Please note that throughout the whole text newspaper articles are abbreviated as below:

Norfolk Chronicle- NC. Bury Free Press- BFP. Downham Market Gazette-DMG. Thetford and Watton Times-TWT. East Anglia Daily Times- EADT. Yarmouth Independent and Gorleston Times/Flegg Journal- YIGT. Diss Express-DE. Newmarket Journal-NJ.

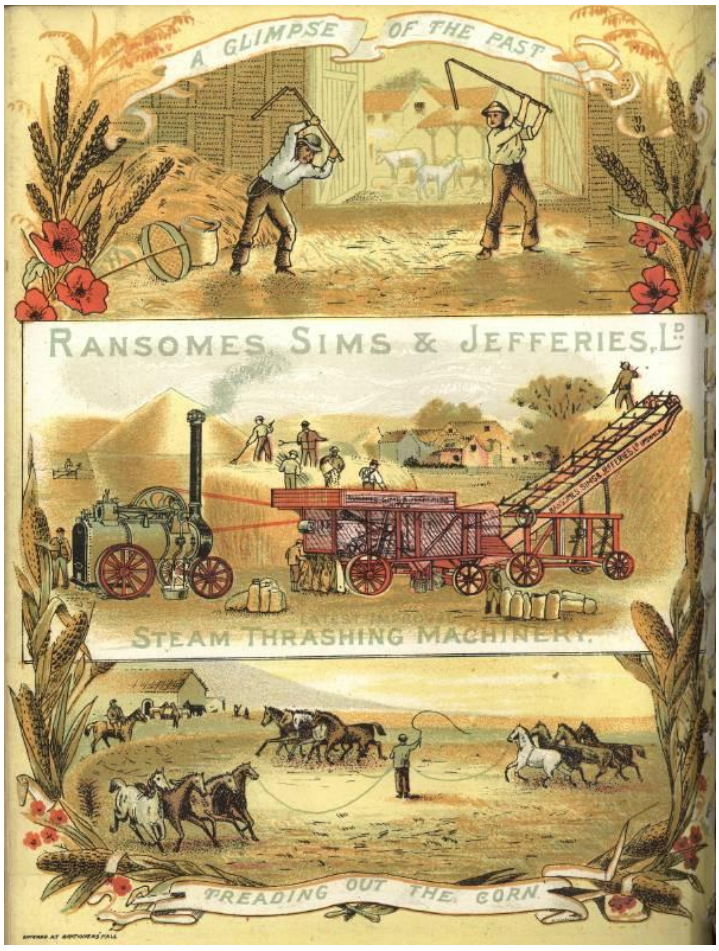
1. The Village in the 19th century, and the causes of a depressed economy.

The poverty and harsh living conditions of labourers during the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries was also to some extent present in the agricultural villages of East Anglia.

Regularly occurring agricultural depressions, which continued until almost the end of the century, were often made worse by prolonged bad weather, leading to very poor grain harvests which affected farmers profits, causing labourers' wages to be lowered and fewer labourers employed. The price of corn rose leading to increased bread prices. The country was struggling to produce sufficient food to feed the population and it became necessary to import grain. This reduced farmers' profits still further and the Government acted to control the price of imported cereals. In Suffolk farmers began to switch to cattle and sheep farming, which needed fewer labourers, and arable land became pasture or was left fallow.

Social unrest, caused by reduced wages, the price of food and unemployment, resulted in food riots. In 1816, amongst many other places, riots took place in Brandon, Downham Market and Littleport and in 1830 the so called 'Swing Riots' led to machine-breaking (threshing machines). In some areas of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex landlords' property was threatened with burning.

Labour saving machines like the steam driven threshing machine were reducing the need for seasonal manual workers.



Ransome's, Sims and Jefferies, Ltd. Advert for a steam threshing machine. 1875.

Wikipedia. Public domain.

A still greater agricultural depression struck in 1873. In Lakenheath parts of the fen lay uncultivated for years; some land-owners began to lease their land for 'country pursuits.' What later became Lakenheath Hall* was advertised as offering *'first-rate pheasant and partridge shooting.'* The tenancy was to run from year to year. [NC July 1862].

*Lakenheath Hall, formerly known as Northlawn Cottage (18th C), then The Retreat (19th C).

Regular flooding of fenland led to increased drainage taxes and farming on the fen became less profitable as the land gradually became less productive and local farmers became reluctant or unable to pay drainage taxes. To make matters worse high winds known as 'fen-blows' could reduce soil fertility through loss of topsoil, gradually causing land to be left uncultivated and neglected for seasons on end**. Eventually farm land became so devalued that it was 'played for' in ordinary card games with some smaller tenant farmers winning or losing the odd acre of land. "By this means several inhabitants became owners of small parcels of land." *Robert Rolph in a memory of his grandfather's tales.*

***Note: It has been suggested that the fenland had become so neglected that it was not until the urgent national need for food in WW2 that fenland recovery was begun by the incredible Land Army girls.*

'Repairing the Broken Banks of The River Lode at Lakenheath 1930's'
Labourers on Lakenheath Fen. Imagine working under these conditions!
LHG Photo Archive.

For the Lakenheath agricultural labourer work was often temporary or seasonal, such as repairing ditches and dykes or work maintaining the 'droves.' A few pennies might be made digging gravel and sand or dredging the Lode or other 'occasional' work. A lucky few might work for Sir William Dunn MP, owner of 'The Retreat'* or on the farms of the more successful local farmers.

A few villagers were able to start a shop using a room of their cottage. There were plenty of beer houses(!) and pubs, whose owners were often tenant farmers.

**At this time 'The Retreat' was the largest estate in and around the village. The present Hall Drive was one of the two entrances to the house.*

Families reduced to poverty, were often saved by the Parish Dole. An accident at work or illness often meant unemployment and the seemingly ever-present vicious diphtheria took an annual toll. In March 1893, 282 Lakenheath households received a dole payment and the Lakenheath Dole List* shows that this was 489 people- roughly 25% of the village population.

Living conditions:

Towards the close of the 19th century the Local Government Board ordered investigations into poverty and poor public health in several places, including Lakenheath, then part of the Mildenhall Rural District. Now known as the Monckton Copeman Report, it showed that poor housing and sanitation with resulting ill-heath had become embedded in parts of the village. Anchor Lane, Dumpling Bridge and Death's Lanes, together with the now disappeared Top Yard (roughly opposite at the junction of Highfields and Cemetery Road) were generally places of poor sanitation and small, often neglected 'cheek by jowl' houses usually shared the same well and foul waste disposal. Between 1889 and 1892 there were 203 cases of diphtheria leading to 28 deaths. The report also suggested that there were more cases of diphtheria than had been identified. Not long after the report was published one family lost three sons aged 8, 7 and 6 in that year (1893). *Ken Turner. Family Research.*

*See Timeline 5 at 1912-13: 'Politics and Poverty' for a photo of the Dole List and Timeline 4 at 1872 for 'The Stone Sifters of Lakenheath.'

