 1860.⁴³ Nine years earlier at the time of the establishment of the first Swindon society the works there had over 1,800 employees.⁴⁴ But co-operatives were also successfully based on rather smaller units. The Durham City society, for example, started amongst the 500 strong workforce of Henderson's carpet factory.⁴⁵ Many of the early supporters of societies in Lancashire and Yorkshire would have worked in mills of a similar size. As figures for 1850 show the average numbers employed in wool, worsted and cotton mills were relatively low (Table 10.2). However, these single averages mask a considerable range of unit sizes. Figures covering eight of the major Lancashire textile centres for 1841 show a minority of very substantial firms; from a total of 804, 51 had a workforce of over 500 and of these 17 employed in excess of 1,000.⁴⁷ Moreover, these

Table 10.2. Average Employment per Mill in the Cotton, Woollen and Worsted Trades, 1850.(46)

	Spinning		Weaving		Spinning & Weaving	
	No. Mills	Workers per Mill	No. Mills	Workers per Mill	No. Mills	Workers per Mill
COTTON						
Cheshire	76	91.3	6	70.0	58	487.2
Derbyshire	36	160.8	4	148.8	13	372.1
Lancashire	517	108.3	196	100.4	436	310.2
Yorkshire	117	82.5	22	65.1	30	219.4
Others	16	135.0	1	566.0	3	613.7
WOOL*						
North	52	26.1	-	0.0	106	76.9
South & Midlands	25	23.3	-	0.0	-	0.0
South-West	106	66.3	-	0.0	23	185.7
Wales	160	9.0	-	0.0	1	133.0
Yorkshire	532	37.9	9	37.0	180	77.8
WORSTED						
Yorkshire	163	106.5	90	165.4	149	254.4
Others	59	89.7	7	118.4	6	243.7

* Regional groupings:

North: Cumberland, Northumberland, Westmoreland, Derbyshire, Cheshire, Lancashire.

South & Midlands: Dorset, Hampshire, Hereford, Leicester, Lincolnshire, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Salop, Surrey.

South-West: Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire.

largest concerns would have accounted for a disproportionate percentage of workers. In Manchester the 9 per cent of firms employing over 500 accounted for nearly 35 per cent of the local cotton workforce while the 29 per cent of firms with a payroll of 100 or fewer employed less than 6 per cent of the total.⁴⁸

In the absence of any general information about individual units it is difficult to judge whether co-operation showed any tendency to be most associated with mills of a particular scale - perhaps, it might be expected with those of a

considerable size. The Ashton society of 1857, for example, started amongst men from one of the largest local mills owned by the Reyner family.⁴⁹ A more general relation between the geographical distribution of co-operative strength in the textile districts and the variation between towns in the size distribution of mills yields no simple conclusion. It is perhaps instructive, however, that the early development of co-operation during the first half of the eighteen fifties in Oldham and Bury, where the average size of cotton mills was relatively small, was more associated with workers in the metals and engineering trades. Moreover, co-operative advance during the sixties and seventies was limited in the Burnley area where the expansion of cotton manufacture was relatively late and individual firms small. But the presence of major textile concerns was no guarantee of success, for co-operative progress was similarly chequered during the third quarter of the century in Preston and Wigan where mills tended to be relatively large. And although many of the towns of southern Lancashire and north-east Cheshire which were the homes of large combined cotton firms, including Ashton, Staleybridge, Mossley, Stockport and Bolton, together with the weaving centre of Blackburn where the trade was organised in similarly substantial units, supported strong and permanent co-operatives from the late eighteen fifties there was only limited interest in such schemes earlier in the decade.

It is impossible to associate co-operative success with a

precisely defined size of unit in any meaningful way. The significance of scale of the workplace was coloured by the context in which it was located. A smaller settlement often revolved around a relatively modest employment unit that would have been of little consequence in a larger town. Indeed some of the earliest co-operatives formed in the villages of the northern textile districts developed amidst an occupational community still largely engaged in domestic production. The closest parallel in the second half of the century probably came with success in the villages of Northamptonshire amongst footwear producers who were still commonly organised in small workshops. By contrast trades operating on a similar scale failed to produce any base for strong co-operatives when swamped by the sheer size and diversity of the larger towns, particularly London and Birmingham.

In broad terms, however, there were parallels between the geography of early co-operative development and regional differentials in the structuring of employment. Societies were generally most numerous and successful in areas of new industrial development which Table 10.3 shows to have been associated with the creation of larger workplace units. Although the figures deriving from the 1851 census are not ideal for the present purpose being records of the workforce of particular employers rather than of individual workplaces—moreover their accuracy is called into question by their incomplete coverage — they do confirm the greater number of large concerns in the North-West and to a lesser extent

Yorkshire. London, by comparison, had more in common with the remainder of southern England in its limited number of large concerns.

Table 10.3. Size of Workforce Employed by Individual Masters, by Region, 1851.(51)

No. of Employees	London		Number of Employers				Wales	
		%	Rest of S. England	%	Midlands	%		%
1-9	11807	86.0	26062	91.5	13536	85.0	3341	91.1
10-49	1705	12.4	2175	7.6	1926	12.1	294	8.0
50-99	137	1.0	161	0.6	242	1.5	21	0.6
100-249	63	0.5	41	0.1	162	1.0	10	0.3
250+	17	0.1	42	0.1	68	0.4	-	0.0

	North		North-West		Yorkshire	
		%		%		%
1-9	4362	87.3	11333	81.3	5509	84.7
10-49	537	10.7	1718	12.3	792	12.2
50-99	50	1.0	320	2.3	98	1.6
100-249	41	0.8	333	2.4	69	1.1
250+	6	0.1	227	1.6	33	0.5

Regional differentials in firm size were a reflection of the basic economic geography of England and Wales. There were, however, some contrasts within as well as between trades which may have contributed to the differential success of co-operation in several areas with common elements to their occupational structures. Note has already been made of the contrasting performance of co-operation on individual coalfields. In part this reflected variations in the size of pits and in the occupational and residential organisation of their workforce. Co-operative success in the North-East was in an area where large pits were common. In 1861 the average workforce of South Durham pits exceeded 200 men, rising to

over 300 by 1884. In areas, including Lancashire and south Staffordshire, where co-operation was less widespread amongst the mining population small pits survived. In the late eighties the typical south Staffordshire colliery employed only seventy men. A corollary of its small size was its short operational life. This made more difficult the development of a workplace-based grouping and it was less likely that any such identity would be consolidated by the establishment of a relatively self-contained residential community focussed around a pit, of the type that was common in North-East England and the base for many co-operatives. Instead miners were dispersed throughout the urban agglomeration of the industrial Black Country.⁵²

The importance of the workplace as a source of communal identity is a theme explored by Joyce with particular reference to the textile districts. His conclusions give breadth to the present argument

The sense of place which was at the time the bedrock of community was moulded by work and its system of authority as much as by any other force. The character of factory-town growth, and the nature of the factory workforce (above all in textiles), meant that the factory itself was a principal source of stability and local identification in the post-1850 Northern towns.⁵³

Other authors have noted the importance of the factory village, sometimes as a distinctive part of a greater urban whole, in a variety of contexts. Indeed as Crossick's work on Woolwich demonstrates the workplace community could have⁵⁴

real significance even within the largest of urban
agglomerations.⁵⁵ Group identity was reflected in the success
of the co-operative that bore the Arsenal's name. Many of the
most enduring of the other metropolitan societies can also be
tied to a particular large workplace.⁵⁶ Parallel instances
can be provided for Birmingham, another city where small
workshops retained a substantial share of local employment.
One of the earliest societies founded in Handsworth was
associated with Bolton and Watt's Soho works and several of
the more lasting ventures were located there and in the
adjacent district of Smethwick where many of Birmingham's
larger factories were concentrated.

The communality of the factory settlement derived not just
from the collection of workers into a single large unit, but
from the interaction of this with other linkages. The bonds
between groups of workers may have been reinforced by common
origins amongst migrants, by religion and although the
various popular institutions were often a product of an
association that began in the workplace they helped to
reinforce existing linkages. The greater the density of the
social network and the more various the spheres in which the
same individuals interacted the greater their mutual
identification, the more likely the spread of information and
the general acceptance and implementation of ideas endorsed
by communal leaders.⁵⁷ In many districts the most important
complement to association in the workplace was, however,
residential contiguity and persistence.

There are considerable problems in identifying precisely the forces which encourage the development of a spirit of communality within a group or settlement. As Dennis notes a deeper identification does not automatically follow from simple continuity of association. However, he concludes

it is difficult to imagine a community according to any popular conception of that term whose members were not relatively persistent and not engaged in social
58
interaction.

With a subject such as co-operation there is the further qualification that not every locality imbued with a sense of community spawned formal institutional expressions of this
59
identity. Again it is unlikely that institutions would start or succeed without a degree of stability amongst their membership; although progress was less likely in settlements that were suffering absolute economic and social stagnation.

One of the most basic influences on stability was the simple pace of population growth. In the rawest and newest of settlements the very speed of their expansion, often drawing in an immigrant population from a variety of areas and backgrounds, may have hampered the development of any strong sense of collective identity. Some settlements had the character of a temporary colony in which workers were quickly gathered together for a short period for a specific task, often the exploitation of mineral resources under short term

leases. In such circumstances there was little point in either the workers or the employer investing time and money in the development of social provision. Moreover, the character of the population attracted by such work was often inimical to the emergence of any interest in institutions of self-help. Comment on parts of the South Wales coalfield at mid-century noted that

whatever is unsettled or lawless, or roving or characterless among working men, as long as bodily strength subsists, has felt an attraction to this district, and a surety of ready acceptance and good wages which very few other districts have afforded to so great a degree.⁶⁰

Even amongst the larger and more permanent of the new industrial centres extremes of population growth perhaps worked against the ready progress of co-operation. Certainly the need and opportunity for its development was not automatically followed by its successful execution. In Middlesbrough stores founded in 1851, 1860 and 1865 all failed and it was not until 1867 that co-operation took firm root in the town. At Barrow-in-Furness the original society of 1860 did survive but its initial performance was unimpressive at a time when co-operatives were expanding steadily in other north-western towns. From a membership of 174 in December 1863 it declined to 143 four years later;⁶¹ only subsequently was there sustained expansion.

It would be most satisfactory to relate the population

record of individual settlements to their experience of co-operation and other collective activity with precision. However, the difficulty of obtaining accurate population totals for many of the most rapidly expanding centres precludes this. It is possible to examine any relationship more generally at the level of registration districts. Given the variety of circumstances which gave rise to co-operation and the regional differentials in its progress it is not surprising that there is no simple and consistent correlation between co-operative strength and the pace of population growth. Figures 10.1 to 10.3 show the range of pairings of the two variables. But there is some suggestion of the difficulties of establishing co-operation strongly in areas of most rapid population growth (c.f. Table 3.3). One of the several characteristics which favoured co-operative success in the textile districts and other areas where the movement later achieved strength was their rate of population increase which struck a compromise between the dislocation of the most expansive areas and the economic and social stagnation of the slow growing and declining districts.

In areas where an industrial base stimulated steady but not explosive population increase a large workplace could provide the focus for a residential grouping that was self-contained both geographically and in terms of its social identity. The reinforcing ties of employment and residence found their simplest expression in smaller industrial communities where the domination of a large workplace could be almost complete. But a similar relationship seems to have

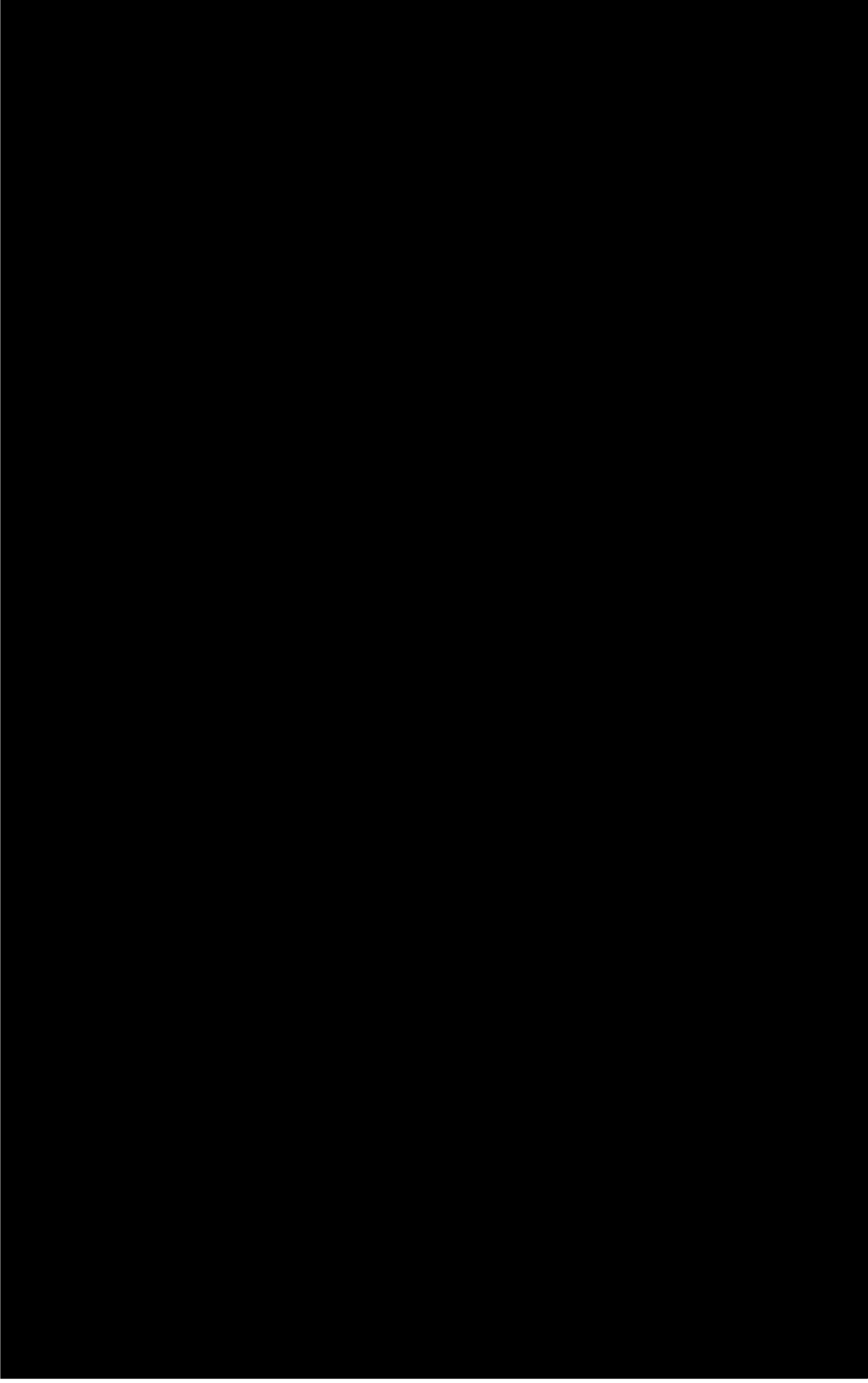


Fig. 10.1. Co-operative Membership 1862 and Population Growth 1851-61
by Registration District.

