

## **The Langcliffe Co-op**

### **Michael Slater**

The first successful co-op started in Rochdale, as the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers' Society, which now houses the attractive Rochdale Pioneers Museum. There were 28 members with a capital of £28. However, the co-operative movement got underway in earlier years and by 1828 there were four co-operative societies set up in London, Brighton (two) and Worthing. The principle was that of 'accumulating a common capital, investing it in trade and so making 10% of it instead of investing it in funds giving 4.5% etc.'. By December 1829 there were 130 societies set up across the country.

Rochdale does not claim to be the first co-op but the first to set up a co-operative activity and store which was financially successful. Many other societies collapsed when times became economically difficult, 'the hungry forties', because they offered credit while Rochdale did not. Most early societies carried on their businesses in pubs and premises which they did not own. The Co-operative Heritage Trust in Manchester holds a photocopy of the Rules of the Langcliffe Co-operative Association, Instituted 31st October 1829. The original booklet loaned to Manchester by the Settle Co-op Society is probably held by the West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS 58D86).

'The Rules of the Langcliffe Co-operative Association' were printed by William Walker in Settle in 1829 and carry the quotation 'Peace and goodwill toward Men'. There were to be an unlimited number of members and the object was 'to procure of necessaries of life from the best market, and vend the same, with the lowest possible rate of profit'. All the transactions were to be with and for ready money. Every member was to subscribe one pound as a share, payable as a lump sum or at 3d a week. An agent or salesman was to be paid for his labour and should buy and sell only for ready money, but not on the Sabbath. No meeting was to be held in a 'Public House'. Any member refusing to serve on the committee should forfeit sixpence, and for refusing to serve as chairman 2s. Any member using indecent language during a meeting was to forfeit threepence, and if he persisted, one shilling. No religious or political disputes were allowed, and no person was to be refused membership on account of religious opinions. Any loans were to be made at 4% pa interest. It is notable that no credit was allowed, as with Rochdale.

The Craven Bank records include a few sheets of the bank balance dated 1831 and 1832 (courtesy Tony Stevens).

When did the Langcliffe shop close? The Registrar of Friendly Societies' Annual Reports for 1871 is the earliest one held and it does not list Langcliffe. The building has been reconstructed as a house, but photographs showing the earlier building are extant. The shop continued as a shop into the 1900s but perhaps as a part of the Settle Co-op Society – further research may reveal this part of its history.

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Sophie McCulloch at the Co-operative Heritage Trust supplied the photocopy of the Langcliffe Rule book at no cost.