The introductory paragraph of The Monckton Copeman Report (pub. 1893) tells us that:

'Lakenheath is a village in Suffolk, which contains about 1,850 inhabitants, many of whom are in very poor circumstances. With the exception of a few tradespeople the entire adult population are either agricultural labourers or gravel sifters on the 'Warren.' The report also commented that: ***'The wages are low, the cottages are in many cases in a bad state of repair (from the landlords being small owners and badly off), or else living at a great distance and neglecting their properties.'***

Sources:

The Lakenheath Dole List for March 1893, Cambridge University Library.
Archivesearch.lib.cam.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/16874

Lakenheath Heritage Group: Politics and Poverty. Timeline 5, 1912-13. Lakenheath Parish Council website.

Report to the Local Government Board on the Sanitary Condition of Lakenheath in the Mildenhall Rural District. Dr S Moncton Copeman.

Books: Roots of Change. Farming and the Landscape in East Anglia. 1700-1870. Susanna Wade and Tom Williamson.

The British Agricultural History Society. 1999 History Review: also, The East Anglian Agrarian Riots of 1822. Paul Muskett. The British Agricultural History Society. bahs.org.uk

2. The beginnings of Co-operation. The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers.

In 1844 a group of poor mill workers in Rochdale set up a 'club' to buy basic food items such as flour and tea to supply club members with unadulterated food. (Chalk is known to have been added to flour by unscrupulous shopkeepers). Each member paid a 'cash down' payment into a fund which provided sufficient capital to enable the bulk purchase of essential family commodities, so stabilising prices for members. A further incentive to join the club was that members shared in any profit made. This was the origin of the dividend system so valued by later Co-op members.

Right from the beginning club members shared both risks and profits. Some basic club rules were agreed.

All decisions were to be democratically made.

Profits were to be shared based on what the member had spent.

Goods sold must be unadulterated and honestly weighed.

The club was to be open to everyone. Women had an equal 'say' in decision making.

A portion of profits were to be used to fund educational classes and a library.

This idea spread rapidly and new clubs (societies) were formed based on the original Rochdale rules. The self-governing skills developed by the early non-conformist chapels were fundamental to the development of the early societies- Methodist, Congregationalist, and Baptist chapels were all well established in Lakenheath. Societies were independent, controlled locally by members.

The rules were gradually refined:

1. Economic participation of members in the Society. Any surplus to be invested in the Society. To discourage debt credit was not to be given.
2. Societies to be autonomous and independent.
3. Education and training to be available and encouraged for elected members.
4. There was to be cooperation between Co-ops to strengthen the movement by working together.
5. There was to be a concern for the local community through policies approved by members.
6. Societies were to be politically and religiously neutral.

'One member one vote,' and 'cooperating,' were fundamental and remain the basis of all co-operative societies today.

The independent Societies concentrated on the needs of their own communities and sourced as much as possible from local producers. Profits and dividends depended on the success, or otherwise, of the local society and, as envisaged by the Rochdale pioneers, the dividend was an incentive to become a member. Above all they realised that they had to be business-like, whilst at the same time recognising the needs of their community. Successful societies soon began to advise newly forming societies.

Sources:

'The Co-operative Movement: Beginnings. Part Two- The Rochdale Principles.' From https://www.principles5.coop/books/a-century-of-co-operation

'How Co-ops began.' www.uk.coop>understanding-co-ops>how-co.uk

3. The Lakenheath Equitable Co-operative Society: 1892-1949.

In the same year as the Monckton Copeman Report (1893) was published the first brief mention of a Cooperative Society in Lakenheath appeared in the Bury Free Press [28 Jan.1893] in a very lengthy, angry, and rather peculiar, letter. Extracts are reproduced below:

'TORY PERSECUTION IN THE TOWN OF LAKENHEATH.'

"DEAR MR EDITOR, - I thought I would write as no-body Else wont or have the Pluck. I Aint much Scholared But a Gentleman friend of mine Says His Missus will Spell the wards if I'll write on tory's what they Can do and what they Can't do…"

The letter goes on, confused, but with many bitter complaints. Here are a just a few.

"…. Then there are So many Pairs of High Lows Give to School Children Every Year And the making of them to Be diwinded Among the Cobblers in the Willage there are tree of them Tew torys and one Liberal and the tew tory Cordwainers Got thirty Pair Each and the Liberal Got None at all. ……"

"…. What they Carnt do is take our wotes away and this razor ill Soon Shave The Lot o them Pretty Clean there we have Got them and we mean to keep them there too. …"

"……then there is our Co-operative Stores Corporation will Band us together and Bye and Bye we Poor Clod Hopping Laughed at Honest Men will be our own Masters. ….. And these the Kew-rat, dow Stampers, Broken down Farmers, and tapsters Carnt take from is Nor Stop us with all he Parsecushons and Petty tyerany that they Put opon us, …… And us fellows As Rade yer Paper are going to Stand up for usselves Next Lecshon And wote Liberal our Kew-rat Mat do whot he Likes……."

"Says the Kew-rat (Curate) 'Love yar Enemies for I doe mine And Cuse we don't wote (vote) **as He tell us it's all UP."**

'A Lakenheath Man.'

There's clearly a deeply felt sense of injustice for at least one person in the village. He thinks there is something he can do about it. He can vote!

Explanatory notes:

In 1884 the right of freeholders to vote was extended to male leaseholders paying £10 p.a. in rent and to most working men over 21 living in a 'dwelling house' as an employee, so long as the employer did not also live there.