Source: P.P. 1863 XXIX; P.P. 1863 LIII Pt I.

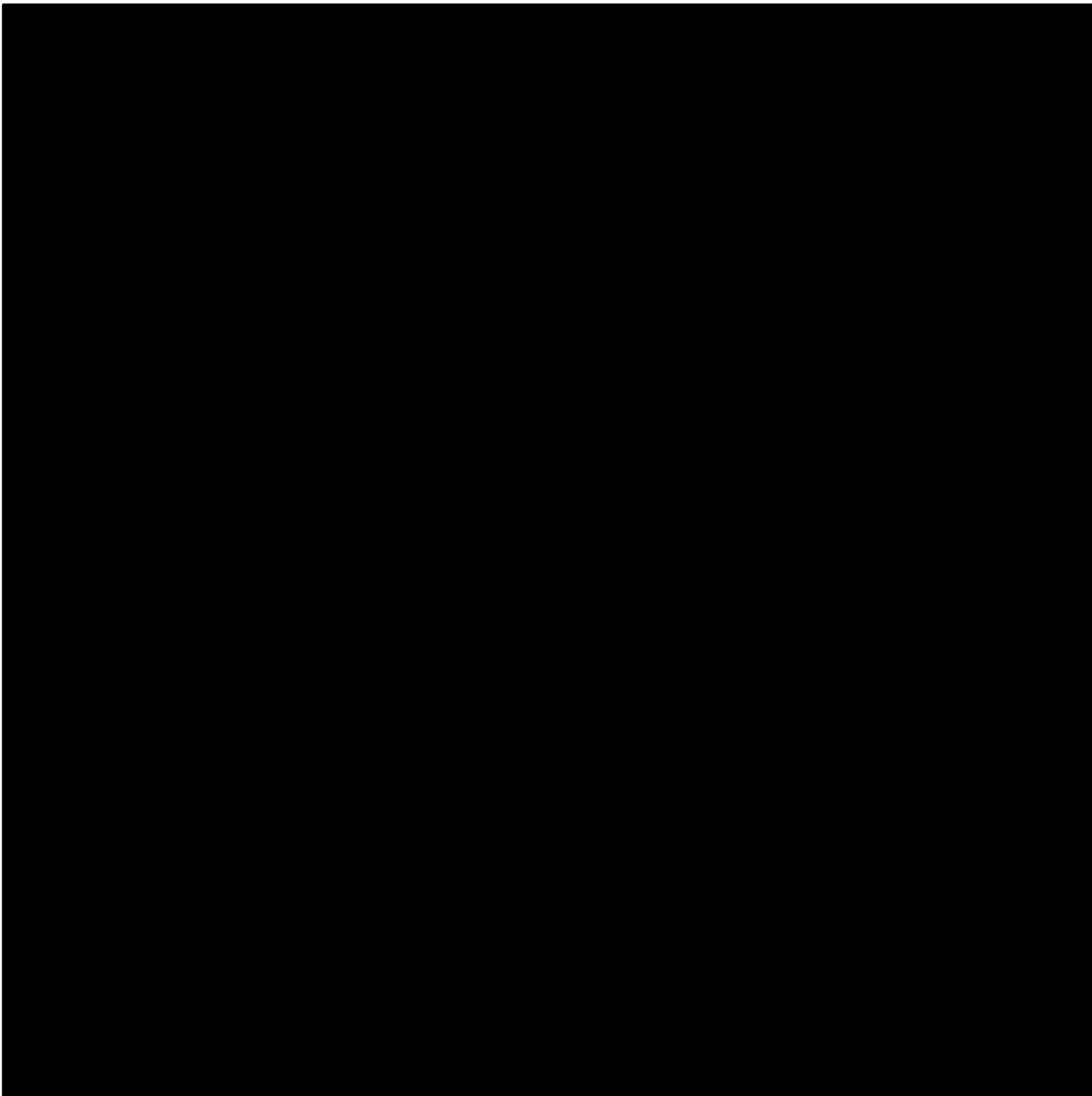
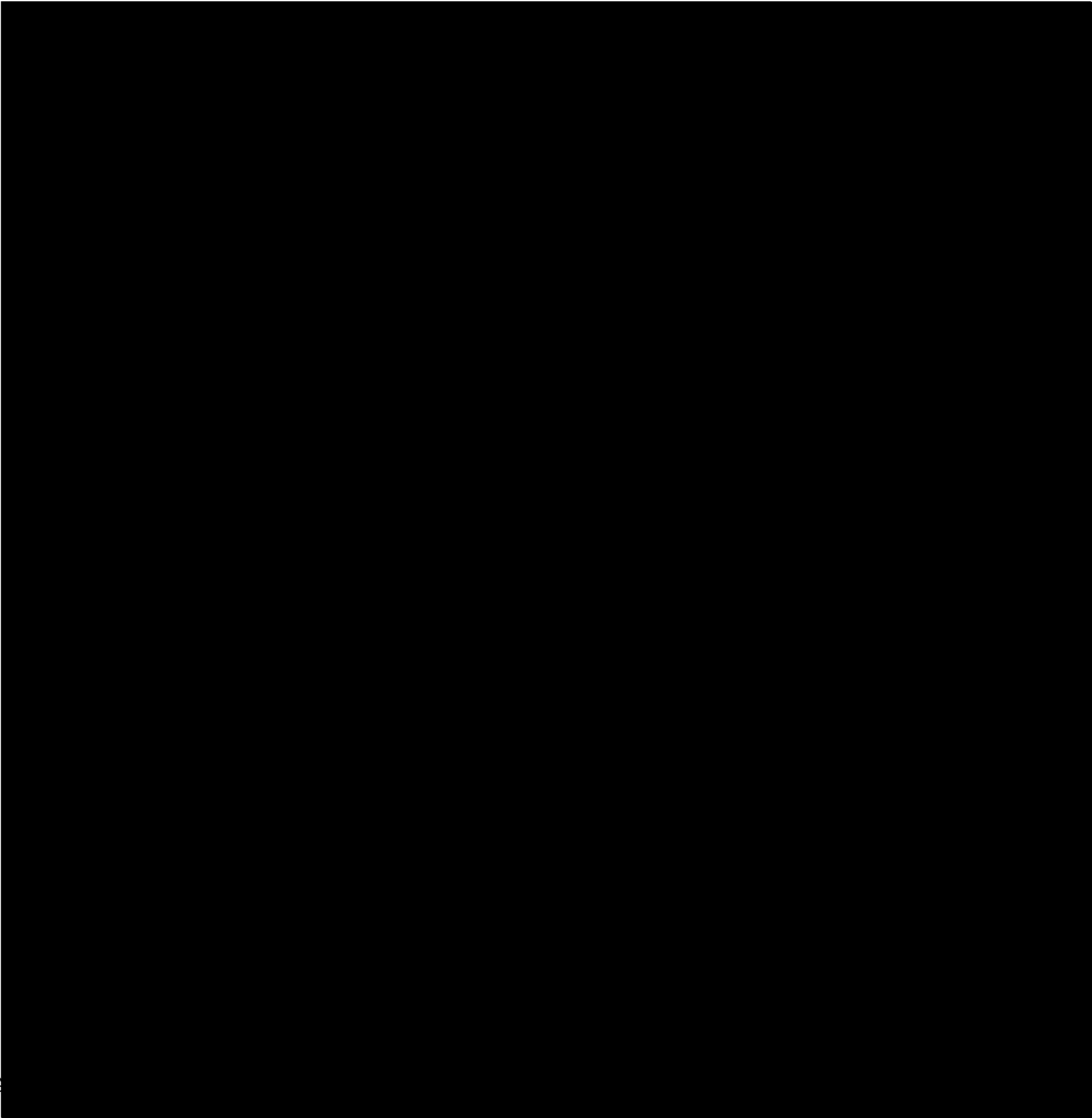


Fig. 10.2. Co-operative Membership 1931 and Population Growth 1871-31
by Registration District.

Source: P.P. 1982 LXVI; P.P. 1983 LXXX.



A
B

been retained within larger industrial towns which developed a cellular structure with major individual workplaces forming the focus of a surrounding residential community.⁶² Several recent studies of towns around mid-century have suggested that proximity to the workplace was a key factor influencing residential structures. Socially heterogeneous neighbourhoods developed adjacent to particular factories containing their entire workforce.⁶³ Other indices reinforce the impression of separate identities of areas within industrial towns. The study of marriage patterns within Huddersfield by Dennis highlights the distinctiveness of districts including Primrose Hill and Lockwood, both of which had for a time their own co-operatives separate from the main Huddersfield society.⁶⁴ In other of the substantial textile centres including Oldham and Blackburn there were several societies which concentrated their strength in the different districts of the town. But it was equally likely for a single society to enlarge its constituency from an individual factory neighbourhood to serve a whole town with branches in the various districts. The most spectacular instance of this was the Leeds co-operative originating from discussion at Benyon's flax mill in Holbeck, which by 1900 operated eighty stores throughout the city and in smaller neighbours including Garforth and Otley.⁶⁵

Individual instances point to the importance of continuity of employment as a force for stability, either tying workers to a particular address or providing a lasting point of

association amidst a pattern of localised residential
circulation.⁶⁶ Joyce notes that some textile workers had a
life long link with a single mill. This applied mainly to
male employees but their persistence tied a whole family to a
given locale. He also suggests that long service could be
found in other sectors in northern industrial towns, notably
amongst mature skilled men employed by larger concerns in the
engineering and metals trades.⁶⁷ Bell's study of Edwardian
Middlesbrough also shows employment persistence in these
sectors.⁶⁸ Overall Joyce suggests that residential stability
was increasing in the Lancashire towns during the later
nineteenth century.⁶⁹

There are insufficient case studies of individual towns to
allow detailed conclusions from comparison of residential
persistence rates across space and time.⁷⁰ However, some
generalisation is possible which can be related to the
success of co-operation in individual towns and others of a
similar social and economic character. Allowing for
difference of area and population it appears that relatively
high rates of persistence were commonly recorded in
prosperous manufacturing towns and smaller industrial
settlements which commonly fostered strong co-operatives.⁷¹
However, as suggested above residential stability was no
guarantee of the development of societies. While towns such
as Leicester and Huddersfield supported successful societies,
progress was more problematical in Preston and St. Helens
which had comparable persistence rates. Indeed in its record
of co-operation St. Helens paralleled Wigan where residential

turnover was greater.

A degree of stability in workplace and residence was one amongst the several factors which offered the potential for co-operative development in northern industrial towns. It follows to ask to what extent they were marked out from other centres where the co-operative record was poorer. High rates of residential turnover were certainly a force hampering the progress of societies in ports and all larger cities. Contemporaries contrasted the latter with the towns of the industrial north. Consideration of the movement's poor record in London and Birmingham noted

continuous changes with regard to work and residence amongst workers which

prevents that personal knowledge which they should have
73
of each other for successful co-operation.

High mobility rates did not curb attempts at co-operation in London but they contributed to the difficulties of societies in recruiting members. Even amongst the small minority who did join a society many were quickly lost to the movement by
74
a change of residence. The problem was exacerbated by the fragmentation of London co-operation so that residential movement commonly necessitated a change of society rather than the easier transfer of custom between branches of the same organisation which was possible in many of the larger
75
northern towns. Societies were weakened by a high turnover rate amongst the membership compounding the effects of generally low levels of recruitment. Table 10.4 contrasts the

experience of metropolitan stores with the national total, co-operatives in the North-West and the particular stability of Yorkshire societies.

