

**POCKET EDITIONS OF THE
NEW JERUSALEM: OWENITE
COMMUNITARIANISM
IN BRITAIN
1825-1855**

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This thesis focuses on the Owenite communitarian societies and experiments in Britain, between 1825 and 1855. Previous studies of the British Owenite communities have tended to concentrate on the large-scale ventures of Orbiston, Ralahine, and Queenwood. Here the focus is on the variety of small-scale communities begun in this period. At the core of the thesis is a detailed case study of the Manea Fen community. As well as considering the actual communities, the thesis also examines the context from which such ventures arose. It locates the range of small-scale communities and Owenite societies within a study of the broader Owenite movement.

The thesis demonstrates that the activities of the movement were not confined to the official Owenite societies. Community was a malleable concept, open to interpretation, and could serve a range of purposes, as was reflected in the range of organisational forms and methods of attaining community adopted within the movement. While the ultimate goal for many was wide-reaching social reform, individual communitarian societies met a range of needs. Community was employed as a solution to immediate practical problems, and had social or educational aspects. This diversity is the central theme of this thesis. Far from being monolithic, or dominated by Robert Owen himself, the movement was in reality fragmented and chaotic.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.

In 1840, the Owenite Rational Society was described by a delegate to the annual Congress as ‘a great moral lever which was moving the world, and community was the fulcrum on which it turned.’¹ This metaphor neatly encapsulates the importance of community to the Owenite movement, emphasising its position as both the goal of the movement, and as a reforming force. Arthur Bestor has stressed the importance of an awareness of the reforming aspect of communitarianism. There is a tendency to regard the foundation of self-contained communities as a retreat, a retrograde step. Yet Bestor underlined the need to assess such movements by the standards of their times, when their claims to be seen as a force for wide-reaching social reform would have been considered seriously.² The use of communities for achieving social change lies at the centre of Bestor’s definition of communitarianism, and it goes to the heart of Robert Owen’s vision. Owen’s was the dominant voice in the communitarian movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. His dreams of community inspired countless followers, from the co-operative movement of the 1820s and 1830s, through to the Rational Society and its collapse in 1845. Despite the collapse of the organised Owenite movement his influence persisted into the 1850s and beyond.

1. 1. Robert Owen and the Owenite movement

Robert Owen’s plans for self-contained communities were initially formulated as an answer to the problem of poor relief, largely in response to the depression following the Napoleonic wars. However, his concept of community soon surpassed this limited aim. For Owen, community came to

¹ *New Moral World*, VII. 85. 6 June 1840 (supplement)

² A. E. Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America 1663-1829* (Philadelphia, 1950), pp. 2-3

occupy a central position in his concept of human development. His vision was underpinned by a belief in the possibility of human progress. A communitarian society would herald the final stage in the development of mankind. The foundation of small, self-contained communities was not a retrograde step, but the culmination of human development. Owen's rejection of a more atavistic model of utopia is indicated by his acceptance of machinery within these communities. Many previous utopian schemes were based on a return to a more arcadian society. Despite this recognition of the potential advantages of machinery, the community was conceived in reaction to contemporary industrialisation, and the fragmented society based on competition and private property that it accompanied. This divided society, productive of so many human ills, was to be replaced by a system based on the community, both in the sense of Owen's plan, and of a harmonious society where a rational life, and thus happiness and freedom, were possible.

The principal justification for a re-structuring of society was provided by Owen's belief in the force of circumstances in shaping human character. Owen held a deterministic view of character formation, arguing, in his oft-quoted maxim, that the character of man is formed for, and not by him. This view led Owen to oppose the organisation of society, as being based on false principles.

My reading and reflection induced me to conclude, that man continued degraded, and poor, and miserable, because he was forced, by the prejudices of past times, to remain ignorant of his own nature, and, in consequence, that he had formed institutions not in unison, but in opposition to it...³

Owen perceived society as being organised on the principle that man was responsible for his own character, and thus society functioned according to a

³ Robert Owen, 'Two Discourses on a New System of Society' (1825) in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Selected Works of Robert Owen* (4 vols., London, 1993), vol. II., p. 5

principle of individual reward and punishment. His belief in the influence of circumstances over character led him to reject this entirely, and in its place he advanced a vision of an entirely co-operative society.

...if there be one closet doctrine more contrary to truth than another, it is the notion that individual interest ... is a more advantageous principle on which to found the social system, for the benefit of all, or of any, than the principle of union and mutual co-operation.⁴

Owen's plans for the re-organisation of society stemmed logically from the central belief in the influence of circumstances in the formation of character. Owen argued that no rational or enlightened character could result from the commercial practices of 'buying cheap and selling dear', which instead engendered deceit, fraud, and a socially disruptive inequality of wealth. Arrangements based on co-operation would lead to a great improvement in the character of society as a whole, and would also prove more productive, raising the wealth of society beyond that experienced by individuals under the contemporary irrational system.

