

**THE JUBILEE HISTORY OF THE  
LEEDS INDUSTRIAL CO-  
OPERATIVE SOCIETY, FROM 1847  
TO 1897. TRACED YEAR BY YEAR**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649620333

The Jubilee History of the Leeds Industrial Co-Operative Society, from 1847 to 1897. Traced  
Year by Year by George Jacob Holyoake

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE**

**THE JUBILEE HISTORY OF THE  
LEEDS INDUSTRIAL CO-  
OPERATIVE SOCIETY, FROM 1847  
TO 1897. TRACED YEAR BY YEAR**



THE  
**JUBILEE HISTORY**  
OF THE  
**Leeds Industrial Co-operative  
Society,**  
FROM 1847 TO 1897.

TRACED YEAR BY YEAR.

By **GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE.**

---

Co-operation seeks improvement by self-effort. That is one great merit; and it asks nothing of the State—that is another.—*The late Lord Derby's last letter to the Author.*

---

LEEDS:  
CENTRAL CO-OPERATIVE OFFICES, 10, ALBION STREET.  
1897.

## P R E F A C E .

---

THE purpose of this book is to celebrate the Jubilee of the Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society, and to set forth, for the encouragement of others, how a few working men, with no resources save good sense and good determination, founded the greatest co-operative store in the world. This is a large thing to say, but it is statistically true. To others who joined the originators, or have been their successors in carrying the movement forward, high credit is due. All who have organised, year by year, down to this day, the surprising operations which have obtained such notable success are equally entitled to the repute which belongs to the great enterprise.

The Directors have done me the honour to ask me to write this Jubilee History, from 1847 to 1897. A story which shall satisfy the views of 37,000 members (the number actually upon the books) is an adventurous undertaking. However much interest the subject has for me, I should hesitate to attempt it, did I not know the abiding tolerance of co-operative judgment. The Directors have prescribed no course, nor have they imposed any conditions, or qualification of opinion to be expressed; therefore, not they, but the writer alone, is responsible for what is said. Where the ideas of many have to be taken into account, my rule is not to consider what I am *expected* to say, but what *ought* to be said, as facts appear to warrant, and the wide interest of the members and co-operative principle require.

Lancashire men are regarded as possessing solid vigour, as the rise of the Rochdale Pioneers has shown; but the men of

Yorkshire are accounted the most adroit and impassable of the English race. But the greater the capacity the greater the good sense, and upon that I rely.

The attention I have had to give to the records of the Society has given me a new conception of the character, merits, and example of the Leeds Pioneers, who have not been estimated as they deserve. Their incessant efforts to make clear to the working class that co-operation meant something higher than mere commercialism; their splendid endeavours to warm the frozen heart of ignorant selfishness, as cold and obstructive as the ponderous icebergs Nansen encountered on his heroic and perilous way—have never been exceeded, and never equalled in their continuity. Met by the charge of being "sentimental"—a term silly people use to disparage what they do not understand, or do not want—the leaders of the Leeds Society never despaired and never desisted. They have always regarded intelligence as a sound investment, and have often advocated profit-sharing as an integral part of co-operation, as a self-acting store movement.

I knew co-operation when it was born. I stood by its cradle. In every journal, newspaper, and review with which I was connected, I defended it in its infancy, when no one thought it would live. For years I was its sole friend and representative in the press. I have lived to see it grow to robust and self-supporting manhood. To me it is no mean pleasure that the last co-operative work I am likely to write, is the history of the triumphs of the Leeds Society.

As it becomes more widely known by its Jubilee History, its remarkable distinction will be acknowledged. It stands next to Rochdale as the foremost English co-operative association, and surpasses it in its valiant conflicts, its organisation, its marvellous gains, and vast army of members who gather around its standard-bearers.

G. J. H.



## Before the Society Began.

### CHAPTER I.

**T**HE Leeds Flour Society, like Rome, did not grow in a day, but soon after it began it grew faster than Rome did—because its founders understood that what honesty is to business so principle is to progress. Others in Leeds may have believed as much, but none acted upon the belief that without honesty in business there can be no permanent trade, and without adherence to principle there can be no public confidence. By this discernment the co-operators have won profit and respect.

The reader will naturally expect to learn how this Society arose and what preceded it, for every intelligent person knows now that progress does not come by chance, but is a matter of evolution from something which went before. The previous is the foundation of the present.

For several years before the commencement of the Leeds Society, the condition of the people had the three characteristics of the time—scarcity of employment, low wages, long hours of labour. The "Condition of Leeds Question," as Carlyle would have called it, was the subject of public meetings. At the commencement of 1843 pauper relief had increased from 30 per cent to 60 per cent. During the year the "Benevolent and Strangers' Friend Society" had con-



siderably over 2,000 applications for relief. The Public Soup Kitchen, supported by voluntary contributions, was opened several days a week, with few intermissions, from 1843 to 1847. An excellent soup, as Mr. William Campbell learned from the report of his neighbours, was sold at 1d. per quart, tickets being issued often gratuitously to the extent, frequently, from 10,000 to 15,000 a week. In one district a committee was formed to ascertain, by house to house visitation, the extent of destitution existing, and found that nearly a thousand families were in the receipt of not more than 10½d. per head per week. In another populous district 12½ per cent of the population were receiving parish relief.