Table 10.4. Turnover of Co-operative Membership: Members Leaving Co-operatives During the Year 1872 as a Percentage of Total Membership on 31st December 1872.(76)

% Members Leaving	England & Wales		North-West		Yorkshire		Metropolitan	
	No. Socs.	%	No. Socs.	%	No. Socs.	%	No. Socs.	%
0-4.9	195	27.5	33	18.5	65	41.9	9	40.9
5-9.9	231	32.6	65	36.5	59	38.1	2	9.1
10-14.9	129	18.2	49	27.5	20	12.9	2	9.1
15-19.9	65	9.2	12	6.7	4	2.6	6	27.3
20-24.9	31	4.4	5	2.8	1	0.6	1	4.5
25-29.9	28	3.9	8	4.5	1	0.6	1	4.5
30-39.9	10	1.4	4	2.2	2	1.3	-	-
40-49.9	9	1.3	-	-	1	0.6	1	4.5
50+	11	1.6	2	1.1	2	1.3	-	-
Total	709	100.1	178	99.8	155	99.9	22	99.9

Confirmation of the higher rates of metropolitan residential turnover is suggested by Table 10.5 which compares persistence rates found in surveys of working class families in three central London parishes during the forties with figures for several provincial centres. Amongst the latter it is the ports of Liverpool and Cardiff which most nearly approach the low levels of residential stability found in the capital. Other more impressionistic evidence points to the high rates of turnover in London throughout the nineteenth century. Thus at the 1891 Congress Sidney Webb noted the migratory nature of the London poor as a barrier to their co-operative membership.

High rates of residential mobility in the larger cities and ports both reflected and reinforced other social and

Table 10.5. Residential Stability at the Same Address: London and Provincial Centres.(77)

Location	Date	% of Total Households Resident at Same Address for		
		>1 Year	>9 Years	>10 Years
St. George's, Hanover Square	1843	61	12	
St. Margaret's, Westminster	1840	59	4	
St. John's, Westminster	1840	45	3	
York	1844	76		21
Manchester	1868	74		18
Liverpool	1851	60		18
Cardiff	1884	75		13
Leicester	1871	76		ND

and economic circumstances which worked against co-operative development. Changes of residence amongst the poor were often associated with the persistence of casual and seasonal employment, particularly on the docks but also in the larger cities amongst a wider range of workers engaged in the production of consumer goods. Their low and irregular earnings, themselves working against co-operative membership, made mobility more likely with moves to avoid rent debts and in search of cheaper accommodation. However, the importance of established personal contacts in obtaining work and credit commonly restricted movement to a very local sphere. It seems likely that population circulation took place on a geographical scale that was no more extensive than elsewhere, but at a faster pace and outside the context of any reinforcing focus of long term neighbourhood identity such as that provided by larger workplaces.

By its very nature casual employment, even when adopted in

larger employment units including some London factories,⁸²
precluded the establishment of a stable workplace group.

The difficulties of generating any communal identity were sometimes compounded by the way in which work was organised.

This was the case in the docks where extreme job specialization and consequent petty jealousies helped foster a fierce individualism and a scorn for the discipline of
⁸³

united activity. In many trades in which casual and piecework prevailed, however, individual operations were small scale. There was a particular lack of any basis for association in the sweated trades. Increasingly in the production of items such as clothing, footwear and furniture the workshop system declined and workers suffered the ultimate isolation of domestic production. They were largely confined to their own homes by the need to work long hours
⁸⁴
even to subsist on the low rates of pay.

In London, and indeed in Birmingham, it was not manufacturing that was lacking, but the semi-skilled factory trades that were often the back-bone of co-operative success
⁸⁵

elsewhere. During the nineties all trades using factory production probably accounted for less than 15 per cent of
⁸⁶

the metropolitan adult labour force. The employment of workers in small manufacturing units was compounded by the importance of service employment. The largest single occupational category in the capital was that of domestic servants. They too were relatively isolated being scattered in individual households making it difficult to develop any collective organisation. Nor did the social circumstances of

their work, the close association with an individual employer, encourage any identification with wider working class activity.⁸⁷ Moreover, the specific retailing services of co-operation were often of no interest as food was provided as part of their payment.

Difficulties of developing and sustaining collective action arising from the limited basis of residential or workplace identity were compounded by the sheer size of the largest cities. It was often difficult to draw attention to co-operative developments let alone develop the sense of communal identification that helped to sustain stores elsewhere. Henry Pitman wrote of London as

an overgrown, unorganised human wilderness, where hardly anybody knows or cares much for his next-door neighbour.⁸⁸

This made inevitable, he suggested, the prevalence of small and unsuccessful attempts at co-operation. A wide range of institutions felt their progress to be handicapped by such conditions. Many of them were the imported products of initiative in the newly assertive provinces which usurped the role that London had played during the eighteenth century in the development of popular and radical activity.⁸⁹

VI

It is important that the contrasts between the social and communal identification in factory settlements and other urban centres should not be too crudely drawn. The geography

of co-operative success by no means defines the limits of working class association. Contemporary comment often stressed the degree of identification between men in individual workshops. The possibility of continued discussion during working hours in a way that was impossible amidst the noise and discipline of most factories made workshops a better environment for the circulation of ideas, including those of social and political reform.⁹⁰ Indeed in some smaller settlements, notably Northamptonshire shoemaking centres, workshop based industry did support a strong local co-operative sector.

The dispersal of producers amongst individual workshops was partly offset by the grouping of particular trades in distinct quarters in cities such as London and Birmingham.⁹¹ Vance's work on mid-century Birmingham suggests moreover that in some trades residential patterns were closely tied to workplace in a way that was not dissimilar to that in the larger factory communities.⁹² Against such a background it is clear that any examination of the geography of co-operation must look not simply to the presence or absence of association amongst groups of workers but also at aspects of their daily life and work, and the manner in which this experience coloured their capabilities, attitudes and aspirations.

The scale of the employment unit under the factory system assumes a greater importance than its role simply in assembling together a large body of workers. It is the wider impact of conditions in the factory community that Tiller

considers in her attention to co-operation in Halifax. She writes

The very things which some of these people [mill operatives] sought to escape or mitigate - the long hours, trying conditions and monotony of the factory system, seem to have produced in them an experience of discipline, of being organised and working together which was central to the success of the sophisticated organisational forms co-operation took in their towns. Their knowledge of intensive capitalism as expressed in the mill and their common experience of living standards ... bore fruit in the ideas of co-operation. The potential of united effort for their own benefit was clear and could be defined in opposition to the system
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in which they worked.

Factory life gave workers a model and structure for the development of their own large scale organisations. Hence in part the contrasts between the scale and sophistication of popular association in different areas noted in Section III. Conditions within the factory equipped the local population with the human resources to sustain organisational developments such as co-operation. Moreover, the scale and structure of these and most other institutions within the local economic and social system demanded that any successful working class response had to be collective. There was little prospect of any other solution to problems such as that of food supply. Workers could not realistically look to escape

from the prevailing economic and social system through individual advancement, thus the alternative was to combine with others to stimulate reform from within. Where large factories were the norm workers could not alone hope to rise to the status of employer.⁹⁴ Any such advance had to be attempted through joint effort and indeed the aims of some co-operatives included the raising of capital for productive schemes. In practice, however, such plans were only infrequently realised and then usually in a debased form that was little different from a conventional joint-stock company.

An alternative approach was to accept the basic framework of capitalism and thus conditions of employment in the private factories as given and to look outside the workplace to other spheres in which collective effort could raise living standards. The appeal of consumers' co-operation was perhaps enhanced by the set-back sustained by the emerging co-operative productive sector in the cotton industry during the cotton famine of the early sixties.⁹⁵ Advocation of co-operative retailing as a means of improving the material conditions of working class life sometimes presented it as a superior alternative to direct confrontation with employers through industrial disputes. In 1862 John Rowlinson of Bury reported

We have prevented a strike amongst the colliers at Wigan. I addressed them last Monday night...: a co-operative society was formed after the meeting... I have just received an invitation to Colne: 1,400 weavers are under notice to strike; but I have written to them

not to strike, and I will give them a better plan for raising wages [i.e. co-operation], and how we succeeded with the Wigan colliers....⁹⁶

Some enthusiasts saw co-operation as allowing the development of greater harmony between employers and workers. It was, moreover, a way of improving conditions for all workers as consumers rather than individual strong sectional groups within the workforce winning advances for themselves partly at the expense of their peers.⁹⁷

It would be misleading, however, to place too much stress on the coincidence between co-operative expansion during the latter half of the nineteenth century and a climate of industrial relations that was more quiescent than during the century's second quarter. Bitter industrial disputes which, as in the 1878 cotton strike and lockout, spilled over into violence⁹⁸, must have involved co-operative members. It would be difficult to sustain any explanatory suggestion that areas of particular co-operative strength were also those of especial industrial harmony.

Where employment was organised in smaller units a range of concerns and aspirations can be identified amongst workers that were rather different from those associated with the factory system and which were less encouraging to co-operative trading. Moreover, different sizes of employment unit produced distinctions in relations within peer groups and between masters and men. In some cases there was a degree of identity between these last two groups which perhaps

compounded notions of craft exclusiveness leading to an isolation from wider working class movements such as co-operation. There was also potential for social control by the employer over his workforce in situations where there was direct contact between individuals. Thus it was suggested that co-operative development was difficult in areas where workshop production predominated as

The employer is often on intimate terms with the employed, and after a long service, their interests seem bound together. I know of men who keep aloof from the movement, not because they do not see its value and its justice, but because they will not do violence to their ⁹⁹ feelings by acting in opposition to their employer....

In some cases the identification between workers and employer reflected the lack of a clear distinction with men moving in both directions between the two groups. Small-scale manufacture offered a realistic prospect that workmen could individually improve their economic and social position. In the secondary metals industries and in a variety of other craft production trades there was a continued role for the small master. Indeed in some sectors an increasing breakdown of the process of production into a series of independently executed stages made it easier to become a small subcontractor. In the secondary metal trades of Sheffield or Birmingham it was possible to rent room and power to set up ¹⁰⁰ as a small master on a capital of £60-100. It was part of the purpose of many of the money clubs which flourished in these centres to aid the accumulation of such funds. However,

much smaller single figure sums were quoted during the second half of the century as sufficient for a worker to set himself up as an independent producer in trades such as cabinet making, tailoring, instrument making, brush making, baking, wireworking and saddlery.

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Not all workers would have sought or been capable of advancement to the status of a small master. It does seem likely, however, that such concerns absorbed the attention of many of the more enterprising and able individuals; men who in other circumstances might have organised activity such as co-operation. Certainly contemporaries saw the prospects for the movement in London and Birmingham suffering because of

the facilities which exist for becoming small manufacturers.

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It is perhaps significant that the most successful development of co-operation amongst workshop trades, that in the Northampton shoemaking centres, followed in the wake of unsuccessful industrial action to resist the introduction of machinery in 1859. Although the scale of production was not immediately changed mechanisation did increase the capital commitment and thus the difficulties of entry to the ranks

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of masters. Defeat in an attempt to preserve traditional rights in one area perhaps led to greater enthusiasm for alternative means to improve material conditions outside work. Some funds intended to support the strike were diverted after its collapse to the foundation of co-operative

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stores.

The struggles of the Northamptonshire shoemakers to resist mechanisation were perhaps illustrative of a concern common to many workshop trades, the attempted maintenance of traditional working practices. Working conditions in the long established factory trades were generally fairly stable and in conflict between employer and employee the issue of wages assumed a greater importance. A concern for the material reward for work was clearly related to the area of family finances directly addressed by consumers' co-operation. Real income and living standards could be bolstered not only by pressure for an increase in money wages but also by the co-operative dividend and value in retail trading at the store. Retailing, however, had little immediate connection with industrial struggles which were concerned as much with rights and practices within the workplace as with the resultant earnings. The organisation of trade society resistance to mechanisation or sweating, sometimes reaching heights such as the Sheffield outrages in the local metal trades during the mid sixties, perhaps distracted attention from other forms of popular activity which may have seemed to have had less immediate relevance. ¹⁰⁵ In defeat some groups, principally the Northamptonshire shoemakers, did turn to co-operation for compensation; for others the decay of their trade was so rapid and complete - large sections of industries such as clothing, footwear and furniture production passed into sweating - that the capacity for any substantial initiative was undermined.

VII

Contrasts between trades organised on a different basis need to be considered both in terms of the impact on workers' attitudes to long term advancement and the related concerns of earning, spending and saving which had a more immediate impact on the progress of co-operation. If the size and discipline of many large workplaces fostered the development of the organisational skills which aided co-operative success, other aspects of factory employment helped to explain the form which the activity took. This supplements earlier argument concerning the stimulus given by the food supply problems of many industrial communities. Factory production with its fixed hours and pace of work set by machinery was often associated with a greater regularity of income. This in its turn encouraged a more provident attitude towards earnings, expenditure and saving that was at the root of much of co-operation's success.

Cole suggested that co-operation

consolidated its position mainly by appealing to the
106
better off sections of the working class.

Certainly the importance within co-operation of societies maintained as a reaction to adversity by groups rendered marginal by economic change decreased during the second half of the nineteenth century. There is some local evidence that co-operatives particularly directed their services towards the relatively well-paid. The Leicester society, for example, reported

Our policy in selecting the branches [branch stores] has been to fix on those districts where large portions of what are sometimes called the elite of the working classes live; and just in proportion as that policy is carried out are our branch stores successful.

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But the strong development of co-operation amongst textile workers might better be suggested to reflect the relative regularity of their incomes, and their improvement during the middle decades of the century, rather than any especial prosperity. As a whole textile workers were of middling rank as regards pay and skill amongst the rest of their class. Within such trades there was little sign that co-operation was significantly biased towards the more highly paid occupations. Samples taken from the records of new members joining the Rochdale Pioneers society (Table 10.6) show no over-representation of supervisory workers or of the so-called "contrived aristocracy" of male spinners. Estimates of average earnings in the cotton industry in 1860 (the Rochdale membership would also have included woollen workers although distinction between the two trades was rarely made in the records) suggest earnings for spinners of around twenty four shillings per week, a level slightly exceeded by the twenty five shillings paid to dressers and sizers. However, the society also included members whose individual earnings would have been lower; these included strippers (14/6 per week), winders (10/-), reelers (9/6), warpers (11/6) and weavers (12/6).