In the new system, union and co-operation will supersede individual interest, and the universal counteraction of each other's objects; and by the change, the powers of one man will obtain for him the advantages of many, and all will become as rich as they desire.⁵

Owen was led by this criticism of the social structure to argue that, 'to obtain the full advantages of co-operation, men must be associated in small communities, or large families...'⁶

⁴ Robert Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark' (1821) in *ibid.*, vol. I., p. 308

⁵ Robert Owen, 'Two Discourses on a New System of Society' (1825) in *ibid.*, vol. II., p. 12

⁶ Robert Owen, 'The Social System' (1826-7) in *ibid.*, vol. II., p. 69

Owen envisaged a world covered by a network of self-contained communities, linked in a federal system. These communities would be spread through example, thus producing a gradual method of social change that shunned sudden, violent revolution. However, Owen was confident that the change to this new system would be swift enough, once the advantages of his plan were realised and embraced by the world population. He increasingly came to describe the change to this new moral order in millennial terms. Such language may have been adopted partially through the search for an effective means of communication, but it also expresses well the totality of the change that the introduction of the new system would herald.

Owen's plan was first presented in the *Report to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor* of 1817, and later elaborated upon in the *Report to the County of Lanark* in 1821. Owen's descriptions of his intended communities were detailed, describing the exact layout of the buildings, the use of their interiors and the facilities available.⁷ The ideal number of people to inhabit a community was between 800 and 1,200, although the lower and upper limits were placed at 300 and 2,000 respectively. Any smaller and the advantages of co-operation could not be realised, any larger and the community would replicate the failings of large towns, with their crowded, unhealthy surroundings.⁸ These inhabitants were to be housed in buildings arranged in a parallelogram. Areas for living, for schools, for recreation and for manufacturing were designated. Individuals would have rooms to themselves, although the kitchens and dining rooms were to be communal. This was intended as a rational measure, to reduce the waste and unnecessary expenditure of effort of maintaining individual kitchens, although it would also have aided a communal spirit.⁹ These parallelograms were to be placed in the centre of the land from which they drew their

⁷ For an illustration of Owen's ideal community see appendix B, p. 359.

⁸ Robert Owen, 'The Social System' (1826-7) in *ibid.*, vol. II., p. 69

⁹ Robert Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark' (1821) in *ibid.*, vol. I., pp. 304-321

support. This location would permit the combination of the advantages of both town and country.¹⁰

Although agriculture was a significant part of the community's activity, manufacturing would also feature. It was the contemporary application of machinery that Owen rejected, not machinery *per se*. This acceptance of machinery, and its importance in guaranteeing the abundance that Owen argued would result from the introduction of his system, marked a significant break with the more agrarian bias of earlier forms of social radicalism.¹¹ Material abundance through manufacturing was coupled with increased agricultural production.

Despite his acceptance of machinery, Owen believed strongly in the advantages of spade agriculture, a belief he shared with other radical reformers who emphasised the primacy of agriculture.¹² For Owen, the adoption of the spade was a step of momentous significance in human history. Spade agriculture conveniently answered a number of criticisms of the community plan. Owen's assurances of a greatly increased yield from a given area of land ensured that the area around a community could support the large population dependent upon it. This supplied Owen with a response to Malthus, and his argument that population growth would necessarily outstrip increases in the means to support it. The labour-intensive nature of spade agriculture ensured that there would be sufficient employment for the members of a community. Owen also argued for its superiority to the plough on scientific grounds.

¹⁰ Robert Owen, 'Two Discourses on a New System of Society' (1825) in *ibid.*, vol. II., pp. 23-24

¹¹ Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From Moral Economy to Socialism 1815-1860* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 148

¹² Robert Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark' (1821) in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. I., pp. 294-299
Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Oxford, 1988), p. 139

For a general discussion of spade cultivation see A. Plummer, 'Spade Husbandry During the Industrial Revolution' in *Journal of the South-West Essex Technical College and School of Art*, 1 (1942), pp. 84-98

There was to be no division of labour among the inhabitants, who would perform different tasks in rotation. Exchange would initially be by labour notes, a system that would replace contemporary currency and permit reward according to the amount of work performed, and thus assure justice in distribution for the labourer would receive benefits in strict accordance with his work. In time no exchange medium would be needed. Within communities inhabitants would receive all that they needed.¹³ The superior efficiency of the production and distribution system within the community would supersede a number of trades and occupations pursued in contemporary society. Small freeholders and retail traders were among the classes that Owen saw as being rendered superfluous by his plan.¹⁴