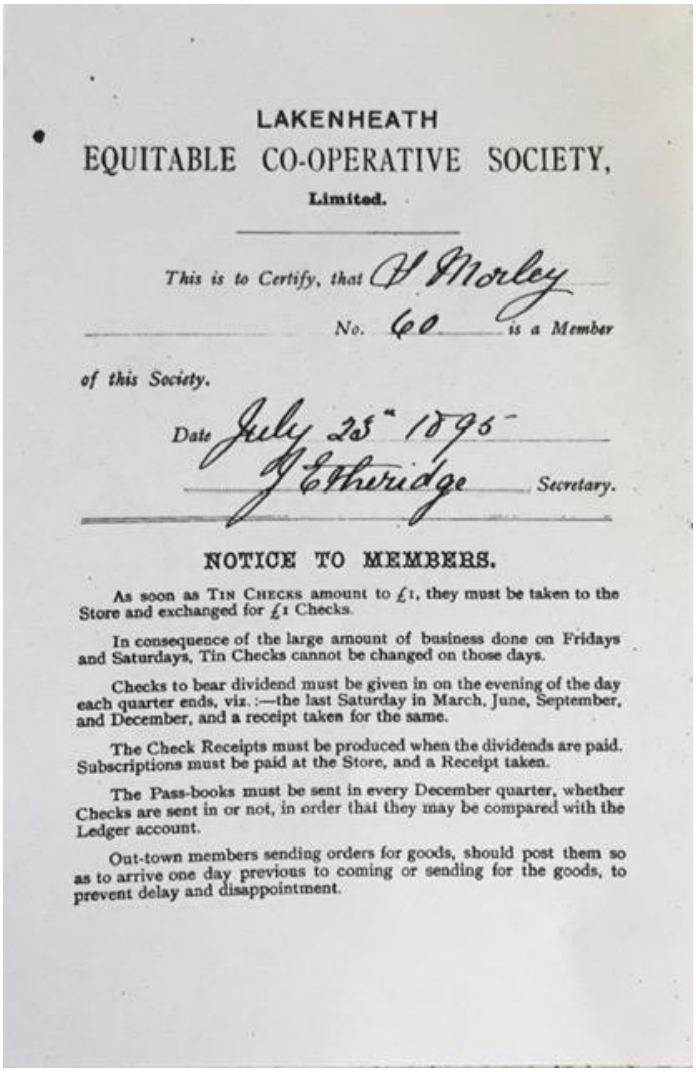
Each year village school children with a good school attendance record were awarded with a free pair of boots. 'High-lows' were a common type of boot. 'Cordwainer' is an alternative name for a shoemaker.

Opposite the pond at the bottom of Mill Road behind the three white overalled figures, the Co-op remained here for almost 100 years.

LHG Photo Archive.

The Lakenheath Co-op made a good start. The Downham Market Gazette [11 02 1893] reported that the **"Lakenheath Co-operative Society was well established and prospering and a dividend of 2/- in the £ had been declared."** There were 44 members and by May 1895 membership had increased to 104 with sales totalling £1,226 19s. 6d. The first annual general meeting was celebrated in style with an afternoon tea attended by 240 people with 60 free tickets being given. [DMG 23 04. 1893]. Saleable assets included stocks of grocery and boots and it was planned to open a drapery department in the following year. [DMG 10 11 1894].

Mr. H Morley's 1895 membership certificate gave the following notice concerning the dividend claims process to be followed: Note the 'tin checks.'



LAKENHEATH
EQUITABLE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY,
Limited.

This is to Certify, that H Morley
No. 60 *is a Member of this Society.*

Date July 25th 1895
J Etheridge *Secretary.*

NOTICE TO MEMBERS.

As soon as TIN CHECKS amount to £1, they must be taken to the Store and exchanged for £1 Checks.

In consequence of the large amount of business done on Fridays and Saturdays, Tin Checks cannot be changed on those days.

Checks to bear dividend must be given in on the evening of the day each quarter ends, viz.:—the last Saturday in March, June, September, and December, and a receipt taken for the same.

The Check Receipts must be produced when the dividends are paid. Subscriptions must be paid at the Store, and a Receipt taken.

The Pass-books must be sent in every December quarter, whether Checks are sent in or not, in order that they may be compared with the Ledger account.

Out-town members sending orders for goods, should post them so as to arrive one day previous to coming or sending for the goods, to prevent delay and disappointment.

Membership certificate 1895 H Morley.

LHG Photo Archive.

Entertainment was not neglected: The Norwich Mercury [13.05.1893] reported that the members were entertained at their quarterly meeting.

"Songs were sung by Messrs. Alfred Peachey, James Kent, John Fincham, T Horrex, Mr. Porter and Miss Olive Rolph. The Lakenheath Drum and Fife Band was present and played selections of music during the evening."

Downham Market Gazette - Saturday 13 May 1893

LAKENHEATH.

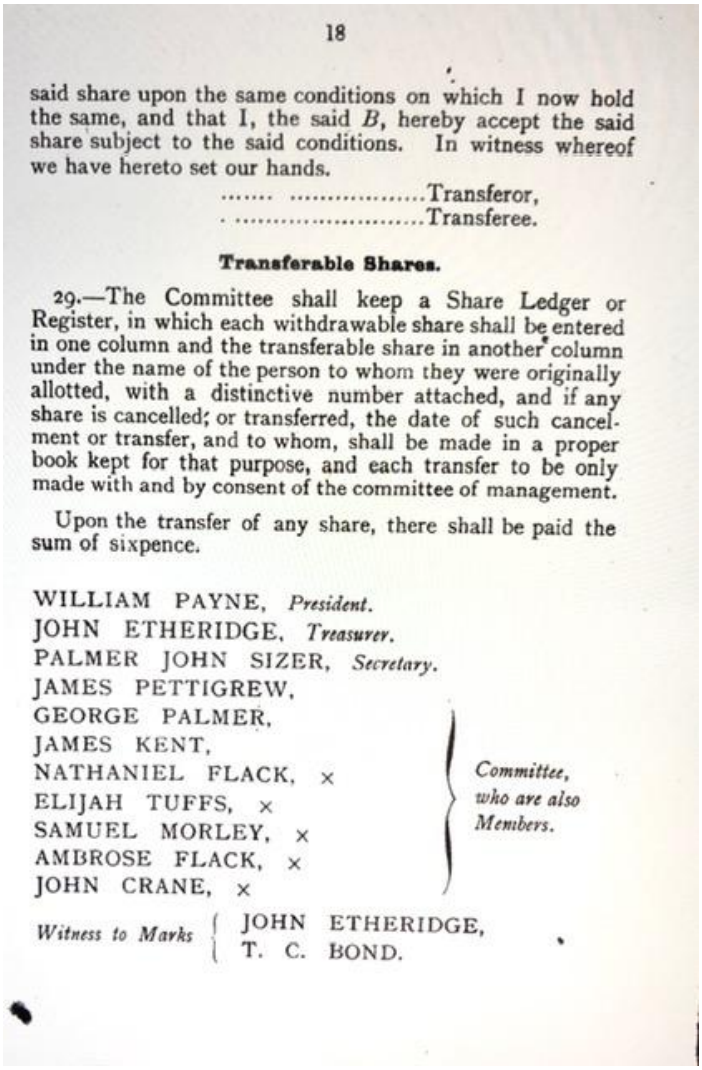
The first annual meeting of the Lakenheath Co-operative Society was celebrated on Thursday in last week. In the afternoon a tea was provided, to which about 240 sat down, 60 free tickets being given to widows and widowers. In the evening a public meeting was held in the large marquee erected for the occasion at the back of the stores. Great disappointment was felt when it was known that Mr. G. Gathercole, treasurer of the Thetford Society, had been prevented at the last from coming through family affliction. Mr. Cooper, of the Wholesale Co-operative Society, London, was on the way to Lakenheath, but lost the train at Cambridge, so he too could not be present. Eventually, Mr. Mason, the manager presided. He congratulated the members upon the success that had attended their efforts, for the first year they had taken £997 18s. 11d. They started with 30, and had gained 11 since quarter day. Mr. Black, of Cambridge, then addressed the meeting, and very forcibly urged the members to stand firm. He showed the benefits of the movement, and incidentally mentioned that he had helped to raise eight societies in and around the vicinity. Several songs were sung by Messrs. Alfred Peachey, James Kent, John Fincham, T. Horrex, Mr. Porter, and Miss Olive Rolph. The Lakenheath Drum and Fife Band was present, and played during the evening selections of music. On Friday the members' children had tea, about 93 sitting down.