Table 10.6. Rochdale Pioneers' Co-operative Society:
Occupational Composition of Members Admitted
1848-49, 1855 & 1864.(109)

Occupational Group	Date of Admission					
	Dec. 1848- Dec. 1849		Jan.-Dec. 1855		June 1864	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
General Labourer	10	4	35	7	13	9
Textiles*	146	53	234	46	28	19
Dress	10	4	18	4	5	3
Building & Woodworking	22	8	32	6	12	8
Engineering, Toolmaking & Metals	19	7	45	9	7	5
Printing	3	1	7	1	-	-
Food/Drink Production	2	1	13	3	-	-
Other/Unspecified						
Manufacture	13	5	38	8	12	8
Mining & Quarrying	7	3	9	2	2	1
Clerical/Professional	7	3	8	2	4	3
Managerial	2	1	4	1	1	1
Dealers	11	4	28	6	4	3
Warehousing	7	3	15	3	11	8
Transport	3	1	7	1	8	6
Other Services	5	2	2	1	4	3
Agriculture	3	1	11	2	-	-
Unspecified	4	1	-	-	33	23
TOTAL	274	100	506	100	144	100

* Composition of the Textiles Category:

	1848-49	1855		1848-49	1855
Beamer	-	1	Roller Coverer	1	2
Bobbin Soaker	1	-	Roper	1	2
Calico Printer	-	1	Rover	-	1
Carder	8	11	Scavenger	1	-
Cardmaker	1	1	Scourer	1	-
Cardstitcher	1	-	Scutcher	-	1
Carpet Printer	1	-	Sizer	-	3
Cut Looker	1	2	Slubber	8	3
Dresser	-	4	Spinner	20	27
Dyer	1	2	Stripper	-	1
Finisher	1	-	Taker In	-	2
Fuller	9	1	Tenter	1	-
Fulling Miller	-	6	Twiner	3	-
Jobber	3	18	Twister	-	2
Loom Jobber	-	3	Twister In	-	1
Loom Tackler	-	1	Twist Maker Up	-	1
Maker Up	-	1	Warper	18	23
Overlooker	8	21	Weaver	45	78
Reeler	2	1	Willower	2	-
			Woolsorter	8	13

In the wider community there was also evidence of membership amongst unskilled and lower paid workers. Indeed there is some suggestion from the series of figures for Rochdale that over time an increasing proportion of new recruits were drawn from such categories. The chief increases were in the warehouse and carrying trades ancilliary to textiles and amongst general labourers. Data for the society at nearby Middleton also show a fair representation of labourers amongst new members: 13 per cent in a sample of ninety recruits for the period June 1865 to December 1866.¹¹⁰

Of the other trades widely associated with co-operation, engineers did enjoy relatively high wages; but local evidence again shows that co-operation was not confined to the most skilled or prosperous men. Amongst the society in the railway town of Darlington 21.5 per cent of a sample of new members 1869-71 were in semi- or unskilled trades (Table 10.7). Within the town's important engineering and metal working sector 39.3 per cent of co-operative recruits were of this status. Labourers and assistants in the engineering plant participated in the society along with their more skilled and affluent workmates.¹¹¹ Railwaymen were another important sector within both the town's employment structure and co-operative membership. The latter included the well-paid elite of engine drivers but also others such as porters and clerks whose wages while regular were as little as half of those of their highest paid colleagues.

Table 10.7. Darlington Co-operative Society: Occupational Composition of Members Admitted Sept.1869 - Nov. 1872.(112)

		%
General Labourer	7	2
Textiles	6	2
Dress	18	6
Building & Woodworking	38	13
Engineering, Tools, Metals*	105	35
Printing	2	1
Food & Drink Production	2	1
Other/Unspecified		
Manufacture	13	4
Mining & Quarrying	-	0
Clerical/Professional	24	8
Managerial	1	0.3
Dealers	7	2
Warehousing	2	1
Transport	57	20
Other Services	5	2
Agriculture	10	3
TOTAL	297	100

* Composition of the Engineering, Tools, Metals Category:

Blacksmith	10	Roller at Ironworks	1
Whitesmith	2	Helper Roller at Ironworks	1
Boiler Maker	3	Iron Turner	1
Foreman Railway Engineer	1	Iron Founder	1
Engine Fitter	17	Iron Moulder	1
Fitter	4	Foreman at Ironworks	2
Enginesmith at Railway		Mill Furnaceman at	
Shops	1	Ironworks	9
Pattern maker	1	Puddler	4
Turner at Engineworks	1	Forgeman	1
Brass Turner	1	Hammerman	1
Brass Moulder	1	Boiler Maker's Labourer	1
Brass Finisher	1	Engineworks Labourer	1
Tinner	1	Labourer at Wagonshops	2
Tin & Ironplate Worker	1	Stoker at Ironworks	2
Iron Worker	7	Labourer at Ironworks	25

Miners commonly had a more fluctuating income as a result of the direct linkage of their pay to coal prices and the geological vagaries of its extraction. While piece rates were operational some of the variation in earnings was beyond the individual's control; by contrast with similar systems in conventional manufacturing there was no guarantee that any

past shortfall could be made up by future effort. In the North-East at least co-operation seems to have been used as a means of dealing with the irregularities of income; to help offset the decline from the relatively good living standards miners enjoyed during periods of full employment and high coal prices. Co-operative dividends were saved to provide
114
against future hardships.

Other less detailed evidence confirms the presence of a lower paid element within co-operation, although membership was probably less common amongst such groups than for their
115
better paid neighbours. At Failsworth in 1871 it was noted
116
that many members were "very poor" and "in great need".
Twenty years later a delegate from Oldham told the national Congress that

However small men's wages they might become co-
117
operators.

The very size of societies in some of the northern towns does itself suggest the recruitment of workers from a range of different levels of status and payment.

As with many of the social and economic variables discussed in this chapter, even the most favourable circumstances of regular and adequate incomes could not themselves guarantee co-operative development. There were many workers outside the movement whose average earnings were higher than those of some of its strongest supporters. However, in some instances the way in which particular groups were rewarded added to the forces hampering co-operative

progress. In part there was a simple financial barrier to membership; there were also less tangible influences with the development of attitudes to issues such as expenditure and savings which conflicted with those underpinning co-operation.

One source of variation was the interval between payments. Long pay was not necessarily a barrier to co-operative membership. Societies often included, indeed were sometimes dominated by, workers employed under such arrangements. In the main these were men in regular work receiving relatively good wages. In some instances the granting of credit by co-operatives reflected the needs of a membership whose pay was fortnightly or monthly. This was true, for example, of the Crewe society and of many of those on the North-East coalfield.¹¹⁸ The regulation of the credit system by the Blaydon society indicated its links with the fortnightly pay of local miners. It was resolved in 1891 that

no credit be given to members on the Baff week who do not deal on the Pay week.¹¹⁹

It was commonly the case, however, that the strains of long pay intervals on family finances led to habits, particularly extended dependence on credit, which were not easily accommodated within the co-operative system. Where the problems of long pay were compounded by further complications the prospects for co-operation were often poor. One specific instance is the organisation of employment in Cornish mines. The system of subcontracting by miners themselves through tender for the execution of particular pieces of work had several features inimical to co-operation. Payment was not

made until the end of the contract period, usually three to six months, although a monthly subsistence allowance was commonly advanced. The competing tenders forced down piece rates, sometimes to the point where eventual earnings were insufficient to cover advances made during the contract. Thus debt with both employers and shopkeepers was common. Moreover, the manner of allocation of work was divisive, contemporaries noted that

in no case has the divergence of interest between the several small parties of workmen been more strongly brought out than on the setting day at a Cornish
120
mine.

Thus there was little development of collective interests and identity to provide a base for institutions such as co-
121
operatives.

Other areas where co-operation failed to capitalize on its first introduction were those in which the infrequent payment of wages was accompanied by a survival of the truck system, including parts of the coal and iron districts of South Wales. While dealing at the company store was not a general condition of employment, workers wishing to draw wages already earned in advance of the regular monthly pay day were commonly required to take at least a part of this payment in
122
goods. It is difficult to judge what proportion of men were involved in such transactions, but the enmeshing of an element in the workforce within the truck system may have restricted co-operative spread. It is perhaps relevant that

co-operative weakness in South Wales arose not so much from the lack of societies but from their limited individual growth.

Contemporaries noted the unsurprising equation between the absence of money wages and the general weakness of the various institutions of working class providence. Moreover, it was suggested that where the truck system remained strong workers were cowed and apathetic, thus there was little impetus for a change in the system of payment which would open the way for subsequent institutional developments. 123 Co-operation was perhaps particularly resisted by truck masters as a direct challenge to their retailing operations. The conflict was clearest in cases where, unlike the conditional truck common in South Wales, masters regarded dealing as a condition of employment for all their workers. This was most often true of lighter trades, principally hand nailmaking and other Midland hardware trades, framework knitting and handloom weaving, where the system was perpetuated by smaller masters whose own financial survival was often dependent on the return from retailing. Thus the transfer of workers' custom to a co-operative brought the kind of response reported by a framework knitter from Sutton-in-Ashfield to the 1871 Royal Commission on the Truck System

When I joined the Equitable co-operative society, there was no work for me. When I used to go for it I was told "there is nothing for you".

Did he tell you the reason? - He used to say that he looked to them as looked to him. 124

As the secretary of the United Framework Knitters of Nottingham told the Commission

The truck master cannot do with a man who works for him
125
and belongs to a co-operative store.

Societies were not completely excluded from areas where truck persisted but they were weakened by the barrier it presented to the recruitment of some individuals. During the eighteen sixties there were complaints of the problems co-operatives found in recruiting members which suggested experiences similar to those at Sutton-in-Ashfield amongst groups such as the nailers of Lye, hardware workers at Cradley, textile producers at Buckfastleigh and shoemakers at
126

Raunds. But some such societies proved enduring even if only on a modest scale. The Buckfastleigh society of 1869, for example, was still trading at the turn of the century. In the West Midlands, the society at Lye, a stronghold of truck around mid-century, survived for over thirty years (1861-93) and in the prosperity of the early seventies achieved a maximum membership in excess of 800. Nearby Halesowen also had a society founded in 1871. Even in areas where they were most concentrated truck masters did not exercise complete domination over local trade. Larger employers who often abandoned the system after it was legislated against in 1831 provided an alternative source of work, especially for the most capable men. In hand nail making it was estimated in 1871 that \underline{c} 11,000 from a total Midland workforce of \underline{c} 25,000
127
worked for true money wages. These were probably the most

skilled, intelligent and steady men of the type usually responsible for the foundation of co-operatives and forming their chief support. In times of prosperity the numbers of men reliant on the various forms of truck payment would have declined. Thus there were temporary successes which confounded the usual weakness of co-operation in truck districts. Amidst the high wage rates of 1872 it was reported from South Wales that

At Bleanavon ... the men had, by opening out a co-operative store and supporting it, completely taken away
128
the trade from the truck shop.

It is possible to make a general equation between areas and trades where there was a late survival of truck as a perpetual part of the payment system and co-operative weakness. Although, of course, in most cases other local influences have to be taken into account; in South Wales, for example, these included religion, language, cyclical and structural economic change and the particular history of co-operation in the district. In areas where truck was of limited importance during normal times its occasional presence may, however, have spurred the development of a self-help alternative. The temporary expansion of truck in the northern textile districts during the depression of the
129
early eighteen forties probably contributed to the reduced rate of co-operative foundations at the time (Fig. 2.3). In the longer run, however, experience of the inequities of truck may have increased the appeal of alternative sources of supply once the general economic revival allowed workers to

regain greater freedom over the disposal of their incomes.

Truck declined steadily during the second half of the nineteenth century - while still locally important it was estimated in 1871 that only $\underline{c}2$ per cent of the national population were dependent on the system ¹³⁰ - but the progress of regular employment and a consequent stability of money wages which would have provided a favourable financial base for co-operation was not universal. Even amongst groups of workers who were relatively well paid contemporaries suggested that irregularity of earnings and work rhythms acted against co-operation. This seems to have been true, for example, of the potters of north Staffordshire, an area in which co-operation remained relatively weak despite its early introduction. Although employed together in large units, the potters' working practices smacked more of the workshop than they did of the factory with the survival of unmechanised production on piece rates. Individuals had considerable control over the rhythm of their own work and thus their earnings. It was this freedom which was invoked to explain the limited success of co-operation. Comment on the potters' attitudes to money contrasted the effects of their system of work with that in a mechanised factory, noting that

machinery seems to lead to habits of calculation. The pottery workers were woefully deficient in this matter; they lived like children without any calculating forecast of their work or its result. In some of the more northern counties this habit of calculation has

made them keenly shrewd in many conspicuous ways. Their great co-operative societies would never have arisen to such immense and fruitful development but for the calculating induced by the use of machinery. ¹³¹

The element of individual control over work and thus perhaps flexible attitudes towards income and expenditure would have been one factor amongst the several which worked against co-operative development by craftsmen engaged in workshop production. It is noticeable that areas and trades - involving both small and large workplaces - in which practices such as the observance of St. Monday persisted included those where co-operative advance was halting: the workshop hardware trades of the Midlands, some of the heavier metalworking sectors of Birmingham, the Sheffield metal industries, South Wales ironworks, the iron, glass and sheetmetal works of the Black Country as well as the ¹³² Potteries.

