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**Book Review**

# All Our Own Work: the Co-operative Pioneers of Hebden Bridge and their Mill

**By Andrew Bibby**
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Joseph Greenwood, moving spirit behind the Hebden Bridge Fustian Manufacturing Co-operative Society — often just 'Nutclough' after the name of its mill — described the co-operative's first object as "the redemption of the working people". In this important book by one of our most knowledgeable writers on co-operative affairs, Andrew Bibby tells the story of an ambitious producer co-operative's rise and subsequent absorption by the CWS with great élan (and with 605 meticulous footnotes). In doing so he illustrates how ancient are many of the fault lines in today's co-operative movement and how enduring were the arguments with which those early co-operators grappled. The book is also an invaluable corrective to the almost exclusive attention that consumer-based distributive co-operation has received in the literature and as such deserves to be widely read within, and beyond, the movement.

Bibby deftly interweaves the national and the local. As the story unfolds it is hard to avoid being struck by Hebden Bridge exceptionalism, by how many people of national stature had their origins, or their formations, in this small Pennine town. The book shows how important a place it was to the burgeoning co-operative movement.

Greenwood himself was a man of stature. As the co-operative's manager from its inception in 1871 until his retirement in 1909 he was influential and ever-present in the co-operative movement locally, nationally and internationally. We are reminded how the International Co-operative Alliance was founded in 1892 by Greenwood (who was its first treasurer) and his fellow producer co-operators, with the Co-operative Union and CWS climbing aboard only at the last minute. Greenwood recruited J C Gray to be the co-operative's secretary. Gray stayed for ten years and then went on to be, eventually, General Secretary of the Co-operative Union. Joseph Craven, after many years as president at Nutclough, became President of the Co-operative Productive Federation. One of Greenwood's sons, Crossley, after a time as assistant secretary at Nutclough, secretary of the Calderdale Co-operative Association and secretary of the national Labour Association, moved down south to help run the Co-partnership Tenants' Housing Council in newly established Letchworth Garden City.

in 1883, Hebden Bridge was the location for the Co-operative Women's Guild's first branch, inspired by Martha Halliwell, the wife of Nutclough's lay auditor. Robert Halstead, who worked at the co-operative from the early 1890s, was a thinker, writer and pioneer of co-operative education, one of the three authors of the Co-operative Union's 1897 Special Commission on Education that recommended all societies to spend at least 2.5% of their profits on education, and eventually, in 1903, a co-founder, with Albert Mansbridge, of the Workers' Education Association and secretary of the Co-operative Productive Federation.

Bibby describes Hebden Bridge in 1879 as a co-operative town. He presents us with compelling evidence for E O Greening's assertion that "For a co-operator not to know Hebden Bridge is to argue himself unknown" and it is tempting to conclude that for a co-operator not to know Nutclough is also to argue her or himself unknown.

Hebden Bridge Fustian Manufacturing Co-operative's story begins in 1870 when Joseph Greenwood — our hero — conceives the idea of a "start in co-operative work" to produce fustian.

Fustian is a strong cotton fabric in which loops in the weft (the threads going from side to side) are cut to create a pile, as in velvet and corduroy. In the nineteenth century it was the universal fabric for the clothing of working men — and no doubt some working women too. It was the denim of its day, but even more so. The wearing of fustian has been called (by Paul Pickering) "a statement of class without words". Cutting of the pile was done by hand, arduous and highly skilled work in which one mistake could ruin a length of cloth. Cutters — many of whom were children until child labour was outlawed in 1864 — were on their feet all day, walking up and down lengths of tautly stretched cloth. By the 1870s fustian production, along with cotton spinning, had become a staple of Hebden Bridge's economy.