Downham Market Gazette Sat 13 May 1893

Mr. Black's 'forcible' urging to 'stand firm' was probably a warning of future difficulties. In parts of the country there was opposition from shopkeepers who regarded the dividend as unfair competition and some wholesalers were 'anti' Co-operatives'. At this time Lakenheath village was fairly self-sufficient with a number of small family run shops and at least one sizeable general store opposite Wings Road owned by the Household family. We don't know how the arrival of the Co-op was taken by its potential competitors.

Mr. William Household was the village Postmaster.
He and his family lived in the large Georgian house next to the shop.
LHG Photo Archive.

The Lakenheath Society was well organised. H Morley's membership booklet also contained the names of the management committee some of whom appear to have signed using 'crosses' not signatures. The manager, Mr T C Bond, was not a member of the management committee.



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said share upon the same conditions on which I now hold the same, and that I, the said *B*, hereby accept the said share subject to the said conditions. In witness whereof we have hereto set our hands.

....Transferor,
. .....Transferee.

Transferable Shares.

29.—The Committee shall keep a Share Ledger or Register, in which each withdrawable share shall be entered in one column and the transferable share in another column under the name of the person to whom they were originally allotted, with a distinctive number attached, and if any share is cancelled; or transferred, the date of such cancelment or transfer, and to whom, shall be made in a proper book kept for that purpose, and each transfer to be only made with and by consent of the committee of management.

Upon the transfer of any share, there shall be paid the sum of sixpence.

WILLIAM PAYNE, *President.*
JOHN ETHERIDGE, *Treasurer.*
PALMER JOHN SIZER, *Secretary.*
JAMES PETTIGREW,
GEORGE PALMER,
JAMES KENT,
NATHANIEL FLACK, ×
ELIJAH TUFFS, ×
SAMUEL MORLEY, ×
AMBROSE FLACK, ×
JOHN CRANE, ×
} *Committee, who are also Members.*

Witness to Marks { JOHN ETHERIDGE, T. C. BOND.

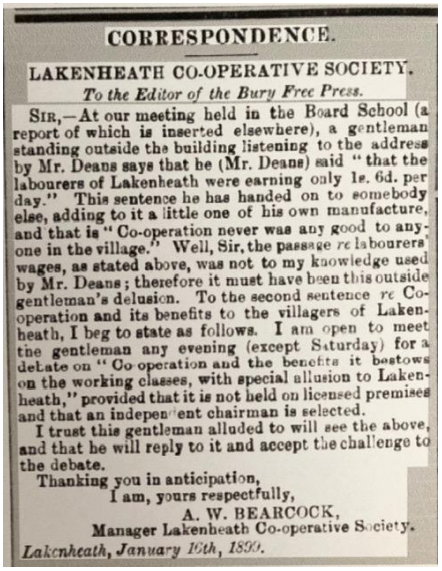
LHG Photo Archive.

"Two Auditors and eight persons acting as a 'Committee of Management' who act until the next half-yearly meeting when they are replaced by another elected committee. No two family members may serve commensurately neither may a family member be an employee of the Society. In such cases the officer must resign." Extract from the rules of the Lakenheath Co-operative Society.

By 1860 there were 200 Co-ops in the North West. In 1863 the foundation of the Co-operative and Wholesale Society (CWS) showed the way forward as they began to establish Co-op factories in Manchester – Crumpsal Biscuit Works and later the Irlam Soap and Candle Works and the Leicester and Rushden Boot factory in Northamptonshire. By 1890 regional Co-op wholesale suppliers were being established. There was a Co-op fish canning factory in Great Yarmouth in 1918. In 1913 CWS claimed to be the largest flour miller in the country.

At the May AGM, 1895, over 400 people 'sat down' to a 'meat tea'*. The manager, Mr. Bond, was congratulated on the progress made. The influential Mr J Black (from Cambridge), again spoke, talking about the 'solidarity of co-op workers' at the CWS Wheatsheaf Works**, who had not joined the Boot and Shoe workers' regional strike which had resulted in a manufacturers' 'lock out.' He declared that the Co-op motto is **"Each for all and all for each."** [TWT 25 May 1895].

There were some in the village who did not agree and in January 1899 the manager, Mr. A W Bearcock, who was also a Parish Councillor wrote to the Bury Free Press challenging a locally heard statement- **"Co-operation never was any good to anyone in the village."**



CORRESPONDENCE.

LAKENHEATH CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY.

To the Editor of the Bury Free Press.

SIR,—At our meeting held in the Board School (a report of which is inserted elsewhere), a gentleman standing outside the building listening to the address by Mr. Deans says that he (Mr. Deans) said "that the labourers of Lakenheath were earning only 1s. 6d. per day." This sentence he has handed on to somebody else, adding to it a little one of his own manufacture, and that is "Co-operation never was any good to anyone in the village." Well, Sir, the passage *re* labourers' wages, as stated above, was not to my knowledge used by Mr. Deans; therefore it must have been this outside gentleman's delusion. To the second sentence *re* Co-operation and its benefits to the villagers of Lakenheath, I beg to state as follows. I am open to meet the gentleman any evening (except Saturday) for a debate on "Co-operation and the benefits it bestows on the working classes, with special allusion to Lakenheath," provided that it is not held on licensed premises and that an independent chairman is selected.

I trust this gentleman alluded to will see the above, and that he will reply to it and accept the challenge to the debate.