Irregularity in work and payment persisted throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in the largest cities and ports where casual employment was of particular importance. Indeed the position of some workers deteriorated during the century. Tailors, for example, saw their daily pay replaced by piece work, which both forced down earnings and made their ¹³³ level more variable. Other trades including building workers and dockers experienced increased uncertainty in the pattern of their employment with the replacement of daily by ¹³⁴ hourly hiring. The deleterious effects of casual and piece work employment on the development of a steady communal base

for co-operation have already been noted. However, such problems were often reinforced by the effects on incomes and the associated development of attitudes towards an individual's financial position. Irregularity of work in such cases was not so much the result of the exercise of individual freedom but the force of outside circumstances: the general state of trade, seasonal fluctuations in demand, weather conditions and, in the docks, the state of tides and winds. Problems were exacerbated by the presence of a pool of surplus labour which meant that un- or underemployment was common.¹³⁵ This surplus also depressed rates of pay so that even when individuals were fully employed their living standards were low. Consequently there was a heavy reliance on credit and charity.¹³⁶

It was perhaps the irregularity of earnings that was most destructive of the careful management of family budgets on which co-operative membership usually rested. While extending short term credit to workers in regular employment co-operatives did not offer the seasonal credit that was part of the family economy of many casual workers, who thus remained tied to private traders.¹³⁷ Poverty did not induce providence; during periods of prosperity there seems to have been less interest in saving to provide against future hardships than in the securement of some present enjoyment to compensate for past and future miseries. Thus a feature of metropolitan culture discussed by Stedman Jones was the importance of the immediate pleasures of the clubs, pubs,

music halls and sporting events. In part the lack of interest in the future was born of a fatalistic acceptance of the inability of workers to combat crushing outside economic forces. There was little of the optimism which motivated some co-operative leaders elsewhere. Moreover, the availability of charity, while solving immediate problems could lead to the sapping of any development of independent initiative.

Thus it was amongst the casual trades and in the centres where they were chiefly concentrated that co-operation often showed its greatest urban weakness. It was such workers who attracted particular attention in the 1891 Congress discussion of the difficulties of introducing co-operation to the poor. Concern was largely voiced by those with experience of metropolitan poverty, by contrast representatives from small and medium-sized northern towns where casual work was much less important seemed more sanguine about the capacity of co-operation to recruit the poorer workers of their areas who although low paid were often in regular employment. Speakers such as the Webbs argued that co-operation would make very little progress amongst the casual and sweated trades if their financial and social circumstances remained unaltered. Thus in a significant reversal of the early emphasis on self-help and individual initiative they looked to action by the state, demanding support for campaigns to win legal reforms of working and living conditions and to give greater powers in areas such as housing provision to municipal authorities. In this way it was hoped to

make our residuum fit co-operation.

It was not until the present century that there was any appreciable progress in this direction.

VIII

This conclusion both reviews the main points raised by this chapter and notes some of the limitations of the material presented here. Previous chapters have concentrated on the business functions of co-operation, this is complemented here by a clearer recognition of its distinctive identity as a form of popular initiative. The degree of co-operative success did not display any consistent relationship with that of other bodies in which workers found an outlet for their talents. It was rare for co-operation to succeed where popular institutions were generally lacking, but the established presence of such organisations was no guarantee of co-operative progress. In part this reflected the internal diversity of particular working class initiatives. Just as co-operation itself took on different forms in different localities so did other general names embrace bodies with variety in their constitutions, aims and states of health. Not all were equally appropriate as a foundation for co-operation. It is possible to trace some direct links between co-operatives and existing bodies. But in other cases there was no development of the organisational and financial resources on which co-operation relied. Moreover, some institutions reflected a preoccupation with other issues such

as employment conditions and political representation which may have deflected attention away from co-operation.

A recognition of the variety of popular activity leads to consideration of the manner in which its local form was related to the wider economic and social circumstances of different communities. These were influences on both the progress of working class initiative in toto - the development of group identity, organisational capacity and the social freedom to give these practical expression - and the particular ends to which it was directed. In the present case the commercial need and opportunity for new entrants into shopkeeping assumes specific importance but local conditions of retail trade were just part of an inter-linking pattern of social and economic variables which influenced the rôles played by workers within a community. The basic structure of this complex was in large part a reflection of the form of the local economic base. Here an attempt has been made to tease out the main strands of the relationship between economy and co-operative initiative to illuminate the associations outlined in Chapter Nine. This includes consideration both of the role of economic forces in the shaping of the general social climate and the structures of power and opportunity within a community, and the way in which the world of work impinged directly upon co-operative development.

As an ideal it might be suggested that communities in which co-operatives enjoyed particular success were commonly those in which general economic buoyancy produced an expanding

working class consumer demand which was increasingly unsatisfied quantitatively and/or qualitatively by private traders. But the population increase which contributed to this growing retail market was not such as to compromise the strength of collective identity which characteristically developed around the larger employment units and the residential communities formed by their workforce. Employment together in factories and mines stimulated the emergence of an assertive working class consciousness and aided the perpetuation of local communal groupings through the rapid integration of newcomers. The experience of work also helped to structure a response to industrial economy and society that was of necessity collective. The size, discipline and organisational complexity of the mechanised factory were paralleled by that of a range of popular bodies, including co-operative societies. Moreover, in the case of co-operation the rôle of employment conditions in the development of particular financial conditions and attitudes was of specific significance. It was not just the level of pay that was important, but the manner of payment and the rhythm of work. The financial steadiness, the careful approach to spending and saving, often at the root of co-operative membership, was seemingly a product of the regularity of conditions within the workplace. Such a general statement of the forces which influenced co-operative success thus includes inter-related factors reflecting the general economic, commercial and social conditions of a settlement, the strength of working

class community and its relationship with other strata of society, and the individual financial circumstances and attitudes of workers.

It is possible to point out the several ways in which locations where co-operative success was commonly limited - the largest cities, the ports, exploding industrial colonies, slow growing market towns, agricultural districts - diverged from the ideal which was approached most closely in towns and villages with a steadily expanding base of factory manufacturing or large scale mining. But it is much more difficult to introduce a high degree of precision into any account of the internal structure of the complex of explanatory variables. Given the fragmentary and qualitative nature of data concerning several elements within the complex any attempt by statistical analysis to clarify the relative importance of individual components is precluded. It seems quite possible that there was no geographical or historical consistency in the importance they assumed. Thus even after the presentation of general principles it is difficult to give a precise explanation of the state of co-operation in any particular area. The problems are reinforced by the recognition that such an explanation cannot deal with the individual settlement in isolation but must examine its wider relations with the outside world - the issues of location and its consequences for general perceptions of co-operation and information resources available for its conduct raised in earlier chapters are important in this context.

Any extension of the analysis presented here would seem to

require the development of a series of more detailed comparative studies at a smaller spatial scale. Regional and district studies adopting an approach more akin to that used here than that of the existing histories of individual co-operatives would put the narrative of local development more firmly into the context of a wider social, economic and political history. It might be possible to use the documentation surviving for a number of societies to establish more clearly the role of co-operation within a given settlement or area. Use has already been made of the records of other institutions to shed light on the social networks and social geography of particular towns. The study of co-operation could be extended in such a direction with interesting results, leading perhaps to a refinement of the analysis presented here as more is discovered about the character of its membership and detailed local functioning. It seems sensible therefore to note that the material given here is but a fraction of that potentially available - in a sense it represents a beginning and not an end.

NOTES

1. Concentration of middle-class employment for the entire cotton districts in Manchester meant that even the larger of the surrounding towns had a population predominantly composed of operatives. Within the major cities contemporaries noted the increased residential segregation of the middle-class, see for example Engels 1969, 79. Modern studies including Dennis 1977 on Huddersfield confirm this pattern.
2. Joyce 1980.
3. R.J. Waller 1983, 89-90.
4. Newbiggin & District Industrial & Provident Society Ltd. 1963, 5 ; Co-operative Union 1900.
5. Seeley 1973, 316.
6. Northumberland Record Office 821/4.
7. For example, the Middlesbrough society was started largely on the initiative of the Quaker ironmasters Fox and Head amongst the workforce of their Newport Rolling Mills: Co-operative Union 1901, 36.
8. Macfarlane 1976, 113.
9. Co-op. 15 June 1866.
10. Information for the 117 societies included here was derived from the Co-operator, Co-operative News, Christian Socialist, Leader and individual society histories detailed in the bibliography. This provides an indication of the range and relative importance of

sources of collective identity, however, it is prudent not to attach any particular value to the precise figures given. It must be remembered that there were many societies the basis of whose origins are unknown or which display no obvious unity of identification. Thus the importance of those type of foci which can be easily identified should not be exaggerated. There were doubtless others, including residential contiguity, which although of significance are not readily picked up from the surviving records.

11. Kirklees Archives Department: Huddersfield Industrial Society Minute Book 1860-64 (unclassified at time of examination); Balmforth 1910, 37.
12. Cole 1944, 78.
13. Durham Record Office D/Co/SH 1.
14. Some indication of this coincidence can be seen on the maps in Purvis 1986.
15. Harrison 1971; Hudson 1851; Tylecote 1957; Gosden 1961.
16. Wearmouth 1954; Potter 1891, 35-36 draws the connection in the case of co-operation.
17. Darvill 1954, 218 notes the prevalence of nonconformity amongst leading co-operators in the north-east.
18. D.L. Thomas, quoted Davies 1965, 158. Cole 1944, 157, floats without substantiating a suggestion that inter-chapel rivalries in South Wales hampered the development of a wider communal identification that was a base for co-operation. Religious divisions were reported as

- hampering co-operative progress in specific instances elsewhere. In Preston differences within the town's substantial Roman Catholic community led to two separate societies being established in the early eighties, neither of which was by itself sufficiently strong to survive: Ch. Soc. 13 Sept. 1851, 18 Oct. 1851.
19. P.P. 1852-53 LXXXIX.
 20. Data derived from P.P. 1863 XXIX with corrections.
 21. Bramwell 1984, 23-27.
 22. Morning Chronicle 10 Mar. 1851, quoted Briggs 1964, 226.
 23. Briggs 1964; see also Co-op. Jan. 1863 which contrasted the fortunes of co-operation and building societies. Behagg 1979 counters past characterisations of Birmingham as lacking in the development of trade societies.
 24. Pollard 1959, 135.
 25. Leader 15 Feb. 1851.
 26. Co-op. Feb. 1862. It would be interesting to know more about the degree of any overlap in membership of the various popular institutions developed within a single large centre, but it seems unlikely that records survive to allow a comprehensive exercise.
 27. See map 26.1 Purvis 1986, 195.
 28. See Chapter Five.
 29. Co-op. Sept. 1864. See also the picture painted of the local influence of traders in Tressell 1955.
 30. The co-operative press carried frequent reports of social events. See for example the description of a tea

party at Prestwich in December 1865 where there was a meal, addresses, songs, recitations and "all seemed to vie with each other to add pleasure to the event": Co-op. 15 Jan. 1866.

31. McCullough Thew 1985; Age Exchange Theatre Company 1983; Llewelyn Davies 1931.
32. See comments made in the 1958 Gaitskell Commission on the Future of Co-operation, quoted Read 1964, 193.
33. See for example, Knights & Farrington 1910; Thompson 1907.
34. Bennett & Baldwin¹⁹¹¹, 52; Caldwell 1899.
35. Angus 1979, 43.
36. Ch. Soc. 25 Oct. 1851.
37. Tyne & Wear Archives Department 120/1.
38. Durham Record Office D/Co/SH 29; Northumberland Record Office 821/3, 1806/1; cross-checked with Enumerators' Returns for the 1871 Census.
39. Morriss 1983, 106-09.
40. CN 4 Dec. 1875; Morton¹⁹²⁵, 11; Darvill 1954, 35.
41. For railway examples see Chapter Nine; Newans 1985.
42. Hobsbawm 1984a, 197.
43. Powell 1973, 85.
44. Crittall 1970, 129.
45. Co-operative Union 1894b, 90; Jenkins & Ponting 1982, 84.
46. P.P. 1850 XLII, 455-60.
47. Kirk 1985, 50.

48. Lloyd-Jones and LeRoux 1980, 75.
49. Thompson 1908.
50. Brooker 1980.
51. P.P. 1852-53 LXXXVIII Pts I and II.
52. Benson 1980, Chapters One and Four. Lowery in Harrison and Hollis 1979, 77-78 contrasted favourably the material and social standards of north-eastern miners in the first half of the century with those of other coalfields. This he partly attributed to the size and stability of individual collieries and consequent differences in the system of employment and payment. Smaller south Staffordshire pits retained a system of operation by sub-contracting butties who were more likely to attempt to reduce miners' wages or restrict their freedom to spend them where they wished - perhaps including the maintenance of truck shops - than were large north-eastern coal owners. Issues of employment and wages are discussed in more detail in section VII. See also Tiller 1975, 235 on the lack of stability of work groups amongst Wigan miners as a force hampering co-operative progress.
53. Joyce 1980, 118.
54. See for example Marshall 1968; Cumbler 1977; Clarke & Gleave 1973; Dennis 1984.
55. Crossick 1978.
56. For example the Great Eastern Railway Works at Stratford, the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield, Penn's Marine Engineering works at Greenwich, the

- railway terminus at Euston and the gas works at Beckton. See also the comments of Stedman Jones 1983, 223 on Woolwich and Stratford as exceptions to his characterisation of working class metropolitan culture.
57. See the discussion of social networks in Boissevain 1974.
58. Dennis 1984, 268-69.
59. Indeed Hoggart 1957, 69-70 makes a clear distinction between the group sense of togetherness and informal neighbourly aid amongst workers and the more self-conscious working class identity which he associated with the development of institutions such as co-operatives.
60. P.P. 1847 XXVIII Pt. II, 294.
61. P.P. 1864 XXXIII & P.P. 1867-68 XL. Compare the comments from Crewe reported in Chapter Five about the need for co-operative development in a new industrial colony. The situation in Crewe was rather unusual in that an existing workforce was transferred en masse from Liverpool to the new works rather than assembling a variety of immigrant labour as at Middlesbrough and Barrow. While this may have led to greater enthusiasm for the foundation of a co-operative, even here its early growth was relatively modest: after six years the membership was only sixty seven, compared with 579 ten years later.
62. Joyce 1980; Marshall 1968.