The cocktail of circumstances was heady: a catastrophic decline in hand-loom weaving (Greenwood's parents were handloom weavers); a recent history of Chartist activism; a group of energetic and committed men who had grown up with Chartism ("thrilling times" according to Greenwood); the formation of the Hebden Bridge Co-operative Society in 1848 (when Greenwood was 14); the founding in 1854 of the Hebden Bridge Mechanics Institute (in which Greenwood played a major part and where he and his family lived for a while) and Greenwood's attendance, along with other founders of the co-operative such as John Hartley, at the second ever Co-operative Congress (and the first in Manchester) in June 1870, where producer co-operation was a prominent topic. In this context it is not hard to envisage the idea of a fustian manufacturing co-operative emerging and catching light. Perhaps the mind-numbing tedium of fustian cutting also gave Greenwood and his fellow workers the chance to dream of other possibilities. At any rate, the spark that finally ignited matters was the funeral of a fellow fustian worker, worked to death at another mill, although Greenwood and others had already made one fruitless attempt to start such a co-operative some years earlier.

Bibby throws light on the different forms of what we would call alternative business model that had been devised by contemporary activists seeking a more humane economy. These were not just the distributive co-operative societies but also the working-class joint-stock companies, in which local working people invested large sums as a form of collective ownership, albeit without a scrap of management or governance control. The Hebden Bridge Cotton and Commercial Company was one such.

It is worth dwelling on Bibby's account of the co-operative's financing arrangements over time, as they help us to see modern debates about how to finance co-operatives as nothing new. Although the co-operative's start-up capital was drawn exclusively from its worker members (of whom there were initially 32) they soon decided to admit non-worker investors, impressed by the success of the joint-stock companies and the local distributive co-operative societies in attracting large amounts of capital. Both worker-investors and non-worker investors were full members of the co-operative: by the end of 1871 there were 17 of the former but 95 of the latter. (It is not clear if there were other workers who, through an inability or reluctance to invest, were not admitted to membership, although Bibby tells us that as the co-operative expanded and diversified into dyeing and clothes manufacture, workers other than the fustian cutters who had founded the co-operative, 'reaped where they had not sown' by becoming members, but only as a result of the dividend to labour. We can conclude from this that workers only became members once they had paid — or started to pay — for their share, and that this happened soon after they started work because at least part of the 'bonus to labour' was retained by the co-operative as payment towards the cost of the worker's share. There is no mention of a probationary period, which became a norm in the modern workers' co-operative movement). Soon other co-operatives, too, were investing. In 1873 the co-operative, just three years old, bought Nutclough Mill, which still stands, freehold. An engraving of these handsome buildings graces the book's cover. Purchase of the mill and machinery was funded by a loan from the CWS, by this time becoming engorged with capital from local societies, as well as by loans direct from some of those societies.

Shareholders received a whopping 10% interest on their shares, which rose to 12.5% in mid-1872 and was reduced to 7.5% shortly afterwards, still well above general loan interest rates.

The recent controversy about high-yielding investment in renewable energy co-operatives comes to mind.

From the start, the co-operative's workers were entitled to a share of the profits, over and above any interest that would be due to them as investors, and initially they received 5% of wages as their 'bonus to labour'. This was a novel idea and ran firmly against the grain of the Rochdale model, in which only consumers were members and their share of any surplus — the dividend — was related solely to how much they purchased. Producer co-operatives took the principles of consumer co-operation and combined them with the capitalisation model of the much more capital-hungry joint stocks.

By 1875 there were 167 individual non-worker investor members, 99 co-operative society investor members and just 71 worker investor members.

When the 7.5% return on shares was agreed in 1873, it was also agreed that the remainder of the surplus would be divided "at an equal rate per pound" between the co-operative's customers and its workers, the former distributed according to trade and the latter distributed in proportion to wages. This varied between 2.5% and 3.75% over the next twenty years. Non-member co-operative societies received half dividends and, as with the distributive co-operatives, other customers received nothing. However, as wages totalled much less than purchases and there were fewer workers than customers the workers received much less in total than the co-operative's customers. The workers' and customers' dividends were added to their share accounts until at least £20 was reached — equivalent to nearly £2,000 today — and then, presumably, paid out in cash.