Thanking you in anticipation,
I am, yours respectfully,
A. W. BEARCOCK,
Manager Lakenheath Co-operative Society.

Lakenheath, January 16th, 1899.

Bury Free Press. Saturday 21 January 1899

. * Meat teas featured regularly in meetings at the time, notably those of the Village Liberal Party.

** The Great Lockout 1895. Rushden Research Group. From 'A History of Boot and shoe Operatives.' A Fox.

In August 1900 the Lakenheath Co-operative Society was recognised by the Industrial Provident Co-operative Society as a 'general dealer'. [BFP 04. 08. 1900]. and The Downham Market Gazette noted that **"The balance sheet was very encouraging."** [DMG 04. 08. 1900].

By 1910 a very considerable range of stock was available- note the fashionable 'boater' straw hats). A very recent local discovery tells us that a delivery service was begun, possibly just before the war. Will (Dicky) Sizer and "old Billy Bennett" were using a horse and cart* to take groceries to Eriswell customers. Billy appears in the photo below. From a note book kept by Mr. G Miller recording his memories of the village.

*This is probably the horse and cart purchased with an investment of £50 by Mr. Horrex. See the Post-war 1950-2000 section.

The Co-op shop window circa 1910.
Note the fashionable 'boater' straw hats.
Billy Bennett is the man in front of the shop window.

LHG Photo Archive

World War 1.

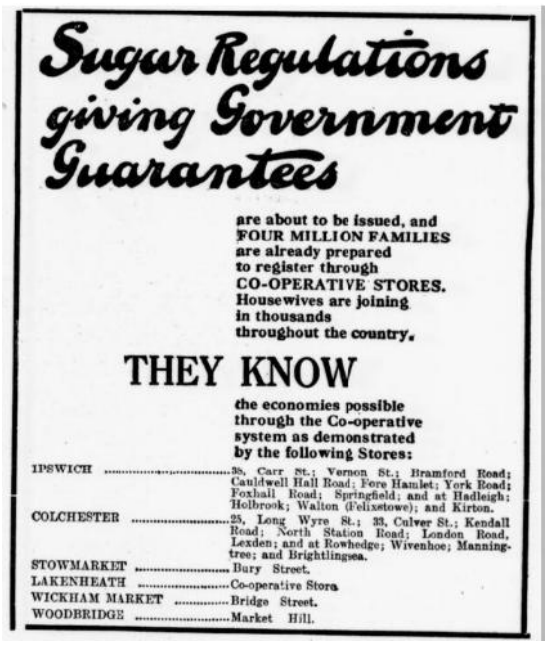
A large proportion of the nation's food was imported, due partly to the agricultural depressions of the previous century, much of the nation's food coming from the British Empire. The sinking of the liner Lusitania in May 1915 by a German U-boat showed the danger of importing food by sea.

The supply and distribution of food was a major problem. Surprisingly, the government disregarded the experience of Co-op organisations, preferring to rely on private wholesalers and retailers**.** The suggestion that Co-op profits on which the dividend was based, were 'excessive profits' and therefore taxable, caused some to consider that the cooperative movement was under threat.

Rural Co-op's had some advantages over suburban Co-op's; locally sourced products reduced transport costs- essential during the war- at the same time keeping prices as low as possible. In May 1917 the Lakenheath Co-op 'divi' was 1s. 10d in the pound [DMG 19th May.1917] but by 1919 this had reduced to 9d. [BFP 20th Dec 1919]. Being 'socially responsible' Co-ops focussed on the supply of essential goods.

'Small rural Co-ops like Lakenheath concentrated on supplying affordable basic unadulterated foods and everyday essentials. Locally farmed produce was regularly supplied and sold. As shortages grew Co-ops' began to ask members to voluntarily ration their purchases as supplies of staples such as tea and flour became harder to supply. Sugar was in short supply and The Band of Hope, a prominent temperance organisation, pointed out that there would be more sugar available if alcohol was not made! Some rural stores supplied animal feed, fertiliser, and seeds to support local growers in addition to everyday clothing including 'wellies.'

AI has been used in the above passage



Sugar Regulations giving Government Guarantees

are about to be issued, and FOUR MILLION FAMILIES are already prepared to register through CO-OPERATIVE STORES. Housewives are joining in thousands throughout the country.

THEY KNOW

the economies possible through the Co-operative system as demonstrated by the following Stores:

IPSWICH ..... 38, Carr St.; Vernon St.; Bramford Road; Cauldwell Hall Road; Fore Hamlet; York Road; Foxhall Road; Springfield; and at Hadleigh; Holbrook; Walton (Felixstowe); and Kirton.

COLCHESTER ..... 25, Long Wyre St.; 33, Culver St.; Kendall Road; North Station Road; London Road, Lexden; and at Rowhedge; Wivenhoe; Manningtree; and Brightlingsea.

STOWMARKET ..... Bury Street.

LAKENHEATH ..... Co-operative Store.

WICKHAM MARKET ..... Bridge Street.

WOODBRIDGE ..... Market Hill.

Sugar Regulations Advert from 1917.

East Anglian Daily Times. Wed. 12 Sept. 1917.

Some Co-op's allowed the 'divi' to be saved up so that it was a 'buffer' in hard times, but it's not known that this happened here. By the end of the war the government had recognised the part played by Co-ops' in feeding the country and local Co-ops' were often regarded with affection and membership across the country increased significantly.

The 20's and 30's.

Although local work prospects gradually improved in the late 20's/early 30's* poor housing was still a village issue.

*The vast Chivers estate on Sedge Fen, the newly developing forestry industries and the construction of Beck Row aerodrome in 1930 broadened job opportunities.

The Co-op in Lakenheath continued to prosper but elsewhere small Co-ops, experiencing supply difficulties, began to amalgamate to improve their buying power. Not so in Lakenheath, where success was such that in 1921 the manager, Ernest Charles Smith, was living next door in 'Cooperative House', perhaps an indication that he had considerable status in the village. (The headteacher of Lakenheath school had a School House.)

'Cooperative House'.
Home to some early managers.
Later it was part of the shop.

LHG Photo Archive

The shop front in the late 1920's.

Christian Enterprise Foundation.

Robert Kidner remembers that in the 30's, *"The largest shop in the village was the Co-op, opposite the pond. Not only did it offer a wide range of groceries and greengrocery, it had its own butchery as well as an in-house bakery. On top of this you could find clothes and hardware with all the attractions of the 'divi,' metal tokens with a monetary value."* Robert also suggested that in the 1930's members could expect 2 or 3% return on what they had spent. Coal (by delivery) and paraffin were also available.