The advantages of community life were to be far more than merely material. The superior circumstances would permit the formation of a rational character, something that was impossible in the degraded conditions of towns or the impoverished countryside. The Owenite movement stressed the importance of education, and in many ways life in community was to be a continual educational process. Krishnan Kumar has remarked that education *in* community was the means to the Owenite goal of a rational, enlightened population.¹⁵ Education was a key feature of the Owenite community. In the new moral world, communities would have a strong educational purpose, which would be ongoing throughout an individual's lifetime, constantly refining the rational character. Prior to the emergence of the new social order, education provided an important justification for the formation of communities in the midst of the old world. Communities would provide a shelter from the irrational society outside, where a new

¹³ Robert Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark' (1821) in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. I., pp. 302-303

Robert Owen, 'The Social System' (1826-7) in *ibid.*, vol. II., pp. 72-73, 88

¹⁴ Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, pp. 51-52

¹⁵ Robert Owen, 'The Social System' (1826-7) in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. II., pp. 66-67

Robert Owen, 'Outline of the Rational System of Society' (1830) in *ibid.*, vol. II., p. 208

Krishnan Kumar, 'Utopian Thought and Communal Practice: Robert Owen and the Owenite Communities' in Dennis Hardy and Lorna Davidson (eds.), *Utopian Thought and Communal Experience* (Middlesex Polytechnic, Geography and Planning Paper No. 24, 1989), p. 24

generation of rational beings, fit and capable of ushering in the new order could be raised. At the Manea Fen community, it was planned to reinforce this ideological position by the physical separation of the school from the remainder of the community by a moat.¹⁶ However, part of the attraction of schools in community was also the promise of a far superior education to that to be obtained elsewhere. Education was enumerated as one of the advantages of the Spa Fields community.¹⁷ This tension, between the general, moral raising of children suited to the promised society, and the more prosaic, if practical, education suited to the current society, can be seen in the education provided in communitarian schools.

Community was the only place where an ideal environment, and thus the ideal character, could be created. Material abundance played a role in this, by removing the incentives to selfishness, deception, competition and a focus on the individual, all considered to be damaging by Owen. The removal of a division of labour also avoided the damaging effects, prevalent under the industrial system, of employment at a single task, and would lead to the development of a healthy, rounded character.¹⁸ Community would also replace the three main institutions to which Owen attributed social problems; private property, religion and marriage. Private property engendered competition and self-interest, and created wide differences in wealth and material well-being. Religion perpetuated ignorance. Marriage enforced the single family, which was destructive of communal feeling, and a means of subjugation of women.¹⁹ An individualistic and divisive social system would be attacked at its root, through the destruction of the single family. Within the community, children would be cared for communally, and the removal of responsibility for their care from their parents would in

¹⁶ *Working Bee*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

¹⁷ *Report of the Committee Appointed at a Meeting of Journeymen, Chiefly Printers, to take into Consideration Certain Propositions, Submitted to them by Mr. George Mudie, Having for their Object a System of Social Arrangement Calculated to Effect Essential Improvements in the Condition of the Working Classes and of Society at Large* (London, 1821)

¹⁸ Robert Owen, 'Outline of the Rational System of Society' (1830) in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. II., p. 208

¹⁹ Robert Owen, 'Oration Containing a Declaration of Mental Independence' (1826) in *ibid.*, vol. II., p. 51

turn facilitate their separation if that was ever desired. Familial bonds would rather be extended to the community as a whole.²⁰ The destruction of marriage as an inviolable institution, and of individual families, was also seen in terms of female emancipation, for women would be freed from the legalised tyranny of their husbands.²¹

The Owenite movement must be distinguished from Owen himself. His ideas were not accepted uncritically, or in full, but instead individuals emphasised different aspects and drew on other influences to suit their own particular situations and aspirations. From Owen the movement took the vision of an alternative society, rather than his precise arguments. The emergence of an Owenite movement can be dated to 1821 and the Spa Fields community founded by George Mudie and a group of London printers. R. G. Garnett describes Mudie as 'virtually the first Owenite'.²²

It is also imperative to recognise the ideological contributions made in this period by theorists other than Owen. In this context too, Mudie was among those whose work was influential. He developed a more strictly economic interpretation of Owen. Gregory Claeys considers Mudie to be one of the most influential theorists, and, after Owen, the main inspiration for William Thompson and John Gray, themselves significant figures.²³

William Thompson occupied a significant position within the co-operative movement of the early 1830s. He made important contributions to socialist theory, especially in considering the question of female emancipation. His influence within the movement also stemmed from his concept of community. Thompson started to achieve prominence with

²⁰ Robert Owen, 'The Social System' (1826-7) in *ibid.*, vol. II., p. 75

Robert Owen, 'Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World' (1835) in *ibid.*, vol. II., pp. 279-291