63. E.g. Dennis 1977; Dennis 1984; Dennis & Daniels 1980; Warnes 1970; Carter & Wheatley 1980; Daunton 1977.
64. Dennis 1977.
65. Harrison 1954, 13; Co-operative Union 1900.
66. See Lawton & Pooley 1975.
67. Joyce 1980, 119-20.
68. Bell 1985, 17.
69. Joyce 1980, 105-10.
70. Problems of comparison are compounded by the different composition of samples used to calculate persistence rates and the variety of spatial units within which persistence has been considered. Measures have different implications for settlements of varying population and area: within settlement persistence in the large town does not necessarily imply the continuity that it would in a small industrial village.
71. Dennis 1984, 255-68 catalogues the results of several studies.
72. Figures for a sample of households resident in 1851 still present in the town in 1861 show persistence rates of 32 per cent for Wigan and 52 per cent for St. Helen's. The latter is comparable to the figure of 58 per cent for Huddersfield: Dennis 1984, 256-57.
73. CN 8 June 1872.
74. See comments regarding the "London Commercial" society of Whitechapel: Co-op. Mar. 1863.
75. The number of co-operatives in the capital seems to confirm that as in provincial centres the immediate

basis of working class association was spatially confined. It was difficult for many institutional initiatives to transcend local divisions to produce a truly metropolitan organisation or sense of association. See Chapter Eight.

76. P.P. 1873 LXI.

77. Statistical Society of London 1840; Weld 1843; Dennis 1984, 256-57.

78. Stedman Jones 1971, 81.

79. Co-operative Union 1891, 15.

80. Stedman Jones 1971; Kidd 1985; Taplin 1974; Lovell 1969.

81. Stedman Jones 1971, 87-88.

82. Stedman Jones 1971, 85.

83. Taplin 1974, Chapter One; Lovell 1969, Chapter Two.

84. For the general condition of sweated labour see Schmiechen 1984; Bythell 1978. For comment with specific reference to co-operation see Co-operative Union 1891, 13-17.

85. Liverpool presented a rather different case as the docks were more dominant and manufacturing industry poorly developed: Taplin 1974, 3-4; Waller 1981, Chapter One.

86. Stedman Jones 1971, 28-29.

87. Similar issues of isolation and close association with the employer were also noted as barriers to co-operative development amongst those in agricultural service.

88. Co-op. 15 Mar. 1866.

89. Read 1964; Goodwin 1979, 136-70. Comments about specific movements include those on Chartism in Prothero 1971; Thompson 1984, 106, and Trades Unionism in Stedman Jones 1983, 212.
90. See the comments of Lowery in Harrison and Hollis 1979, 60-61, 114 on tailoring and handloom weaving; Kingsley 1983 on tailoring and Hobsbawm and Scott 1984 on shoemaking.
91. Hall 1962; Wise 1949.
92. Vance 1967.
93. Tiller 1975, 234-35.
94. Crouzet's examination of the social origins of industrialists 1750-1850 shows only a limited representation of men with a working class background. Using the occupation of an individual immediately prior to the foundation of his business as an indicator, 9.8 per cent of Crouzet's sample were classified as working class. There were contrasts between trades; only 1.6 per cent of textile manufacturers had working class origins against 17.1 per cent in the metal trades and 12.3 per cent in all other sectors. The chances of working class enterprise diminished as the size of individual units increased during the second half of the century: Crouzet 1985, 147-51.
95. See the comments of J.C. Farn in Co-op. 5 Mar. 1870.
96. Co-op. July 1860.
97. Note the ambivalence of some co-operators towards trades unions which were seen as dividing rather than uniting

- working class interests: CN 1 May 1875, 7 Aug. 1875, 20 Nov. 1875.
98. King 1985.
99. CN 23 Oct. 1875.
100. Mathias 1983, 247.
101. Thompson & Yeo 1971; Stedman Jones 1971, 29-30.
102. CN 8 June 1872.
103. Brooker 1980, Muscott 1906, 326-27.
104. Co-op. 7 Aug. 1869.
105. Pollard 1959, 146. Some trade organisations did advocate co-operative production as a means of avoiding the imposition of a new working regime. Very few of the small number of schemes which were put into practice enjoyed any long term success. The circumstances of their development and their attempted competition with the cheaper production methods of mechanisation and sweating did not aid their survival.
106. Cole 1944, 82.
107. Co-op. 4 June 1870.
108. Wood 1910, 146. Of course, the significance of individual wages would have been tempered by variations in family size and earnings capacity.
109. Toad Lane Co-operative Museum, Rochdale: Rochdale Pioneers' Co-operative Society Membership Register 1848-55; Rochdale Public Library: Loose Paper in C/IND/COOP 1 1/1/1.
110. Rochdale Public Library: C/IND/COOP 1 4/1/1.

111. These figures show a higher percentage of semi- and unskilled workers than those presented by Crossick for the Woolwich society where only 12.4 per cent of all members 1872-80 were so categorised: Crossick 1978, 167.
112. Durham Record Office D/Co/Da 1, 2 and 3 cross checked with 1871 Census Enumerators' Returns.
113. Daunton 1981; Church 1986, 556-81.
114. Darvill 1954, 168-69.
115. Roberts' study of Victorian Preston suggests that poorer workers in inner areas were less likely to use the co-operatives than their more prosperous counterparts on the outer fringes of the town. The operation of co-operatives was frequently incompatible with the shopping habits of poorer workers who were forced to sacrifice the long term value of dividends and higher quality goods offered by the co-operatives for immediate access to food in the small amounts commonly purchased at any one time. Many co-operatives did give short term credit but would not sustain the perpetual debts which many poorer workers maintained with retailers. Moreover, existing debts tied many workers to private retailers. Some societies attempted to free potential members by loans to pay off shop debts. This made some impact but as the money was repaid from initial dividends it also led to the postponement of one of the attractions of co-operative trading. The need to pay an entrance fee, usually one shilling, and buy a one pound share was a further disincentive for workers with

little or no spare income. Shares were commonly purchased by installments using money derived from the dividend, again delaying benefit from this aspect of co-operation. The frequency of their shopping trips, often making purchases for a single meal only made poorer consumers reliant on the shops of their immediate vicinity. As some societies preferred to concentrate on serving more prosperous workers the very poorest districts were often without easily accessible co-operative stores: Roberts 1982; Nield 1841; Co-op. Jan. 1865, Apr. 1863, Oct. 1863, Jan. 1865; Shaw 1985, 286.

116. CN 11 Nov. 1871.

117. Co-operative Union 1891, 16.

118. See the discussion on credit at the local co-operative conference held at Crewe in 1878: CN 13 July 1878.

119. Durham Record Office D/Co/B1 6.

120. Price 1891, 156: reprinted in Burt 1969.

121. Burt 1969, 10 draws attention to such divisions amongst miners as damaging specifically to the prospects of trades unions.

122. Hilton 1960, 20-21, 145; P.P. 1842 IX, 201, 250.

123. Bagwell 1974, 52-54.

124. P.P. 1871 XXXVI, 44.

125. P.P. 1871 XXXVI, 1098.

126. Co-op. 25 June 1869, 29 Apr. 1871, 1 June 1867, 1 Dec. 1866.

127. P.P. 1871 XXXVI, 38.

128. CN 9 Mar. 1872.
129. P.P. 1842 IX, 125-78.
130. P.P. 1871 XXXVI, 16.
131. "An Old Potter" 1903, quoted Thompson 1967, 75.
132. Reid 1976, 91.
133. Thompson & Yeo 1971, 184.
134. Powell 1980, 77; Stedman Jones 1971, 120-21. Liverpool dockers retained the marginally greater security of half-day hiring: Taplin 1974, 11.
135. Lovell 1969, 32-34.
136. Stedman Jones 1971, 87-88, 94-95, 264-66.
137. Stedman Jones 1971, 87-88.
138. Stedman Jones 1983.
139. Stedman Jones 1971, 241-70.
140. Co-operative Union 1891, 13-17. Attitudes displayed by some co-operators during the eighteen nineties, especially those with socialist connections, show interesting contrasts with the traditional values of the movement. While individuals such as the Webbs saw co-operation alone as incapable of raising the condition of the poorest workers and looked first to legislative action by the state, others, particularly leaders of established northern societies still saw self-help as a preferable solution to working class problems. State involvement was rejected in favour of greater efforts to make workers aware of their own powers to improve their conditions. There was perhaps a limited understanding of and sympathy for the poorest workers amongst their

relatively well paid fellows. Beatrice Webb simplified the issue when she told the 1891 Congress that

There were some things which north-country co-operators with their happy homes did not understand. It was necessary to live in the south to understand the slums.

But there was some truth in her characterisation of the attitudes of co-operators and it was against such a background that subsequent suggestions for greater efforts, including branch stores selling goods in small quantities at low prices, and a general reduction in dividends and thus prices, to increase co-operative membership amongst the poorest workers were forced to struggle ineffectually for acceptance: Darvill 1954, Chapter Six, considers efforts to extend co-operation in the North-East including the Sunderland Poor Store.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION.

I

It seems appropriate in conclusion to review the factual content of a study which traces the expansion of co-operative activity in England and Wales during the nineteenth century. This will be combined with some brief comments relating the approach adopted in this thesis to other research and methodological writings by historians and geographers.

The present work focusses chiefly on co-operative retailing, although particularly in the early years of the study period it is unrealistic to think of societies invariably being established for the purposes of retailing alone. In tracing co-operative expansion it touches but little on the activities of individual leaders or the organisational complexities of the developing hierarchy of institutions. Rather, attention is devoted to growth at the grass-roots level in an attempt to understand the sometimes rather faltering process of establishment of new local societies and their recruitment of members. Thus in the measurement of co-operative progress it is chiefly the numbers of societies and their total membership which are taken as indicators. In these terms the nineteenth century saw growth in England and Wales from a virtually non-existent base - there were a handful of small and unstable societies of the co-operative type operating in the late eighteenth century - to a total of over 1,200 societies with a

membership in excess of 1.5 million by 1901. By this date co-operation had captured some six to seven per cent of the total British retail market.

At no stage during the nineteenth century was there any geographical uniformity in the success of co-operation; there were always areas in which its local importance both as a retailer and as an expression of working class communality diverged significantly from the national average. This makes it all the more desirable to have a clear idea of the patterning of co-operative strength. At a broad level the geography of co-operation presented here conforms with the conventional wisdom on the distribution of activity in England and Wales. Even the most impressionistic discussion of the topic would reveal strength in northern England and indeed the majority of the most firmly established societies were located in the industrial towns and villages of the area. But the presentation of more comprehensive data offers a more refined view which involves not only a quantification of the achievements of co-operation in its acknowledged strongholds but also an examination of the extent to which interest was displayed in other parts of the country.

It is obvious that, for example, co-operative achievements in London were more modest than those of Lancashire, the West Riding and North-East England. But it is surely an advance to be able to set some quantitative value on this disparity and to present in detail the contrasts between the sequence of foundations and the subsequent success of societies in the various areas. Charting the changing geography of co-

operation also reveals and clarifies other patterns which are less apparent from the existing literature. One such is the relative strength of co-operation in Lancashire and the West Riding. At the county level it was the latter where, by the end of the century, membership represented the higher proportion of the total population. Moreover, the degree of penetration achieved in Lancashire also came to be exceeded by the counties of north-eastern England. Similarly noteworthy is the extent to which early co-operative activity, particularly during the eighteen forties, was seated in the West Riding rather than Lancashire, which, as the home of the Rochdale Pioneers, has received most of the plaudits.

Broad contrasts at the regional or county level can be complemented by more detailed presentation of local variations in co-operative success. This reveals, for example, the diversity within the overall strength displayed in northern textile and mining districts. At their greatest membership totals within individual registration districts such as Rochdale, Bury, Todmorden, Saddleworth and Dewsbury were around the equivalent of 20 per cent of the total population by the end of the century, while only a few miles distant in districts centred on towns including Wigan, St.Helen's and Chorley the proportions were little more than a quarter of this figure. Even less impact was made in Manchester and Liverpool.

As some stores were clearly more fortunate than others in

attracting popular support, there was no easy equation between the geographical pattern of co-operative success and that of attempts to found societies. The sheer number of societies formed and their widespread distribution is not the least striking result of the present study. There was hardly a town of any consequence throughout the whole of England and Wales that did not see at least a brief experiment at some time during the nineteenth century, and while the co-operative store was by no means commonplace in agricultural villages, the idea did penetrate rural areas. From mid-century onwards individual societies demonstrated the potential for successful development in social and economic milieu that were rather different from those of the textile and mining communities with which co-operation is most commonly associated. However, perhaps an equally important result of the attempt to locate all recorded co-operatives is the recognition of the large number of short-lived societies. In many districts the weakness or absence of co-operation reflected not a complete lack of awareness or interest but the difficulties of extending this in practice.

By their limited acknowledgement of the many short-lived societies standard historical treatments undervalue the scale of co-operative activity, particularly in much of the southern half of England and Wales where failures were common. They neglect an important characteristic of overall co-operative advance: the degree to which in some areas it was dogged by uncertainty and a record of past failure which did so much to shape attitudes and thus the chronology and

geography of its development. By these omissions previous accounts also present a chronology of co-operative foundations which is itself distorted, disguising its divergence from the pattern of absolute growth of co-operative membership during the nineteenth century which was substantially concentrated in the later decades.