There were a few hiccups. In 1936 a burglary was reported. **A "quantity of the best cigarettes and Beecham's Pills and a small amount of cash."** were taken. Mr. Herbert English, foreman baker raised the alarm. Later in the same year the manager, Mr. T J Ames, was summonsed charged with selling an under-weight sack of coal. He pleaded guilty and the Co-op was fined £1. There was a repeat of this in 1940, this time a local carrier was fined £1 and once again, the Co-op was fined £1. [YIGT/FJ 5/ CSGA Dec. 1936]. [BFP 7 Sept. 1940].

Sources:

'Join Me in the 1900's: a social history of everyday life'. Everywhere a Co-op shop.' Pat Cryer in her web page quoting a source - Meryl Donaldson.

Robert Kidner. 'A Suffolk Village in the 1930's,' and Cyril Matthews. 'My Story,' in Times Remembered. Lakenheath Heritage Group.

The 40's.

The efficient supply systems of the Cooperative organisations played an important part in feeding the country in World War Two as food shortages bit. Once again, small rural Co-ops were able to take advantage of local suppliers. Bread continued to be baked in the village by Mr. English, head baker of our Co-op and CO of the Home Guard platoon and in 1942 Lakenheath Co-op was one of three village shops to supply off-ration meat pies in a scheme organised by Mildenhall Rural District Council. Land Army girls and the War Ag* ensured that much of the previously neglected fenland was brought back into productivity. The Co-op management committee had considerable status in the village and regularly consulted with other societies, particularly those at Thetford and Newmarket.

*County War Agricultural Executive Committee.

In 1948 regional Co-op workers rejected a Union proposal that shops should close on Saturday afternoons. The Lakenheath staff view was that because food shopping was a daily necessity to close on Saturday afternoons would be to neglect their social responsibility. [DE 26 Nov. 1948].

The gradual relaxation of wartime rationing and the increasing demand for the 'good things' led to new luxury products which were proudly displayed, but the rapidly increasing range of stock carried must have created storage problems for old and/or small shops like Lakenheath. Whilst the introduction of the mobile shop in 1949 to serve outlying villages like Beck Row may account for some of the 112 new members and a very high dividend of 2s. in the pound [BFP Fri. 27 May 1949], it might also have caused additional storage problems which soon led to the moving of some departments to nearby premises.

MOBILE SHOP SERVES THE VILLAGES

THREE weeks ago, Lakenheath Co-operative Society put a self-service mobile shop on the road to supply the out-lying villages with all the commodities of the stores. "People appreciate this very much," said Mr. B. Butler, chief executive officer of the Society, opening the end-of-the-quarter meeting, held in the Memorial Hall, Lakenheath.

Trade had increased this quarter by £2,606 compared with the corresponding quarter of last year, and since the beginning of this year, 112 new members had been enrolled, he concluded. The balance sheet was passed.

Before the 85 members who attended the meeting, Mr. J. Horrex, who was for 40 years the treasurer, was presented, on behalf of the Society, by Mrs. R. Bennett, with an electric clock, suitably inscribed.

After a dividend of 2s. in the £ had been declared, the rest of the programme consisted of a film show, given by the C.W.S. Film Unit, on the Co-operative movement in England.

Election of officers resulted in the re-election of Mr. B. W. Gathercole, president, and Mr. C. H. Gathercole secretary. The four retiring committee members were also re-elected—Mr. J. Horn, Mr. J. Rutterford, Mr. B. Baker and Mr. J. Horrex.

The mobile shop arrives.

BFP Fri 27 May 1949

4. Post war to modern times. 1950-2000.

In the early 50's Mr. B W Gathercole became President of the Society. Together with Mr. F E Leeder, (managing secretary), they served for several very successful years, introducing new products and expanding existing sales. In May 1955 half-yearly sales increased from £23,713 to £29,226 and membership was strong at 716, an increase of 36 over the previous half-year. The new butchery set up in 1955 was said to be big asset. The most noticeable change to the shop occurred in the mid 1950's when 'self-service' came to Lakenheath.

Interior of Lakenheath Co-op: the self-service shop.

LHG Photo Archive

By the mid 50's two delivery vans were replaced by walk-on mobile shops carrying a full range of groceries. Eric Dennis drove one, delivering to Eriswell and Holywell Row, and the other by Alf Winter covered the Fens. The in-house bakery run by head baker, Billy Howard, was very popular. Haberdashery and shoes including 'wellies' and work clothing and other 'utility' items were sold by Elsie Neilson (manager) and Alice Whall in the drapery department which was then in the former Cooperative House. The introduction of a Ladies hair-dressing salon, run by Mrs. Bentley, eventually led to the decision to move the drapery and butchery departments across the road. The drapery moved to what is now the library, and butchery to the former Sizers butchers' shop, now the Lakenheath Stores.

Now the Library, this building housed the Drapery Dept. until it's closure in 1971.

LHG Photo Archive

In May 1957 members received a dividend of 1s. 8d in the pound, said at the time to be highest in East Anglia, and annual sales had reached £50,000 [BFP 3 May 1957]. It was later noted that: **"During the six years that Mr. F E Leeder has been managing secretary of Lakenheath Co-operative Society the sales have increased from £19,050 to £50,322 and the dividend from £1,319 to £4,444."** [BFP-Fri. 3 May 1957].

The committee circa. 1950. Ivan Crow, Mr. Watson, 2 unknown, Harry Rutterford, Albert Rolph, Mr. Butler (Manager), Claude Gathercole, Bernard Gathercole, John William Horrex.

LHG Photo Archive

In the same year a past treasurer, Mr. John Horrex completed 50 years membership of Lakenheath Co-op. Presenting him with a 'smoking outfit' and an electric clock, Mr. Gathercole remarked that the £50 invested by Mr. Horrex in the Co-op many years before had enabled the purchase of a horse and cart; **"the first means of delivery of 'meal' and coal to customers."** [BFP 21 June 1957]. Around 1960 the bakery and coal deliveries were discontinued. [BFP 13 May 1960].

The Co-op Dinner 1950's.