Robert Owen, 'Outline of the Rational System of Society' (1830) in *ibid.*, vol. II., p. 208

²¹ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World* (London, 1969), p. 60-61

²² R. G. Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain, 1825-45* (Manchester, 1972), p. 41

²³ Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, pp. 67-68

An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth, the publication of which, in 1824, coincided with Owen's departure for America. During Owen's absence Thompson's influence grew. In contrast to Owen, Thompson placed greater emphasis on a more working-class, democratic approach to community. He rejected middle-class support, which was being sought by Owen, and by the early 1830s he had come to stress the need for an immediate start on a small scale, while Owen's plans at this time were far more grandiose. His *Practical Directions for the speedy and economical establishment of Communities* (1830) laid out his views on community, and was extremely influential within the co-operative movement. The tension between these two approaches can readily be seen in the proceedings at the early co-operative Congresses, which were largely dominated by Thompson's concept of community.²⁴ Before his death in 1833, Thompson clearly provided an alternative focus within the movement. His approach was extremely influential in the early years, a fact which is readily understandable given his audience. An emphasis on small-scale experiments, to be begun immediately, and freed from middle-class paternalism must have appealed far more to a movement composed largely of urban, working-class artisans, than the expensive plans of Owen, with their dependence on the middle classes and scheduled for an indefinite point in the future. Thompson's advice must have accorded closely to the desires of the co-operative movement in this period.

It is clear that, while the co-operative and Owenite movements thus contained influences other than Owen himself, the attraction of the

²⁴ Thompson's influence is apparent in the reports of the first four Co-operative Congresses: 'Resolutions, &c. Passed at the First Meeting of the Co-operative Congress, Held in Manchester, on Thursday and Friday, May 26 and 27, 1831' in *Co-operative Congresses, Reports and Papers* (Goldsmiths' Collection, University of London, GL A831) John Powell and James Powell, *Proceedings of the Second Co-operative Congress* (Birmingham, 1831)

William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress* (London, 1832) 'Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of Delegates from Co-operative Societies of Great Britain and Ireland' in *The Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, November 1832

See also R. K. P. Pankhurst, *William Thompson (1775-1833): Britain's Pioneer Socialist, Feminist and Co-operator* (London, 1954), pp. 153-181

communitarian vision in this period drew much strength from influences outside the movement. While the influence of socialist theorists needs to be analysed if the form of the nineteenth-century communities is to be understood, it is also helpful to recognise the more general attraction of the communitarian way of life. Krishnan Kumar has written, 'The communal impulse, one might almost go as far as to say, has its own independent existence, only tangentially affected by the theories that seek to guide it. Time and again ... men and women have almost instinctively withdrawn into communities to find, by painful error if need be, what the value of their beliefs might be'.²⁵ Tony Weggemans has also supported this view of the small-scale community as an almost automatic response when social reform is sought, arguing that communal projects frequently result from utopian activism, as the communal life can be seen as a practical way to start a new society out of nothing.²⁶ A small, close-knit community can also be seen as offering a cohesive and meaningful lifestyle, in contrast to wider society which can be chaotic, and without order. Rosabeth Kanter has seen this as being part of the basic attraction of utopian communal schemes.²⁷ These general impulses behind the drive to community need to be linked to historically specific influences, if the communitarian movement in this period is to be understood.

That communal life can be seen as offering an ordered, stable environment, was clearly particularly relevant in the early nineteenth century. As has been discussed above, Owen's concept of community was formulated in response to the rapid social changes under industrialisation. Industrialisation brought huge social changes in its wake. Older, traditional working patterns and social relationships were overturned. The period saw an increase in the amount of waged labour, and the emergence of a

²⁵ Krishnan Kumar, 'Utopian Thought and Communal Practice: Robert Owen and the Owenite Communities', in Dennis Hardy and Lorna Davidson (eds.), *Utopian Thought and Communal Experience*, p. 28

²⁶ Tony Weggemans, 'Modern Utopia and Modern Communes', in Dennis Hardy and Lorna Davidson (eds.), *Utopian Thought and Communal Experience*, p. 44

²⁷ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), pp. 39-46

proletariat dependent on wages for their livelihood. Relationships between employers and workers shifted to an impersonal relationship based on the cash nexus, rather than the former traditional relationship which acknowledged duties and responsibilities on both sides. These changes produced a sense that community was being lost. Social ties and duties were replaced by economic relationships.

Industrialisation was accompanied by urbanisation, itself productive of great change. The process was rapid. Whereas in 1750 the only two cities in Britain with a population of more than 50,000 were London and Edinburgh, by 1801 there were eight cities, and by 1851 twenty-nine.²⁸ 1851 also marked the first time in which more people in Britain lived in towns than in the countryside. The rapid growth of these towns was due in a large part to migration from rural areas. In 1811 Liverpool had a population of 115,000, which had increased to 338,000 by 1851, approximately two-thirds of whom were migrants.²⁹ Public services were stretched beyond their limits by this rapid growth of the urban population. Migrants moved into overcrowded slums, and disease and pollution spread.