The existence of a cluster of foundations in the years around 1830 when co-operative retailing was popularised largely through Owenite propaganda is well known. However, there have been only limited attempts to establish their number or geographical distribution and thus the material presented in Chapter Two, while still incomplete, represents an advance on previous rather impressionistic descriptions. A lack of comprehensive study is even more apparent for the pattern of society foundations in the following decades. Those co-operatives established in the late eighties and early forties often in association with local Chartist groups, have received little consideration from the historians of either movement. This has perhaps encouraged an underestimation of the extent to which co-operative retailing existed alongside and sometimes in direct alliance with other initiatives which have gained rather greater attention as manifestations of popular radicalism during the first half of the century.

Rather than attempting to assert that co-operation conformed to a single model during any particular period, it seems more appropriate to stress its continued internal

diversity of opinion and practice. The institution of the store appealed both to those chiefly interested in immediate practical benefits from retailing and others who saw it as a means towards the end of a wider reshaping of economy and society. Thus although the level of support for co-operation showed some fluctuations reflecting a shifting of interest between the varieties of popular initiative, the relationship between co-operation and other forms of protest was not a simple one of "either/or"; for some individuals they were alternatives, for others they were related parts of struggle for wider changes. In the case of Chartism co-operation was in some localities an integral part of the campaign to win support for a political programme of restructuring during the late thirties and early forties and not merely an activity to which disillusioned Chartists later transferred their energies on the failure of their other protests. To link co-operative growth around mid-century with the general decline of working class radicalism is only part of the story as the existing co-operative body was more substantial than is often acknowledged and was itself partly a product of an alliance with radical forces.

Attention to co-operative developments during the early eighteen fifties has hitherto concentrated chiefly on the individual involvement of middle-class liberals. Rather less notice has been taken of the actual retail societies founded during this period, the number of which was temporarily boosted by the enthusiastic propagandism of the Christian Socialists. Nor has any particular study been made of the

important episode of co-operative activity during the late eighteen fifties and early sixties. These few years saw a concentration of foundations, whose number has commonly been under-represented as a result of the somewhat faltering progress of co-operation during the period immediately following in much of the southern half of England and in Wales. A reconstruction of the true proportions reveals the rapid spread of the idea from virtual confinement within an area centred upon the main northern textile districts with attempts at its practical execution widely distributed throughout the country by the mid eighteen sixties.

In itself this flurry of foundations suggests both the effectiveness of the means available to spread awareness of the idea of co-operation and its power to capture the enthusiasm of individual recipients of information in widespread localities. But it was also of significance in relation to the longer term development of co-operation during the second half of the century. The late eighteen fifties and early sixties saw the foundation of many of the societies which subsequently expanded to form the backbone of co-operation throughout most of the country. But a substantial number of societies found the actual operation of a store and the attraction of mass support to be beyond their capabilities. The fate of these precocious ventures probably also had a long term effect in their own localities, initial failures discouraging or delaying attempts to repeat the experiment.

II

It is some measure of the methodological advance of historical geography that the description of the spatial and chronological pattern of co-operative development should be considered here not as an end in itself, but as a topic requiring further explanatory analysis, including exploration of the role of underlying social and economic forces. Indeed it could be suggested that the sequence of presentation of material in this thesis parallels on an individual basis the changing methodological currents within geography as a whole. The early chapters are chiefly devoted to outlining the changing pattern of co-operative activity. The analysis which immediately follows derives largely from the geographical literature on innovation diffusion. This examines the sequence of co-operative foundations and involves consideration of the pattern of growth by a simple categorization of the settlements with societies, stressing in particular their location and size, both relative and absolute. But to go beyond the establishment of correlations of this kind to attempt to understand why the level of co-operative success varied in different localities involves study of human values and attitudes, and the way in which they both reflected and helped to shape wider social and economic forces. Thus the approach moves towards that advocated in calls for a truly human geography.

Some of the characteristics of co-operative development make it an interesting case study in relation to the wider

body of work on innovation diffusion. A recent critical review of existing studies has drawn attention to their implicit assumption of successful diffusion. Examination of an innovation which completely failed to gain acceptance might prove difficult and from a geographical viewpoint perhaps not particularly revealing. Thus an examination of a subject which while ultimately successful, suffers a significant number of failed introductions is useful. Attention can be devoted to issues rarely explicitly tackled in diffusion studies, including examination of any differential characteristics of locations in which an innovation succeeds or fails following its introduction and the impact of an initial disappointment on the subsequent record of an innovation in and around the same area. Unsurprisingly in the present case it does appear that contemporary fears that failures prejudiced renewed attempts at co-operation were born out by the evidence of repeated difficulties or long delays in the re-establishment of stores in particular localities.

If in many instances absence of co-operative progress was a result of failure in situ rather than any lack of communication of the idea across space, this suggests that the role of information transfer was rather different from the simplicity of the central importance accorded to it in diffusion studies which follow the Hägerstrand model. Economic, commercial and social conditions within particular communities influenced the progress of local co-operatives. Societies in different locations faced different problems in

establishing their retail operations. But there were also variations in the resources of information available to individual co-operatives to address these problems. Any practical difficulties experienced by societies located in relative isolation from their fellows were invariably exacerbated by the lack of any supporting body of locally specific advice. Where paucity of information formed a part of co-operative difficulties the problem was commonly one of a lack of know-how to help tackle the complexities of business operations rather than an absence of the more easily and widely circulated awareness of the idea itself and its potential advantages. Such findings confirm the value of a separate examination of the content and circulation of the various sources drawn upon by inexperienced co-operators rather than treating information availability as a single unitary variable.

The more detailed analysis of the availability of information and the needs of groups of adopters in different locations attempted here acknowledges the wisdom of placing an episode of innovation diffusion within a wider framework. The exchange of information is itself a complex social process; a complexity which cannot be fully expressed by mapping its spatial pattern. Geographical studies, not unnaturally, tend to accord particular importance to location as an influence upon the probability of receipt and use of news about a given innovation. But information is moving through a human group already structured to give a social and

economic hierarchy. The existence of differentiation - between and within groups of donors and recipients of information - can be a powerful influence on the course of innovation diffusion. Differential access to the resources necessary for the broadcasting of information means that the privileged can exercise a selectivity about the innovations which receive attention and the composition of the audience to which messages are addressed. The structures of social and economic power can also exert an influence over the course of the actual innovation adoption. The unequal availability of necessary resources can allow the creation of artificial barriers to innovation spread as the powerful seek to maximise their own advantage either by retaining benefits to themselves or, where established interests are challenged, by attempting to stifle change completely.

Once the unrealistic simplicity of the assumption of an automatically favourable response to acquaintance with an innovation is abandoned the exploration of the adoption process assumes greater importance. This involves attention to the attitudes displayed by the various groups involved and the resources they are able to call upon for the promotion or enforcement of their point of view. With regard to co-operation, study should not be confined to working class consumers who were the chief beneficiaries of the stores. Others, not involved as customers, were influential with their attitudes ranging from the encouragement of societies to the opposition displayed by groups, particularly shopkeepers, who felt their existing interests to be

challenged.

It is not difficult to find individual praise for co-operatives and statements of the importance of the stores within particular communities. More problematic is any assessment of the extent to which real enthusiasm for co-operation was shared. It might be expected that private shopkeepers whose business interests were directly challenged and employers who felt threatened by any instances of working class organisation and independence would have little sympathy with co-operation. But tensions were not simply expressed along class lines; it was not the case that all members of the middle class were condemnatory of co-operation or that all workers were equally strong in its support. In some areas the chequered record of co-operation offered little inducement to adhere to its cause, but even where societies were strongest some workers were indifferent or hostile. Perhaps amongst some craft producers these feelings echoed the shopkeepers' concern of challenge to their livelihood. Equally there was encouragement and aid for societies from outside the ranks of workers, from private traders, employers, intellectuals, clergy and gentry. It was not infrequently the last three groups who took the initiative in the extension of co-operation into areas removed in location and character from its early northern strongholds. The motivation for this action varied. Some members of the middle-class saw the encouragement of co-operation as a practical response to their genuine concern

about low working class living standards; others saw its function more as one of social control: a means of encouraging steadiness, thrift and perhaps docility amongst workers. Whatever its rationale, the enthusiasm of middle class sympathisers for sustained campaigning to extend operations to new areas may be contrasted with the attitudes of the majority of working class co-operators whose interests and ability or willingness to disburse financial resources were more narrowly confined to their own locality. Many amongst even the most committed of co-operators were chary of propagandism and other "artificial" encouragements to the foundation of new societies.

In the main, however, co-operation at the level of the individual society was organised by, as well as for, workers themselves. The strongest societies were fiercely independent both in their desire to retain local control over their own affairs and in their contempt for any notion of middle or upper class patronage. Values of respectability, hard work and thrift were not usually accepted uncritically from middle class sources; they were advanced to build up the strength and self-respect of workers, not to make them the stooges of employers. Indeed co-operative and other popular provident institutions met opposition from some employers largely because they feared the organisational and financial independence amongst workers that these bodies represented or seemed to presage.

While the reputation of co-operation commonly received local damage as particular societies experienced setbacks its

overall advance both reflected and reinforced a general improvement in the regard in which it was held. There was a growing approval of co-operation amongst most social groupings during the second half of the nineteenth century as many societies proved themselves to be enduring and responsible. The structures of vested social and economic interest which sometimes blocked early co-operative progress were not themselves unchanging and indeed that change was sometimes engineered by an increasingly influential co-operative body itself. An expanding commercial importance, particularly its value as a customer for the goods and services of other businesses, combined with a willingness, if not an enthusiasm, to support regional and national co-ordinating bodies gave co-operation increasing means to counter obstacles such as the refusal of supplies by private companies or attempts by employers to prejudice their workforce against co-operation. Even groups like private shopkeepers who, against the general trend, became more vocal and organised in their opposition found their efforts ineffectual. The very strengthening of co-operation which fuelled the anxiety of shopkeepers gave it the strength to survive the challenge.

Co-operative growth came not only with the overcoming of major barriers, but also as a result of a multitude of membership decisions by individual households. It was commonly the case that consumers judged the appeal of co-operation on fairly simple grounds of commercial performance:

the ability of stores to offer a better deal than private shopkeepers locally and to emulate the achievements of successful co-operatives elsewhere. The degree to which societies were seen, and were indeed able, to fulfil these expectations varied considerably in different locations. In some instances, particularly in the largest cities and in settlements of a wide range of sizes where established retailers jealously guarded a fairly stable retail market, societies sometimes failed despite the best efforts of their leaders because their potential supporters were unimpressed by a performance which was commendable when viewed in its own context but which failed to match successes achieved elsewhere. A relative lack of success could sometimes lead to absolute failure.

The attempts at quantification made here show an unsurprising relationship between co-operative profitability and the degree to which it penetrated local retail markets. More difficult is the formulation of an explanation for this variable performance, a task whose problems are increased by the rather fragmentary nature of much of the evidence. Certainly all-embracing statistical exercises are inappropriate in the present case. In part, explanation must reflect the commercial operations of co-operative stores: the size and elasticity of local working class custom, the degree of competition faced from private traders and operational cost such as staff and premises, all of which influenced the freedom enjoyed by stores to finance the balance of prices and dividends most likely to attract a large working class

custom. But the nature of a co-operative as an exercise in self-help was also important. Account must therefore be taken of variation in the social structure of different settlements; the degree to which the balance of forces between local social and economic groupings allowed the development of any form of collective working class identity and initiative. The nature of economic conditions assumed an importance beyond its impact on incomes and expenditure. Conditions of employment shaped working class attitudes and identity, providing in some instances both the basis of collectivity combined with the social freedom for the translation of this into independent action in the wider community. This was perhaps most obviously a feature of the urban industrial settlements of northern England but was also often present in individual centres with a similar structure of employment in other parts of the country. Moreover, this more self-conscious and assertive working class attitude and the institutions associated with it gained sway over an increasing geographical territory not only with the spread of industry but through its espousal and propagation by other expanding groups within the workforce such as railwaymen.

It would be wrong, however, to treat separately the commercial and social conditions which seem to have influenced co-operative success for both were a product of wider forces, often occurring in such a way as to be mutually reinforcing. Conditions which produced socially independent and collectively assertive workers were usually also those in

which a co-operative could prosper commercially by tapping an expanding retail market. Equally, stagnation in social structures and retail trade were the common accompaniment to a meagre or declining sector of large-scale manufacturing.

While it is difficult to give any precisely analytical explanation of the geography of co-operative development or a similarly cast account of the progress of a particular society without detailed local research, it is still possible and useful to discuss some general characteristics of settlements which were associated with varying degrees of co-operative success. The centres in which co-operation made its greatest proportional impact covered a fairly wide range of population totals but the very largest and very smallest settlements were generally excluded. Similarly with population growth: it was rare for settlements experiencing the extremes of change to be co-operative strongholds. Such circumstances tended in different ways to work against the development of favourable social conditions and a stable population tended to produce a stagnant retail market already adequately served by private traders. In the largest centres, commercial difficulties were rather different. The degree of competition which resulted from the sheer number of retailers made it difficult for any newcomer to create a major or permanent impact unless supported by substantial financial resources at the outset which co-operatives as independent local ventures were unable to muster. The very size and economic structure of many of the largest cities tended also to work against any easy development of a strong collective

working class identity on a sufficient scale to provide the base for commercially effective operations in such difficult conditions.