As Bibby points out, this made Nutclough what we would now call a multistakeholder co-operative. It worked, enabling the co-operative to raise enough capital to part-fund the Nutclough Mill purchase in 1873 and subsequently pay off the CWS loan just four years later. By 1875 the share capital of the co-operative was £13,000, £4,000 of which was from individuals, the remainder from societies. Interestingly, by distributing profit in this way Nutclough was in fact implementing principles agreed at the very first Co-operative Congress in 1869:

> that the new union's objectives included 'conciliating the conflicting interests of the capitalist, the worker and the purchaser through an equitable division among them of the fund commonly known as profit'.

This rapidly growing healthy infant of a co-operative was then the setting for a debate which rumbled — at times thundered — through the co-operative movement for years to come, and which is with us today. It stems from the fact that despite the aspiration of co-operators at their 1869 Congress the interests of workers, investors and customers were not so easily reconciled: what should be the balance of power between them? How should the surplus generated by the co-operative be divided amongst them? In what proportions? According to what principles? Should there be a 'bonus to labour' at all or was that, in the words of Henry Jackson of the CWS at a general meeting of the co-operative on 8 January 1876 convened to abolish it, "mere sentiment, a sham and a delusion"? Bibby guides us through the twists and turns in this painful but fascinating saga with a steady hand, showing how it played out not only in one co-operative but in the movement as a whole.

As Bibby demonstrates, the 1878 attack on the workers' share of surplus, which was narrowly repelled, was a local manifestation of what had by then become a movement-wide controversy. The CWS's move into manufacturing in 1872 and the earlier setting up of factories by individual societies, including Rochdale, had placed the 'bonus to labour' right at the centre of co-operative politicking and ideological dispute. To begin with, all CWS employees were covered by a profit sharing scheme. Many of the movement's leaders, including Holyoake, Greening, Neale and Hughes, were enthusiastic supporters of the bonus to labour, which they argued made co-operatives' employees "co-partners instead of mere hired workmen" or, in the words of Lloyd Jones "merely worker[s] for capital". but against them was the mighty CWS, led by the equally mighty J T W Mitchell, and the influential Beatrice Potter/Webb who argued

that maximising the CWS's profits and distributing them to its distributive society members and thence to their individual members was the fairest way to improve working class conditions collectively. For the exponents of the bonus to labour this was to replicate in co-operative workplaces the same relations of production as in the rest of the capitalist economy. Holyoake, in 1887, defends with passion what he saw as the original impulses of co-operativism: "capital lives in opulence ... labour is chained to the workshop … all the profit that labour has created is swept away by capital … and paid over the counter to its banker. Is this common honesty or common humanity? Yet there are some who tell us this should be the co-operative policy in our workshop". What Halstead and his colleagues wanted was "the freedom of self-employment and self-management" rather than to trust in others and adopt a "highly centralised system of industrial despotism".

By the late 1880s controversy had become conflict. The supporters of a bonus to labour had organised themselves into the Labour Association in 1884 (it's still with us today, as the Involvement and Participation Association) but despite their efforts and those of their allies in the Co-operative Productive Federation the CWS finally abolished its bonus to labour in 1886. Interestingly, the Scottish CWS, in Bibby's words, "equivocated between the two positions" and retained its bonus to labour until 1915. Caught in the middle, trying to stay on good terms with everyone, was the Co-operative Union, led from 1891 by ex-Nutclough man J C Gray, who only a few years earlier had argued that the CWS's manufacturing operation should become a federation of independent co-operatives (rather like Mondragon, as Bibby points out). Relations with his ex-colleagues at Nutclough became rather strained. The conflict persisted for many years, despite initiatives such as a conciliation committee set up at the 1895 Congress, with Joseph Craven (by then Chairman of both Nutclough and the CPF) as one of its members.