Community provided a response to these changing conditions. In doing so, the appeal of Owen's vision was combined with older beliefs and attitudes. The majority of those active within the Owenite movement were urban, working-class artisans. Owen's plan was easily adapted to fit the concerns of urban artisans. His advocacy of co-operation was not of itself entirely original, and built on a tradition of working-class mutuality. Examples of co-operative corn mills and stores can be found from the late eighteenth century onwards. Friendly societies providing a degree of mutual assistance also pre-dated the emergence of the Owenite movement. Owen's dream of a communitarian society was also suited to the concerns of the small, independent producer. His economic theory was rooted in a belief that labour was the source of all value, and he sought to ensure that the

²⁸ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 86

²⁹ Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation* (London, 2nd ed. 1983), p. 178

labourer received the full value of his work. Exploitation by middlemen, distributors, and employers would cease. At a time when artisans were being increasingly brought within the capitalist system, and seeing their position eroded by an increase in sweated labour and an influx of cheap, untrained labour against which their defences were being progressively weakened, community offered security. Owen's vision of community was adapted to provide a method by which the working classes could raise themselves, through their own labour.

A significant part of the attraction for such groups was the association of the Owenite community with a return to the land. Community was partly a reaction against the worsening conditions in the growing cities. Furthermore, the land held a strong emotional appeal, especially for an urban working-class which in this period would have been only one generation removed from the countryside. Malcolm Chase stresses the extent to which this removal was not complete, for seasonal rural work, and the persistence of both rural pastimes and a partial reliance on home-grown produce, maintained strong ties with the rural life.³⁰ Despite the maintenance of such practical links, there was a strong romanticization of the land in this period, in contrast to the squalor of the expanding cities. A myth of a vanished, golden age of rural living emerged, stressing the dignity of labour and the nobility of a life on the land. This yearning found an effective voice in the writings of William Cobbett, who, while not advocating a return to the land, did much to popularise a romantic view of a lost rural life.³¹

The land was a significant element in most radical plans for social reform, understandable when it was the possession of property which guaranteed political power. Two of the most influential theorists with regard to the land in this period were Thomas Paine and Thomas Spence. In

³⁰ Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, pp. 9-15

³¹ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium: A Study of the Harmony Community* (Manchester, 1998), pp. 42-43

his *Agrarian Justice*, Paine argued for an original state of nature, in which there had been common ownership of the land. Paine did not argue for a return to this state, but rather for the payment of rent by landowners to the community in compensation for their loss of the land. Unlike Paine, Spence argued for a return to communal ownership. As it was the land which supported life, to deny access to the land was to deny the right to live. Spence's solution involved the redistribution of land into small parish communes, which would then rent the land to farmers. As against Paine, Spence was arguing for democratic control and a radical shift in ownership.³² Such theories, and the experience of the working classes in this period, came together in support for agrarian attitudes. These views encompassed a number of elements, ranging from a belief in the potential abundance to be gained from the land, to the independence from capitalist society, to a belief in the dignity of the self-sufficiency to be found through labour on the land.³³ These views were significant both for the general appeal of the land, and for support for communitarian schemes in this period. Malcolm Chase has demonstrated the persistence of agrarian attitudes into the Owenite movement of the 1830s and 1840s. Chase has identified a group of Spenceans centred on Finsbury, members of which were involved in a number of Owenite and communitarian schemes, including the local branches of both the Rational Society and the Manea Fen community in Cambridgeshire.³⁴

The return to the land could also hold an economic appeal. Part of the agrarian position was an advocacy of a society of small producers located on the land, and this was similar to the communitarian argument for small, self-sufficient communities. Owenism's appeal was based on its moral and educational theories, but also on its economic critique. As has been mentioned above, George Mudie had done much to develop this side from the early 1820s. The growth of the co-operative movement from the

³² Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, pp. 34-37, 65-67

³³ *ibid.*, pp. 140-143

³⁴ *ibid.*, chapter. 6.

late-1820s had demonstrated the attraction of the economic advantages to be gained under the co-operative system. Community itself could also be seen in economic terms. Co-operative production under a communal system would free the workers from the capitalist market-driven economy. Producers would be ensured their right to the full produce of labour, and justice in distribution. Community held out the promise of more efficient production and material comfort and security. While the economic elements were present in Owenism from the 1820s, Sidney Pollard has argued that they were less significant than the moral side for the period before 1828 and after 1834.³⁵ Between these years the focus of activity was more on co-operative trading and the labour exchanges, although for Owen community remained as the goal. However, community itself could also be advocated on purely economic grounds, as was demonstrated by the Leeds Redemption Society. Founded in 1845, the society saw community as the solution to social problems, but it perceived those problems in economic terms. A moral or religious approach to community was explicitly rejected. This approach was clearly expressed in the society's slogan, 'Labouring Capitalists, not Labourers and Capitalists'. For most of the community experiments of the 1830s and 1840s however, the attraction of the economic advantages to be found there would have been blended with other elements, such as Owen's educational and moral arguments, and the possibilities for democracy and equality.