It was commonly experience of discipline, relative regularity of work and pay, and large-scale combined endeavour stemming from employment in factories and other substantial workplaces which were important in the strong development of co-operation in much of the industrial north. The lesser development of the factory manufacturing sector in several of the country's larger cities can only have contributed to the problems of establishing co-operatives. It was sometimes physically difficult to assemble together workers employed in the relative isolation of many service occupations or in domestic manufacture. This problem was by no means confined to the large cities, but was also experienced, for example, amongst farm labourers in rural areas. This, perhaps combined with an element of social control, contributed to the problems of forging any collective identity amongst those whose interests and experiences were inevitably various. Even the identity of artisans within a small workshop, which was the basis for some successful co-operatives in modestly sized communities, was swamped amidst the human and commercial tide of a city such as London. Moreover, just as some forms of employment seem to have encouraged the values that lay at the root of successful co-operation, others produced rather different attitudes and styles of life. Workers in trades in which

patterns of work and pay were irregular seem to have had difficulties in accepting the financial mores of co-operation and found its whole ethos inconsistent with their more opportunistic style of life. This contributed to the frequent poor development of co-operation in centres where casual employment was of significance, particularly in the ports, and in other areas where pre-industrial work practices persisted, sometimes, as in the Staffordshire potteries, within the context of large-scale manufacturing industry.

The suggestion of these general points is the result of an attempt to expand upon the fairly restricted analysis based chiefly on settlement characteristics of size and relative location which are the stuff of many geographical diffusion studies. An approach which is more sensitive to local variation in the functioning of economy and society, and which aims to penetrate the underlying rationale for linkages observed between variables such as co-operative success and economic structures, offers greater potential for understanding the context of the external introduction or internal development of any new element. There are perhaps parallels between such an approach and that advocated in recent methodological essays which have called for a more prominent social and humanist aspect to studies in historical geography and indeed human geography in general. But in applauding the renewed interest in the characteristics of place it seems shortsighted to abandon entirely the concern with space that was a feature of work in immediately preceding decades.

However firmly any locality might establish a distinctive identity as a mould in which wide-ranging social and economic forces were given a new and locally specific form, no place can be entirely immune from outside influence and ideas. Indeed the case of co-operation showed the way in which new societies were established with reference to others elsewhere. Relative location matters in a context that is rather more complicated than that of point patterns on an undifferentiated surface. It influenced not only the probability and timing of the receipt of new ideas but also the local use made of them. Judgements about co-operation, and doubtless many other innovations, were influenced by the reported experience of peers in neighbouring districts. In the actual conduct of retail business some societies found their relative isolation from other co-operatives to be a handicap, while those that were part of a concentration of activity benefitted both from the local resource of advice and experience, and the stimulus provided by the example and perhaps direct competition of neighbouring stores. There is, however, a complementary need for study of locally specific factors: forces about which generalisation is impossible or inappropriate. The national framework adopted here is in many senses revealing of the development of co-operation, but it cannot be all embracing and there remains a need for analysis of progress at the level of the individual settlement or society. This would address issues such as the rôle of individuals in determining the strength of the society they

led; a topic which parallels the more general debate within human geography about the interacting roles of individual agency and the structures of society and economy. In the case of co-operation it does seem that a number of societies were successful in locations that were not by general criteria particularly favourable, at least in part because of the energy and initiative of their leadership. The society at Banbury, whose leaders received national recognition for their work in propaganda and the recruitment of members, is one such case.

The attempt made here to place the diffusion process more firmly in its historical context and to pursue the economic and social roots of the changing geography of co-operation has the beneficial general result of adding to the range of issues which traditionally have been the concern of historical geographers. In this way the present study can perhaps be seen as contributing to wider moves to expand upon the rather glib but still telling characterisation of historical geography as economic history with maps. There is increasing recognition of the desirability of enlarging the scholarly interest in the geography of past society to complement the attention devoted to economy, not least because, as the case of co-operation reminds us, the two were inseparably linked in reality.

A specifically geographical perspective - a concern not only with the location of phenomena but also the way in which identically named features and forces varied in practice between different areas - is not a prominent aspect of social

or labour history. Researches abound which are place-related in that they draw their evidence from study of a particular area, but little attention has been devoted to the exploration of any geographical, rather than historical, limits to the relevance of such work. A consequence can be the production of rather sweeping generalisations which obscure the locational rootedness of the evidence on which they are based. The lengthy wrangling as authors of studies whose findings are at variance argue their particular causes can also be somewhat unproductive. It is not inconceivable in some instances that contradictory results reflect the varied experience of different areas. To offer a geographical approach as a panacea would be foolish, but it can sometimes offer a way forward.

The posing of questions about location and variation between areas should both stimulate new studies and aid the creation of a framework for the comparison and integration of the variety of results from a multitude of studies. A clearer concern for the examination of geographical diversity might thus provide fresh light on existing debates and the stimulation of new initiatives. For as the process of co-operative development shows, a recognition and investigation of diversity - a diversity which includes a geographical aspect - can prove more valuable than the blanket ascription of a single set of features. For all the customary reference to a co-operative movement local societies were arguably characterised as much by variety and individualism as they

were by any unitary or common origin, experience, form or purpose. To recognise this sort of diversity might make history seem more complicated, but it also makes it considerably more accurate. If a geographical approach has this effect, it is surely worthwhile.

APPENDIX ONE

DATA SOURCES AND THEIR USE.

APPENDIX ONE

Data Sources and their Use

The Returns of the Funds and Effects of Industrial and Provident Societies (the legal term for co-operative societies) presented by the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies are an important data source. The first set of returns covered the year 1862 and subsequent returns were produced annually except for the years 1868 and 1869 when it was argued that the expense of their preparation was not justified by the limited degree of public interest in their contents. Pressure from co-operators and their sympathisers led to the reinstatement of returns in 1870. Statistics for the two missing years can be estimated by taking account of the new foundations in this period and assuming a constant rate of growth for established societies between 1867 and 1870. However, the break in the series does cause problems in areas, generally southern England and in particular the Metropolitan region, where the turnover of society creations and dissolutions was high. A number of societies which actually failed in 1868 or 1869 may be credited with continued operation until the early eighteen seventies by the methods adopted here. These are societies whose formal notification of dissolution was not recorded until the early seventies following one or two years in which they are listed in the returns but no details of their operations are given. This lack of information makes it possible that their effective failure predated, perhaps by several years, their

formal dissolution. This may cause an overestimation of the growth rates and absolute levels of society membership and sales in 1868-70 and a corresponding underestimation of growth rates in the immediately succeeding period. The effect of any error is particularly concentrated in certain regions, but to attempt to make corrections would be to risk eliminating a true trend in co-operative progress which is being exaggerated but not completely distorted by data deficiencies.

The chief difficulties with the use of the returns lie, however, not in the absence of whole years but in evaluating the comprehensiveness and accuracy of those returns presented. G.D.H. Cole was not alone in his doubts about the usefulness of the early returns. In 1863 the co-operative statistician William Nuttall produced his own figures to show that the Return is carelessly and ignorantly compiled - full of inaccuracies, absurdities and deficiencies - and that it will mislead the public as to the progress and present position of co-operative stores.¹

Other correspondence in the Co-operator indicates that the returns were regarded as particularly misleading in their presentation of specific issues: the number of shares taken up by members, the amount of share capital held by societies and their assets and liabilities.² It is very doubtful whether any analysis of the detailed financial operations of societies can sensibly be attempted from such material. However, the ground is much firmer if use is made only of basic information on the number, membership and sales of

individual societies. It is still important that the annual returns from each society be examined individually to allow compensation for identifiable inaccuracies and omissions. Particularly in the earliest returns there are errors which do indeed suggest that the printed tables were carelessly compiled; societies were entered under the wrong county heading and in the numerical sections of the returns extra digits were inserted or digits omitted. The collection of all returns onto a single data matrix allowing year to year comparisons of the progress of individual societies is vital for the identification of such discrepancies. It also allows detection of a quantitatively more important source of error, the failure of societies to make returns for every year.

That the annual returns did not present a complete picture of co-operation was not the fault of the Chief Registrar. Legal powers to require societies to make returns were not acquired until late in the century. Surviving correspondence indicates that regular efforts were made to trace societies which had not made returns for several years; often only to find that a society had failed previously without informing the Registrar.³ For most societies the omissions were irregular and were probably the result of oversight or a period of internal difficulties in the society's operations. A small minority of societies did, however, consistently fail to make returns to the Registrar or indeed later to the Co-operative Union. This is particularly true of the smaller societies surviving from the eighteen thirties and early

forties, which perhaps retained the suspicion of official investigation of their affairs that characterised this early period. Other, again predominantly small, societies expressed their willingness to make returns but were unable to find members fully competent to complete the necessary forms. The more detailed the financial knowledge required, the less complete is that section of the returns. There were undoubtedly irregularities both in the completion of returns and in the running of societies themselves. This arose from ignorance, from a desire to maintain the faith of the membership in a society and thus enable it to weather temporary difficulties by overstating the extent of its success, as well as from directly dishonest intent. Problems caused by book keeping and accounting were a significant cause of society failure in the early years of the period.

As the largest and most successful societies were also, in the main, the most regular in making returns individual omissions are usually small. Their effect is, however, cumulative and must be corrected. In some cases the necessary material is available from statistics collected by co-operative organisations, but particularly in the eighteen sixties and early seventies recourse must be made to estimation to bring the published figures up to a level approximating to reality.

There were four main cases in which compensation is necessary:

- 1) Short gaps in the returns of sales and membership made by an individual society - these can be filled simply by the

insertion of averages derived from the figures bounding the gaps assuming a constant rate of growth across the period.

2) The failure of new societies to make returns in their initial years. A standard correction has been applied. The membership of all new societies is assumed to have grown at a constant rate from an initial group of thirty members to the first recorded total for membership; except in cases where this first recorded total is itself below thirty when it is taken to represent the initial group. Sales are assumed to have grown at a constant rate from zero. In both cases no figures are included for the year of the society's foundation in line with experience for all societies.

3) The failure of ailing societies to make returns in their final years. Again a standard corrective formula has been applied. Membership and sales are assumed to have remained stable from the last recorded return until two years before the date of notification of dissolution. In a society's penultimate year membership and sales are taken to be half the previous year's level and no figure is included for the final year. This system is more problematical than that for new societies as there was sometimes a delay between a society ceasing to trade and the recorded notification of the fact to the Registrar. Including a figure for membership and sales up to the latter date may lead to some exaggeration of the totals, but as the individual societies involved were usually small and with membership and sales often shrunken by previous decline the overall impact of any exaggeration on

county, regional or national totals will be minimal. In cases where no date of dissolution was recorded this is assumed to have occurred in the year following the last return made and no additions are made to subsequent totals.

4) The failure of a small number of societies ever to make returns - here unlike cases 1, 2 and 3 there is no guide to the size of the individual society and it is also possible that the venture was never successfully floated. The latter is recorded to have been the case for a number of societies and it is further assumed to have been true of all societies whose notifications of formation and dissolution were made in succeeding years. The remainder of societies are all assumed to have operated in the period between their recorded foundation and dissolution dates. For each of the years between, but not including, these two dates a standard figure is added to the total. This is derived from the averages of sales and membership of societies failing during the same decade and in the same region as the nil return society. These societies were felt to be the most appropriate standard by which to estimate the impact of the nil return societies which were all short lived, by implication small, and ran against the general trend of co-operative growth. As with 3 above it is possible that these assumptions may lead to overestimation, but there are enough cases of societies which although failing to make returns are known from other sources to have truly been in operation to make it unreasonable to discount all nil return societies. It is possible, moreover, that when used in regional or national totals any individual

society exaggeration serves to offset the underestimation caused by the failure of some societies ever to register legally as co-operatives.

Table One indicates the relative contribution made to the national totals for England and Wales by the different

Table One. Co-operative Retail Society Membership in England and Wales, 1862-1891: The Contribution Made by Different Classes of Data.

	1862	1871	1881	1891
A) Societies Making Returns				
Number	543	918	945	1142
% of Total	71.3	81.2	84.8	91.2
Membership	87,759	258,354	505,738	906,970
% of Total	72.4	89.4	91.7	95.3
B) Societies Omitting Returns in Individual Years (1-3)				
Number	158	139	164	90
% of Total	20.7	12.3	14.7	7.2
Membership	26,690	22,825	45,018	41,630
% of Total	22.0	7.9	8.2	4.3
C) Nil Return Societies (4)				
Number	61	73	6	20
% of Total	8.0	6.5	0.5	1.6
Membership	6,790	7,959	933	2,852
% of Total	5.6	2.8	0.2	0.3
D) Total Sections A, B and C				
Number	762	1130	1115	1252
% of Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Membership	121,239	289,138	551,689	951,452
% of Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

classes of membership statistics. This confirms the increasing completeness of the published returns, although there are some fluctuations in the trend once the membership declared by societies making returns tops the level of 90 per cent of the corrected national total. It also confirms that except in the very earliest period societies making returns were generally larger than average. The figures in sections A and D approximate to minimum and maximum values for co-operative membership in the years concerned. The totals of society numbers given in section D do not, however, include societies registering or dissolving in that year as these are not assumed to have made a contribution to membership or sales. It is certain that the true value of membership was very much closer to the maximum than the minimum and it seems equally likely that it was above the levels of sections A and B combined. In the discussion in the main body of the thesis the combined values given in section D are taken as the true level of co-operative membership with a similar procedure being adopted for sales figures. As can be seen on Table One the effect this correction has on the figures is greatest in 1862 and 1871. The correction to the totals is also particularly significant in certain regions, notably in London. Here societies were predominantly small and unstable, thus a high percentage failed during their short lives to make full returns. In such cases although the absolute total involved is small the percentage correction to the published figures is sometimes significantly above the national average.

NOTES

1. Co-operator 15 Sept. 1863.
2. Co-operator Nov. 1863.
3. PRO FS 1.

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6	30 June 1890 - 28 Jan. 1892
7	30 Jan. 1892 - 11 June 1894
8	18 June 1894 - 18 Apr. 1898

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2	25 Aug. 1869 - 16 Mar. 1871
3	20 Mar. 1871 - 30 Dec. 1872
10	19 Jan. 1891 - 21 May 1895
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D/Co/SH Sherburn Hill Co-operative Society

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