Underlying this tussle was a deep split in how the two sides — described by some as the individualists and the federalists — saw the world. They had what we might now call different narratives, the federalists giving primacy to the general interests of a mass of consumers, enjoying the easy wins of trade and the British talent for shopkeeping and logistics, riding a wave of success at the very moment that modern consumer society came into being. (As Alfred Marshall, helpfully quoted by Bibby, said in his 1889 presidential address to Congress, "co-operative retailing … can fairly well flourish without genius", although that may be less true now than then). Against them were ranged the individualists, championing the rights of labour, arguing that businesses in which workers were part-owners and had a share in management were more productive (much as is claimed for employee-owned businesses today) and at the same time grappling with the challenges of financing their capital-intensive factories (a number of which failed) without the ready access to cash enjoyed by the CWS.

These competing narratives reflect, of course, the duality of human lives, as producers and as consumers. We consume en masse, we are all different at work. We are free to choose where, what and how to consume, much less free to make similar choices about where, when and how we work. Associating as consumers is very different from associating as workers, and combining the two modes of association in a multi-stakeholding enterprise is to compound those differences.

These debates and conflicts Bibby brings vividly to life. We feel as though we are there, siding with one or the other faction or urging them to a reconciliation, but knowing, with the benefit of hindsight, that base consumerism will win out over idealistic productivism, the political energies of which will be channelled into mass Trade Unionism and the creation of the Labour Party and not into the subordination of capital to labour one factory at a time.

This dispute has a modern resonance, in its pitting of direct against representative democracy, centralisation against decentralisation ("… could the representatives they sent to Parliament do for the working classes what the working classes do for themselves?" Greenwood in 1895). Suspicion of centralised collectivism seems to foreshadow the later excesses of communist states but whilst admitting the undeniable attractiveness of Halstead's and Holyoake's position Bibby is fair-minded, setting out the force of the Webbs' argument that "the achievements of

self-managed co-operative workshops were so paltry and limited that they offered no model for the radical transformation of industrial life" and, tellingly, describing the ambiguities in the Labour Association's stance as it attracted upper class supporters and moved steadily towards a "class-harmony" position redolent of current debate about whether employee-ownership is a sister to 'true co-operation' or whether it is simply a handmaiden to neo-liberalism, charged with smoothing the conflict between labour and capital.

Perhaps there is an irony here, exemplified by Aneurin Williams, who appears in the book as an activist in both the Labour Co-partnership Association (LCA, the renamed Labour Association) and Letchworth Garden City. He became Joint Honorary Secretary of the LCA and Chairman of the Executive of the International Co-operative Alliance. Bibby mentions that he later became an MP (in 1918), but not that he was a Liberal Party MP, which suggests a line of descent through to the 1970s when Job Ownership Ltd (now the Employee Ownership Association) was founded by Robert Oakeshott (a Liberal candidate at the 1966 general election) and Jo Grimond (erstwhile leader of the Liberal Party). So those who argued for the rights of labour in production, and presented themselves initially as the radicals, ended up as anti-socialists advocating a unity of interest between capital and labour, whilst those who they accused of accommodating to competitive capitalism eventually joined forces with organised labour to achieve enormous improvements in working class life through mass trade unionism and Labour governments.

Meanwhile, back at Nutclough, the generous rate of share interest became increasingly anomalous and controversial through the 1880s. Shareholders, not surprisingly, resisted any attempt to reduce it but were eventually defeated in 1890 when the rate was cut to 5%, still quite generous. At the same time the dividend to workers and consumers was increased, neatly, also to 5%. It was held at that figure from 1891 and then fell back after 1900 to 2%-3.75% as trading became tougher and profit declined. In 1901 there was no dividend at all. On the other hand, by 1908 over 70% of the co-operative's share capital was in the hands of its workers and customers, many of whom therefore received share interest as well as dividend.