1. 2. Historians and Robert Owen

Owen and the Owenite movement have both attracted significant attention from historians. As R. G. Garnett remarks, Owen's influence was so diffuse that there are immediate problems of delineation.³⁶ Owen occurs in the history of many different areas, from the trades unions to the co-operative movement, and from education to communitarianism. This thesis focuses

³⁵ Sidney Pollard, 'Nineteenth-Century Co-operation: From Community Building to Shopkeeping' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History* (London, 1960), p. 77

on this last aspect, and examines the variety of Owenite communitarian experiments in Britain. Whereas in America Owen has been treated primarily in relation to communitarianism, this has not been the case in Britain. Furthermore, the majority of studies focus on the main, large communities of Orbiston, Ralahine, and Queenwood. This thesis argues that this focus does not produce an entirely representative picture of the communitarian impulse in this period. By focusing on the small-scale communities, and a number of community proposals which were not realised, this thesis argues for an awareness of both the broad concept of community employed within the movement, and the diversity, of both aim and form, which characterised these small-scale experiments.

The three major studies of British Owenite communitarianism are those of J. F. C. Harrison, R. G. Garnett, and, most recently, Edward Royle.³⁷ Harrison's work, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America*, had two main aims. Like Garnett, Harrison recognised that Owen had influenced a diverse range of areas and wished to redress the partial nature of the historiography. In particular, Harrison was reacting against the recent tendency to assess Owen and Owenism largely as a part of the labour movement. Harrison employed two methods to move beyond previous partial interpretations. Firstly, as is clear from the title of the work, Harrison sought to integrate the experience of Owenism in both Britain and America into a single study. For Harrison, the appeal of Owenism in these two different societies was one of its central features. Secondly, the work also employed a comparative methodology in its attempt to widen the scope of the study. The result was a wide-ranging study which examined a broad range of issues. Harrison was concerned with many areas of Owenism besides the community ventures, but he provides a valuable thematic study of many of the smaller experiments. This analysis benefited from the comparison between the British and American experience, and raised many

³⁶ R. G. Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain*, p. 12

³⁷ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*

R. G. Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain*

of the issues faced by communities. While Harrison included some of the lesser known experiments, such as that of the Leeds Redemption Society, a more exhaustive study of smaller British communities was outside the scope of the book.

Like Harrison, Garnett was reacting to the weaknesses of recent work. *Co-operation and the Owenite socialist communities in Britain, 1825-45* has a more specific focus than Harrison's work. Garnett is primarily concerned with the connections between Owen, the Owenites and the early co-operative movement. He is also concerned with the origins of the co-operative movement, and seeks to counter-act the tendency to focus on the movement after Rochdale. Garnett's work provides a largely narrative, and detailed, history of the three main Owenite communities of Orbiston, Ralahine and Queenwood. Through focusing on the relationship between Owen and the co-operative movement, Garnett necessarily devoted little attention to the issue at the centre of this study, that of the communitarian impulse and the variety of its manifestations.

Since the publication of Garnett's book in 1972, the only major study of British Owenite communitarianism has been Edward Royle's *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*. This work, focusing on the Queenwood community, provides the most detailed study of a single British community available. Royle places the community within the context of the Owenite movement, and examines the relationship between Owen himself and the wider movement.

A focus on the more prominent experiments ignores the great number and variety of communitarian ventures in this period. And yet it was experiments such as these that provided the background to the larger communities, and they attest to the same communitarian impulse that drove their larger counterparts. An examination of the small-scale ventures will

produce a broader understanding of the nature and purpose of community in this period. The communitarian movement embraced a wide range of different proposals and ventures. It was a movement characterised by diversity, and experiments can be distinguished by their specific concepts of the nature of community, the forms they adopted, and the particular aims they sought to achieve.