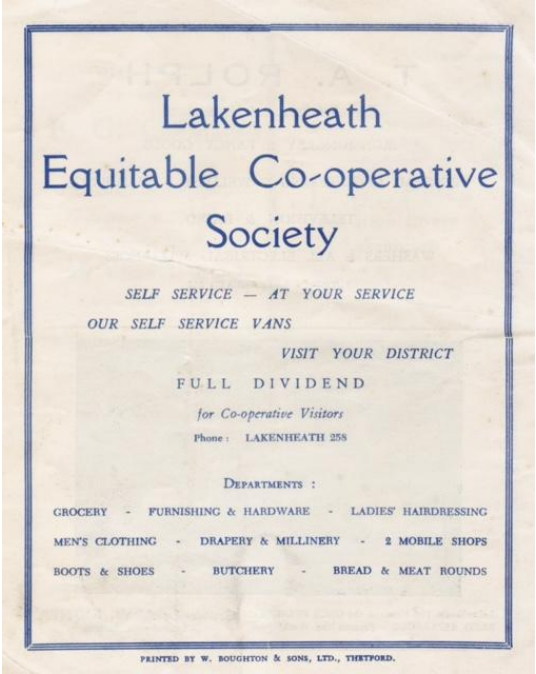
LHG Photo Archive

Few homes had fridges, let alone freezers, and so shopping remained a daily task. Everyone knew everybody and pavement chatting was common-place; young mums with their prams and older villagers, meeting outside the Co-op, took the chance to share experiences, seek advice, and have a good gossip. Our Co-op continued to be the corner-stone of family shopping for many villagers. Very much a village business, local loyalty had ensured its continued independence.

The 1960's. The Beginnings of Change.

Lakenheath Co-op trade increased as new arrivals from London began to arrive. Nationally a greater variety of food and consumer products encouraged market competition and Co-op organisations made efforts to 'move with the times,' one example being the decision to sell alcohol in spite of the traditional Co-op support of abstinence. Friendly relations with American families introduced some villagers to new packaged foods and consumer products and some villagers were able to shop on the base.

*"Because USAF wives were not allowed to work on the Base there was more mixing between the village and the Base". And, "They (*the villagers*) all knew that shopping was usually cheaper on the Base." The Co-op was very important to the community. Local shopping was essential as so few had cars."* Former employees.


Lakenheath
Equitable Co-operative
Society

SELF SERVICE — AT YOUR SERVICE
OUR SELF SERVICE VANS
VISIT YOUR DISTRICT
FULL DIVIDEND
for Co-operative Visitors
Phone: LAKENHEATH 258

DEPARTMENTS:
GROCERY - FURNISHING & HARDWARE - LADIES' HAIRDRESSING
MEN'S CLOTHING - DRAPERY & MILLINERY - 2 MOBILE SHOPS
BOOTS & SHOES - BUTCHERY - BREAD & MEAT ROUNDS

PRINTED BY W. BOUGHTON & SONS, LTD., THETFORD.

Advert from St. Mary's Church magazine.

Lakenheath Co-op membership grew and it remained an independent Society but this was not the case elsewhere as corporate stores and food supermarkets, offering greater choice, began to appear across the country and the national Co-op share of the consumer market suffered as shopping habits began to change.

The introduction of the Lakenheath Co-op catalogue, managed by Barbara Rolph, may well have been an attempt to compete with larger retailers by expanding the range of goods available locally without taking up much needed storage space. Barbara made regular trips to a London Co-op warehouse to place orders which were then supplied for collection from the shop, or delivered to customers if necessary. The drapery department closed in 1972, probably because it could no longer compete with rapidly developing chain stores in nearby towns and large mail order organisations. Car ownership was beginning to make a leisure activity of travelling in search of advantageous prices and greater choice.

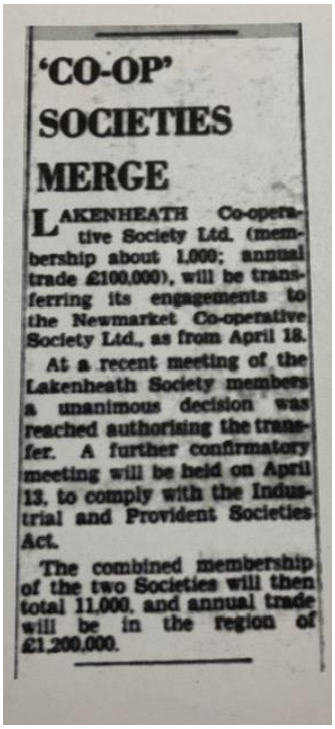
Lakenheath drapery interior display

LHG Photo Archive

The increasingly competitive market was leading to the gradual closure of Co-op branches and the 'divi' incentive could not compete with aggressive price-cutting and reward schemes such as the 'Greenshield Stamps' and mail order catalogues. Some traditional Co-op values - socially responsible retailing, and community centred Societies - became less important as competition in the retail industries accelerated.

In April 1966 Lakenheath Cooperative Society members voted unanimously in favour of a merger with the Newmarket Co-operative Society - local membership was about 1,000 and the annual trade turnover £100.000. Undoubtedly this success, due in large part to Mr. F S Leeder, ensured that the local dividend was retained here for a time despite a national move to a members' loyalty discount scheme at the point of sale.

Bury Free Press Thursday 7th April 1966



'CO-OP' SOCIETIES MERGE

LAKENHEATH Co-operative Society Ltd. (membership about 1,000; annual trade £100,000), will be transferring its engagements to the Newmarket Co-operative Society Ltd., as from April 18.

At a recent meeting of the Lakenheath Society members a unanimous decision was reached authorising the transfer. A further confirmatory meeting will be held on April 13, to comply with the Industrial and Provident Societies Act.

The combined membership of the two Societies will then total 11,000, and annual trade will be in the region of £1,200,000.

After four years, in July 1970, the Newmarket Society company directors proposed that the Society should give up its independence and merge with Co-operative Retail Services Ltd. (CRS Ltd.) About this time, and perhaps because of it, the old Lakenheath Co-op building received an extensive 'make-over'. [NJ 23rd July 1970].

According to an advert in the Bury Free Press [11th May 1973] **"The Co-op Continues to cut your cost of living at the new "Lakenheath Food-store"** and in November an advert for a new manager offered a salary by negotiation together with an 'excellent superannuation scheme.' [BFP 2 November 1973].

Co-operative Retail Services Ltd.

BRITAIN'S LARGEST RETAIL CO-OP

Supermarket

MANAGER

We are seeking a first class man with a proven record in retailing to manage a small modern supermarket situated in Lakenheath.

The successful applicant must have drive and initiative, be able to direct the store operations in accordance with a pre-determined policy and possess the ability to control and motivate staff.

This is an excellent opportunity to join Britain's largest retail Co-op and there are considerable prospects for advancement. Salary will be by negotiation and will reflect the responsibilities involved. There is an excellent superannuation scheme and other staff benefits.

Applications to Regional General Manager, Co-operative Retail Services Ltd., East Anglia Region, 129 All Saints Road, Newmarket CB8 8EU.