Another way in which these early producer co-operatives attempted, with a distinctly modern resonance, to balance the conflicting interests of worker, consumer and investor was governance (or 'government' as Greenwood and his colleagues called it). Bibby tells us that the co-operative's workers were forbidden by its rules from being members of the management committee and gives us a number of reasons why this was — or might have been — the case. Most co-operative society governance experience had come from the distributive co-operatives which unambiguously existed for the benefit of their customers and whose employees were seen as serving that interest and certainly not admissible as committee members. There was a fear (and Bibby quotes Beatrice Potter, by then Webb, on this) that it would be management, rather than shop floor workers, who would gain places on the committee and in an early version of 'management capture' run the co-operative in their own interests — although modern experience shows that such a usurpation of power can, and often does, take place without any formal role for management in a co-operative's legal structure. Joseph Greenwood himself, as manager of the co-operative, was not a member of the management committee but was the most powerful individual in the co-operative, presumably attended committee meetings, and in 1878 was elected to the Co-operative Union's Central Board. It could also be asked whether or not the rules could have been — and could still be — drawn so as to ameliorate this particular danger by reserving a certain number of committee places for employees at different levels in the management hierarchy.

It seems that many other producer co-operatives did allow employee committee members: by 1888 40% of producer co-operative committee members were employees and in 1917 it was forbidden in only 17 of the 67 producer co-operatives. But Nutclough retained this bar on employee directors throughout its existence, despite nearly overturning the rule in 1894. The co-operative's committee was in practice made up of non-employee investors and co-operative society representatives in about equal measure, although there was no rule to dictate this balance.

Another surprising feature of the co-operatives governance was that, from 1872, co-operative society members were given additional votes, in proportion not to trade but to capital invested: each £100 invested in shares brought (bought) them another vote.

We get a clear sense from the book of how things changed after 1914 with the wartime emergence of a modern state. War was good for business: clothes wore out much faster and the state became a major customer. At the same time government started to control wages, creating the clothing Trade Board. Trade Union membership grew hugely, wages rose, prices rose, modern collective bargaining came into being, and along with it a formalised, more structured relationship between organised labour and professionalised management.

Nutclough tried to stand outside this changing world, for example by making use of the TUC/ Co-operative Joint Committee established in 1885, yet another unresearched aspect of the movement of which I was unaware, but to no avail. Nutclough's workers joined the union en masse, responding to pressure from local unions, who were suspicious that the co-operative was holding down wage rates in the area, and joined a Hebden Bridge-wide strike in November 1916. The strikers were mostly women workers, who were a majority of the Garment Workers Union's members. Nutclough settled the dispute separately from other employers, through government arbitration, but then decided that this was an untenable arrangement and joined the local employers' associations. In Bibby's words, "Sometimes, it seemed, the interests of labour and capital could not be easily reconciled". Such ambiguities in co-operatives' relationships with trade unions are familiar ones for today's worker co-operatives.

There is an air of inevitability as Bibby unfolds the story of Nutclough's demise as an independent producer co-operative in this changed world and after consumption's victory over production in the struggle for co-operative supremacy. Bibby describes the irresistible force of CWS consolidating its position by swallowing up one producer co-operative after another. First came Leicester Hosiery, in 1903: CWS threatened to set up a rival hosiery business if the co-operative wouldn't submit, so the members had no option but to sell. Bibby provides a revealing quote from the CWS Chairman, who in 1907 refers to Leicester Hosiery as "one of those small concerns started in connection with another phase of the co-operative movement".

We have, too, a sense of generational change in the first decade of the twentieth century, with the retirement of Joseph Greenwood and the deaths of Craven and Hartley, both leading figures in the co-operative's story. Perhaps Nutclough exhibited an element of what the modern workers' co-operative movement describes as 'founder member syndrome', in which the early members stay on, leadership and power structure ossify and the co-operative is unable, or slow, to adapt to change. Bibby highlights the challenge of "developing co-operative businesses through long periods of time and across several generations", with the implied dangers of a co-operative either degenerating into a non-co-operative business or being swallowed up by a bigger one.