Preceding the works mentioned above was W. H. G. Armytage's *Heavens Below*.³⁸ This provides a valuable survey of utopian experiments in England from 1560 to 1960. While providing a significant level of detail on the experiments and the groups involved with them, the broad scope of the book precludes a discussion of issues to be covered in this study, such as forms of government, or communitarian culture. More recently Dennis Hardy provided a similar survey, which due to its more limited scope was able to provide information on a number of more obscure experiments.³⁹ Again, this work was not primarily concerned with the Owenite movement. Although Hardy does discuss the aims of the movement, the purpose of the book was to provide a general survey of the communities, including non-Owenite experiments of the period. While there have been few recent works primarily concerned with Owenite communitarianism, the field has benefited from contributions to the wider study of Owenism and socialism in the period. Gregory Claeys' works on Owenite and socialist economics and politics are notable examples.⁴⁰ Barbara Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem* provides a detailed study of socialism and feminism.⁴¹

Included amongst the communities studied here are some which, while treated here as Owenite ventures, have been previously considered in other contexts. Malcolm Chase covers a number of communities in his

³⁸ W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England 1560-1960* (London, 1961)

³⁹ Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1979)

⁴⁰ Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge, 1989)

Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*

study of radical agrarianism, *The People's Farm*.⁴² He demonstrates the important element of agrarian thought in the Manea Fen community. A further example is Paul Pickering's inclusion of the 1841 Chat Moss community in his study of Chartism in Manchester.⁴³ These communities have been included here as they were perceived by their members or contemporaries as belonging to the Owenite movement, in a broad sense. However, it is not the intention of this thesis to argue that they were Owenite, and not agrarian or Chartist, or to reject these interpretations. Instead, by bringing these communities within a study of Owenite communitarianism, this thesis draws on such interpretations to demonstrate the range of ideological approaches underpinning communities at this time, and argues that the movement was highly diverse and fragmented. Applying rigid definitions has the potential to limit an awareness of the multifarious character of the Owenite communitarian movement.

In contrast to the literature on British communities, historians have given much recent attention to American communities. As communitarianism has remained current in American historiography, recent works employ approaches that have not been applied to British experiments. This thesis draws on these approaches and addresses questions which have emerged in studies of American communities. A key example of this is Carol Kolmerten's book *Women in Utopia*.⁴⁴ This work focuses on the contrast between the rhetoric of sexual equality employed by Owen and other early socialists, and the situation in the actual experiments. While Kolmerten's conclusion has been questioned, the issues raised in this work are clearly of great importance.⁴⁵ As both Kolmerten and Barbara Taylor emphasise, the promise of sexual equality was a key feature of Owenism.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1983)

⁴² Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*

⁴³ Paul A. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (London, 1995)

⁴⁴ Carol Kolmerten, *Women in Utopia: The Ideology of Gender in the American Owenite Communities* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990)

⁴⁵ N. Gabin, 'Women in Utopia' in *Journal of the Early Republic*, 12 (1992), summer, pp. 275-276

⁴⁶ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*

Many women would have found a voice within the movement, and the communities offered, in theory at least, the hope of true equality. Sally Alexander has argued that the Owenite movement provided an opportunity for women that was denied them in other contemporary organisations.⁴⁷ However, this is an aspect that has received little attention in studies of British communities.

Study of the American communities has also benefited from analysis from disciplines other than history. R. M. Kanter's *Commitment and Community* demonstrates the value of a sociological approach.⁴⁸ The book focuses on the methods employed in communities to generate commitment, and on the values underlying these communities. While Kanter's classification of communities as successful or unsuccessful, and concentration on the question of longevity, has been questioned, her analysis of community structures and customs remains valuable.⁴⁹ Barbara Goodwin also considers the methods used to generate control and cohesion, and the values of utopia.⁵⁰

The range of studies available on the American communities provides useful material on the problems faced by community ventures. Harrison demonstrated the value of a comparative approach, and a number of general studies have shown that communities faced a range of common difficulties and issues. Works such as John Hostetler's *Communitarian Societies* provide a useful discussion of the issues raised in attempts to found a community.⁵¹ Seymour Kesten's *Utopian Episodes* provides a thematic discussion of a broad range of areas within communitarian life.⁵² American historiography includes studies of many aspects of community life

⁴⁷ Sally Alexander, 'Women, Class and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 1840s: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History' in *History Workshop Journal*, 17 (1984), pp. 125-149

⁴⁸ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community*

⁴⁹ James Latimore, 'Natural Limits on the Size and Duration of Utopian Communities', *Communal Societies*, 11 (1991), pp. 34-61

⁵⁰ Barbara Goodwin, *Social Science and Utopia: Nineteenth-Century Models of Social Harmony* (Sussex, 1978)

⁵¹ John A. Hostetler, *Communitarian Societies* (New York, 1972)

not represented in works on British experiments. One example of this is architecture. Both Hayden and Green have discussed community architecture in relation to its functions as an expression of, and method of reinforcing, communitarian values.⁵³ The present study, while locating the small-scale communities in Britain in relation to the Owenite movement, also aims to provide a social analysis of a number of themes present in communitarian life. This analysis includes themes such as the importance of education, the relationship between ideology and practice, government, communitarian culture, and economic viability. Given the gaps in British historiography, it is from American studies that many approaches and lines of questioning are drawn.