Bury Free Press. Friday 2nd Nov. 1973

Further amalgamations followed in September 1975 when the Newmarket and Bury St. Edmunds Societies merged to form the East Anglia Region of Co-operative Retail Society, controlling 26 stores and offering a wide range of outlets with sales approaching £6million per annum. It was said to be the largest Co-op in the country. [NJ 4th Sept 1975].

In 1980 a new butchery and grocery manager was sought for the Lakenheath branch. The salary was £5,000 p.a. and the advert promised **"Tremendous scope for personal career development in our large, successful and expanding organisation."** [BFP August 8 1980]. In 1992 the Hairdressing Salon closed for the last time, having operated for 40 years, first by Mrs. Bentley and then by Dawn Tuffs, née Thorn.

The shopfront in 1989.
Christian Enterprise Foundation

Trading at the original Lakenheath Co-op premises ended around 2001 when the Co-op Group took over the tenancy of the Alldays convenience food-store site at the corner of Anchor Lane and the High Street. The following year BBC News announced the take-over of the Alldays Group by the Cooperative Group and soon after Lakenheath Co-op Food Store opened on its present site. [BBC News Mon. 28th Oct 2002].

The opening of the present Co-op.
By permission of Lisa Sheedy

Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee.
LHG Photo Archive

Sources.
'How the Co-op Lost its Purpose'. Independent Labour Publications.
Julie Musesoglu. Surveyor, Co-op Property dept. Manchester.

5.Remembering working at the Lakenheath Co-op. 1950-1970.

The Co-op girls

LHG Photo Archive

The Heritage Group are very grateful to the following villagers and former employees for their enthusiastic help:

Mary Turner, Margaret Sumner, Valerie Jackson and Barbara Rolph joined the Co-op straight from school, working in the grocery and drapery depts. Loraine Leader, who eventually became the dividend clerk, explained the workings of the 'divi' and Angela (Ange) Cook gave us a customer's viewpoint. Michael Tuffs added his memories of being a part-time bicycle deliveries boy.

Conditions of work.

Hours of work for the shop were 9.00 to 5.00, Monday to Friday, with a one-hour closure for dinner. Saturday was 9.00- 12.30. Unlike most shops there was no half-day closing for Co-op employees. We learned that it was "unusual for young ladies to be in paid employment" and that they never had the opportunity to express any ideas they might have.

The girls' wages were generally at, or slightly below, the national average. For shop workers in 1955 this was around £3 - £5 per week with young employees at the bottom or below the scale. Mary Turner remembers her wage being £3. 10 shillings in 1959 (age18). Barbara Rolph (age 15) remembers a wage of £2. 10 shillings as a drapery assistant in 1960. Aged 16, Michael was paid I0 shillings a day. (1971).

White overalls were worn in the grocery department. Training was 'on the job' and the young employees were expected "to use their common sense", but, "you did what you were told". Apart from counter sales and general tidying up, packaging dry goods was a regular task-sugar 'bagged up' in blue paper bags ready for sale, tea packaged and cheese cut into weighed portions and shelves kept stocked. Bacon was prepared for sale and sliced to order with scraps being taken home by Mr. Leader (not Mr. F E Leeder) to be rendered into lard ready for sale in the shop. Alcohol was not sold until the mid-1960's. General household requirements and common remedies were also available.

‘Cleaning up’ was a regular task but food hygiene was unregulated and as practiced in a competent household kitchen. **‘**Health and Safety’ was non-existent by comparison with todays’ requirements. None of the ladies could remember staff toilets.

Green overalls were worn in the drapery department where duties varied from window-dressing and stock-taking to serving customers and cleaning the shop. “You were on your feet all day as there was only one rickety chair.” Sometimes the assistants cleaned the shop windows. It was often necessary to cross the road to the main shop as drapery stock stored above the main shop- the upper floor was rotten in places and infested with cockroaches! When Barbara Rolph started work, aged 15, the drapery dept sold general everyday clothing including work clothing and underwear, and the commonly worn ladies Lisle stockings. Also sold were shoes, boots and ‘wellies’. The later Co-op catalogue was an important part of the Co-op’s attempt to compete with other local retail outlets. The drapery dept closed in 1972.

Two important departments were the bakery and the butchery. Bread and cakes were baked on site and meat was also prepared for sale by the butchers at the rear of the shop.

Some village customers wanted their weekly shopping delivered. Advance orders written in a weekly household ‘shopping’ note book were ‘made up’ ready for delivery. Delivering groceries using a purpose-built delivery bicycle gave village lads a means of making a ‘few bob’.

From 1968-1971 Michael Tuffs (aged 13-16) worked after school on Thursdays and Fridays until 7.30pm and on Saturday mornings until 12.30, delivering groceries in all weathers. He remembers making a regular delivery to a family of ten on South Road. There were so many boxes that he had to make the journey three times! Not much fun when it was raining! In the 60’s, before the hairdressers moved upstairs, furniture was sold “up there”. Guess who used to sit on the beds?

The Dividend. 1950-1970.

Most of the features of the original dividend continued, except that a mechanical adding machine was used by the clerk. Otherwise, all the traditional book-keeping systems were in use.

At the end of the half-year the Management Committee examined the accounts to determine the gross sales profit. After factoring in future expenditure which could include a community investment, the net profit was determined. This was divided equally between Society members as a ‘dividend’ based on the amount they had spent in the shop.

Each Co-op member, (often the mother of the family), had a membership number and it was rooted so firmly in the family memory that some still remember it seventy years later. Our shop girls also remembered the numbers of regular customers.

At the conclusion of each sale the total cost and customer’s number was written on a sales receipt rather like a raffle ticket with a copy for the shop retained at the counter until closing time.

At the end of the day counter receipts went to the office to be ‘filed’ in trays with compartments numbered for each member. These were regularly emptied and the amount on the receipts entered in a ledger which gave the total spent at the conclusion of the six months. The rattle of the mechanical adding machine used by the clerk was ever-present in the office.

On the eagerly awaited ‘Divi day’ the customer took every receipted ticket together with the total amount spent to the Co-op office dividend clerk. The separate totals of the member and the Co-op had to agree before the divi was paid! I bet the adding up was done carefully!

There were some amusing memories too:

The lady who always pressed her nose against the glass door before entering. She was checking to see if there was someone in the shop she didn’t want to meet. This regular event was the cause of a great deal of hilarity and mimicry.

One nice young lady was offered a cup of tea by one of the butchers. Enjoying it, as she got to the bottom of the mug, a sheep’s eye was revealed!

The butchers (again) made a lovely meat pie for an assistant’s father’s birthday. They didn’t tell her that the filling was sawdust!