By 1918 the CWS had amassed a sizeable productive capacity, by acquiring both producer co-operatives (especially flour mills) and private businesses and by building new factories. It had done well from WW1 and had the thriving Nutclough co-operative firmly in its sights. After a brief, fierce, but one-sided tussle, conducted as Bibby pointedly informs us at the CWS office and under the guiding hand of a CWS-appointed chairman, it acquired the Nutclough Fustian Manufacturing Co-operative for £42,000 in May 1918. At a special meeting of about 350 members there were only five votes against and in his passionate speech opposing the sale the 84-year-old Joseph Greenwood would, as Bibby puts it "have been listened to politely" but "his views could no longer command attention". Bibby's verdict on the transaction is that "perhaps we should conclude … that £42,000 … was a little too much of a bargain for the CWS". As it was, even this modest price generated a £2 payout for each of the co-operative's £1 shares.

Whatever the causes of this change in ownership, CWS subsequently ran the mill until 1967, for 49 years, almost exactly the same length of time (48 years) that it had been an independent co-operative.

## What else had marked out the co-operative during its life?

Nutclough had distinguished itself by a commitment to education, in this case a deep and enduring link with the Oxford University Extension Scheme, which for 15 years from 1886 provided lecturers, many of them eminent (Hilaire Belloc, Cosmo Lang), who by the late 1880s regularly gathered audiences of several hundred at (of course) the Hebden Bridge Co-operative Hall, ranging over subjects that included history, literature and geography. This stemmed from the 1882 Co-operative Congress in Oxford, which was addressed, inspiringly, by Arnold Toynbee, at a time when the 1872 Education Act was a recent event and universal male suffrage (1884) was imminent. Some people, many associated with the Co-operative, including its leaders, submitted essays and took exams set by the university. Pre-echoes here of the Open University some 80 years later, even more so from 1882 onwards when small groups of workers from Hebden Bridge, and elsewhere in the area, attended Summer Meetings in Oxford for an intense and heady fortnight of "the conferences, the garden parties, the geological and other excursions, the visits to colleges, halls, museums and libraries with which Oxford abounds". From these experiences, and the frustrations of failing to create a dedicated co-operative Summer Meeting, grew an urge not so much for auto-didacticism as for mutual didacticism that led eventually to the launch of the Workers Educational Association in 1903. And many of these mutual didacts, including Crossley Greenwood, were among the founders, in 1905, of the Hebden Bridge Literary & Philosophical Society, still going today.

In fascinating asides, Bibby tells us about Nutclough developing housing (distributive co-operatives had built nearly 47,000 houses by 1907), the co-operative's links to the Garden Cities movement, its support for other co-operatives, strike funds and many charitable causes, and a major attempt to set up another producer co-operative by striking weavers in 1907 nearby in Eaves Bottom. We learn of the co-operative festivals at Crystal Palace, attracting up to 60,000 people, promoted by the CPF and "run entirely autonomously from the Co-operative Union" and of how the CPF became a provider of investment capital to its members, again foreshadowing some of the alternative financing arrangements of today.

There are important chapters, too, on working conditions and wages and on the role of women workers at the co-operative who were recruited in large numbers once the co-operative had decided to diversify into making clothes as, apart from the cutting, this was female work. Eventually the women came to outnumber the men. Women workers were as entitled as the men to become members, although none of them ever became a member of the management committee.

Bibby warns us against "judging the past by today's standards" but nonetheless some reflections on then and now are inescapable, as he himself allows when asking "what lessons can we take from the experience of co-operative manufacturing in Hebden Bridge?".

Perhaps the first lesson is to be reminded yet again of the power of capital. Unlike some of its modern counterparts Nutclough was a commercial success, expanding steadily and trading independently with only minor setbacks for almost 50 years. Despite this, the co-operative had to pay dearly for its capital. Aneurin Williams warned producer co-operatives of the 'fatal mistake' of being too dependent on co-operative societies for capital. Combined with the heavy presence of other 'investor members' this meant that the workers in this producer co-operative were never the sole employers of their capital, sharing that control with others who had different interests. They innovated with governance to create an early example of multi-stakeholding, but struggled to accommodate the tensions that produced. The lesson here is that governance is key but the possibilities are constrained by the demands of capital. We have a sense, reading the book, that the decision not to have any of the co-operative's workers on its committee was a mistake. It's a mistake that no co-operative would make today so sometimes we do indeed learn our lessons. A related lesson is the one taken to heart by the early proponents of common ownership, that businesses owned collectively rather than through individual shareholding are

much less vulnerable to takeover by purchasers offering capital gains on the share price or to liquidation by shareholders tempted to pocket the accumulated capital.