The necessity for gratuitous sustenance was so great that the supply of soup had to be increased to 19,200 quarts, at a cost of £200 a week. A petition was sent to Parliament for protection against the powerloom, which displaced workmen and increased the unemployed by thousands. Parliament did not see its way to do anything, and did not want to see it. The greatest objection to Free Trade has been its want of consideration to workmen temporarily ruined by it, which has set workmen in every nation against Free Trade. Those who made fortunes by the powerloom should have been assessed, so far as was necessary, to succour those who were displaced, until new employment was found for them. Invention, which was hated, resented, and opposed unto death in many places, would then have been popular, and the use of inventions would have been honourably accelerated.

The Leeds Flour Society did not spring up out of nothing. Co-operation was in the air, but it was not bred there—it was put there. Several Leeds men of capacity and influence had been interested in the "New Views of Society," promulgated by Robert Owen. When Queenwood had failed, they were disconcerted—but not discouraged—and some of them met in the Unitarian Meeting House on Sunday afternoons, and endeavoured to found another industrial city, which should show the working class the way of self extrication. It took the aspiring title of the "Redemption" Society. The movement commenced in 1845. Mr. William Howitt afterwards described it, in his Journal, as a "Co-operative League," but the committee unfortunately adopted the more ambitious and pretentious name of the "Redemption Society." The *Leader*

newspaper published subscriptions received by the Society. The lists came to me. We all approved of the object in view, but when we had to announce subscriptions of 1s. 2d. in Leeds, 10d. from Edinburgh, and 4d. from Glasgow, readers felt that, with contributions so slender, the redemption of the world was a long way off. But in the earlier days of the Society the support was greater. During 1846 the promoters took the field, or rather the streets, by making house to house visitations, obtaining members and penny per week subscriptions. Working people had very little to give in those days. A Mr. G. Williams gave the Society, conditionally, an estate in Wales on which to try their experiment. Three persons went from Leeds—E. C. Denton, a joiner, who died only a few weeks ago; J. W. Gardiner, a shoemaker, still living in Leeds; and a youth named Hobson. The first annual Redemption meeting was held in the Music Hall, Leeds (January 7th, 1847), when William Howitt took the chair, and made an excellent speech on co-operation. The speakers were the Rev. Edmund R. Larken (a large proprietor of the *Leader*), Dr. F. R. Lees, Joseph Barker, Joshua Hobson, James Hole, and the chief inspirer of the movement—David Green. About 200 persons, interested in the social enterprise, took tea together. Lord Ashley, Douglas Jerrold, Joseph Sturge, Henry Vincent, Rev. Thomas Spencer (uncle of Herbert Spencer), wrote letters to the meeting; and Joseph Mazzini, who sent a subscription with his letter, asked to be enrolled as a member. Hence the reader will see the Society had distinguished well-wishers. It was stated there were 600 members belonging to it. The subscriptions for the year exceeded £181, while the expenses had been only £17.

The method of this Society shows the reader how co-operation was the original device of these social reformers. The Redemption Society did a little distributive trade in groceries and provisions. It had a shop, and its commodities were sold at its place of meeting, which was an upper room in Trinity Street, over a stable. It was open in the evenings only, when a member of the committee attended. The principal article sent from the Society's estate in Wales was blackberry jam. Blackberries being plentiful about the place, labourers' children gathered them and sold them to the little Colony for a shilling a basket, and so jam came to the

Redemption Society in Trinity Street, Leeds. Thus Robert Owen's scheme of Industrial Cities (then called communities) were in the minds of the thinking artisans of Leeds. Lloyd Jones, one of my colleagues of the Social Missionary group, had often visited Leeds, and about 1847 was living there. Public discussions had been held there. The *Northern Star* had been published in Leeds. Many men of ability in the town knew all about co-operation.

Several volumes of the *New Moral World* were printed and published by Joshua Hobson, at 5, Market Street, Leeds. In the *New Moral World* for 1839, no fewer than eighteen notices are accorded to Leeds. Robert Owen, G. A. Fleming, Lloyd Jones, Dr. Frederic Hollick (still living in New York), Robert Buchanan, James Rigby, and all the lights of the "Socialism" of that day—not dreamy but definite—not revolutionary but constructive—had spoken in Leeds. A hall was held by those advocates, and lectures delivered weekly, and famous discussions were held at times. Richard Carlile and Lloyd Jones met in Leeds. From 1838 to 1841, Leeds was an emporium of social ideas.

The principal apostles of the Redemption Society were David Green, Lloyd Jones, Dr. Lees, James Hole, John Holmes, William Campbell, William Bell, John Hunt, and E. Gaunt. Mr. Campbell, whose recollections I follow, is not aware that there was any single member of the Redemption Society among the early originators of the Flour Society, and only three names—Green, Holmes, and Hole—can be rightly counted among the fifty-eight precursors elsewhere enumerated. The two movements were essentially distinct and promoted by different persons. Nevertheless, when the Redemption movement was found impracticable with the means available, its leaders, acting on Goethe's great maxim, "Do the duty nearest hand," carried their enthusiasm and larger knowledge into the ranks of the Flour Society when it was appealing for public support, and needing it. The names of those who thus assisted will be found frequently occurring in the ensuing narrative. Some of them became directors, some of them presidents. Lloyd Jones and John Holmes, two of the most influential directors of the Flour Society, lost their seats through advocating forward steps, such as the addition of the grocery and provision business to the Flour Society. They