Another of the book's themes that is more relevant than ever is scale. Perceptively anticipating modern arguments about globalisation Ainley, the Nutclough president, said at the special meeting called to agree the CWS takeover "The country will have to do everything it possibly can to bring manufactures up to the highest state of efficiency in order to compete with the other nations of the world." Bibby quotes Thomas Tweddle, Mitchell's successor as CWS chairman, in 1898: "For good or ill, we have entered upon an era of big capitals, operating through gigantic factories." The movement's retreat from producer co-operation has in fact been a double retreat, from production itself as well as from workers control. All the early producer co-operatives were just that – factories and workshops. In contrast, the more recent wave of worker co-operation has been predominantly in the retailing and distribution sectors, much like the consumer-owned distributive co-operatives, thereby benefitting from the lower capital requirements, simpler technologies and broader markets that those businesses enjoy, albeit experiencing the same intense competitive pressures.

To some extent this withdrawal from manufacturing reflects long term trends in the UK's economy, and contrasts with the persistence and success of producer co-operation in many other countries, often sustained by the deployment of collaborative structures of which Mondragon is the best known. It could be argued that an exception to this concentration of UK worker co-operation in the service industries is cultural and intellectual production, such as performing arts and publishing, which with its lower capital requirements and suitability for small scale operations, lends itself to producer co-operation. We are left to wonder, though, what the UK's co-operative economy would look like today if it had adopted J C Gray's plans, presented to the 1886 and 1887 Congresses, for a federation of interlinked producer co-operatives in each of which the CWS would have a major shareholding. As Bibby points, this bears a striking resemblance to Mondragon.

What lessons can we learn about mixing politics with enterprise? How ideologically and politically minded were these early producer co-operators, in comparison to today's worker co-operators? As Bibby shows, there is no doubt that they saw producer co-operatives as a sign of "a better society in the making" and that they were driven by hostility to an unbridled, competitive capitalism that would only result in immiseration of the working class. In favouring a decentralised and bottom-up version of democracy they shared with modern co-operators a sense that the institutions they were building were prefigurative of another, better, way of organising society. We can be pretty sure that Nutclough's leaders — and at least some of its workers - would have been familiar with socialist thinkers who were sympathetic to co-operation. Bibby describes a public meeting at the Co-operative Hall in Hebden Bridge in 1893, addressed by Tom Mann, arranged by the Fustian Society and chaired by J C Gray and another occasion three years later when Keir Hardie came to Hebden Bridge and addressed 12,000 people, no doubt including many of the Nutclough co-operators. What, frustratingly, we cannot know is how many of the rank and file Nutclough members had a similarly developed political vision to that of their leaders. If the book has one disappointment is that, perhaps inevitably, the co-operative's workers come across as a shadowy and anonymous crowd, in contrast to the vivid impressions that we are given of their leaders.

The overall lesson to be taken, then, is how many of the Nutclough's challenges endure to confront today's co-operators but that if they are as creative, resilient and doughty as their Hebden Bridge predecessors the challenges can be overcome. When some of us embarked on a new wave of worker co-operation in the 1970s we Midlanders were dimly aware of the surviving CPF co-operatives nearby, such as Walsall Locks, Equity Shoes and Leicester Printers, but had no contact with them. Nor, as far as I know, did the doomed co-operators at Triumph Meriden. The achievement of this book is to make us think that things might have turned out differently if we had — and it's not too late for today's worker co-operators to wise themselves up by reading it.

## The Reviewer

John Goodman worked as Head of Policy and the Regions for Co-operatives UK. Before that he was a long-standing member of the business advisory organisation Coventry Co-operative Development Agency and a founder member of the Coventry workers' co-operative Wedge Bookshop.