1. 3. The thesis structure

This thesis essentially falls into three main sections, structured around a detailed case-study of the Manea Fen community. The first section comprises chapters two, three, and four. Chapter two examines the debates over community within the early communitarian movement, from 1820 to 1835. This period begins with the emergence of an Owenite movement with George Mudie and the Spa Fields community. From the late 1820s, the movement became involved with co-operative trading and trade unionism. Despite the early success of co-operative stores and labour exchanges, this phase ended in 1834. The chapter traces debates within the movement primarily through the series of co-operative congresses which ran from 1831 to 1833. Whereas the second chapter studies differing views of community, chapter three covers attempts to carry these views into practice. Focusing on London and Manchester, the two main centres of Owenism, the chapter locates community ventures in the context of the societies and individuals composing the movement. The fourth chapter begins in 1835 with the

⁵² Seymour R. Kesten, *Utopian Episodes* (New York, 1993)

⁵³ Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976)

Ernest J. Green, 'The Social Functions of Utopian Architecture' in *Utopian Studies*, 4 (1993), pp. 1-13

foundation of the Association of All Classes of All Nations, the Owenite organisation which dominated the following ten years. While the largest society, it could not satisfy the demand for community which existed, and this chapter focuses on the unofficial communities of these years.

The core of the thesis is a study of the Manea Fen community, 1839 to 1841. Chapters five to eight consider a variety of aspects of the community. The study covers questions relevant to all such ventures, such as the economic viability of the community, the position of women, and its ideological basis. It also attempts to provide an examination of what it meant to live in community, and the demands that this way of life place upon its members. Chapter nine compares Manea Fen with two of its contemporaries, Pant Glas and the United Advancement Society. The comparison reveals common problems faced by attempts to establish self-contained communities, as well as the difficulties raised by the particular approach of each community.

The final part of the thesis is composed of chapters ten and eleven. Chapter ten examines the continuation of the communitarian movement beyond the collapse of the official Owenite movement and the loss of its organisational infrastructure in 1845. While focusing on the Leeds Redemption Society and its Welsh community, the chapter also examines the national context. Chapter eleven examines co-operative emigration throughout the period covered by the thesis, which both highlights the difficulties faced by communitarians in Britain and the manner in which communal emigration ran parallel to the domestic movement, reacting to the same demands and debates.

CHAPTER 2. THE COMMUNITY DEBATE: 1825-1835

2. Introduction

One evening in September, 1827, the members of the London Co-operative Society assembled at its rooms at 36 Red Lion Square, just east of Bloomsbury, to hear Robert Owen outline his community plans. The discussion on this occasion illustrates the extent to which the Owenite communitarian movement was characterised by variety, both in theory and in practice. At their meeting the London Co-operative Society sought to answer the fundamental question which ran throughout debates within the communitarian movement - how best to achieve the transition to community. Discussions on this issue can be divided into three main, although interrelated, areas. Firstly, there was the question of timing. The communitarian movement was divided in two over this issue. There were those who argued for an immediate start, while others, believing that society was not yet ready for communities, favoured a more gradual approach, with a concentration on education and preparation in the short-term. Stemming from this was the second main issue, that of the size of the proposed communities. Advocates of immediate action were more inclined towards a small-scale beginning, far removed from Owen's grandiose visions, while others, like the London Co-operative Society, proposed large-scale communities with over a thousand inhabitants. The community's size would clearly relate to its funding, and this is the third main area. Owen was prepared to seek middle-class or government funding, something which his working-class followers objected to most strongly. Sources of finance clearly impacted upon the nature and government of the communities, and the working-class vision of community as democratic and independent clashed with Owen's own views.

A further main theme of these early debates over community was the extent to which the movement was both open to influences besides Owen and operated independently of him. The men who gathered for this meeting

were part of an independent group, which, while clearly influenced by Owen, had developed during his absence in America. The society's aim was 'the Formation of Communities of Mutual Co-operation and Equal Distribution', a recognisably Owenite goal, yet their plan for a community was printed as an appendix to John Gray's *Lecture on Human Happiness*, showing the influence of other theorists.¹ While Owen was a figurehead for many communitarian groups, he was not the sole influence. Furthermore, Owen disowned these early attempts at community, and the first faltering steps that were taken were independent of Owen personally, often made despite rather than because of his actions.

This chapter traces these main issues through the debates on community from 1825 through to 1835, a phase of the communitarian movement characterised by a multiplicity of small, independent societies, which began with the formation of the London Co-operative Society and ended with the formation of the Association of All Classes of All Nations. The chapter focuses on the Co-operative Congresses, held between 1831 and 1835, which provided the main forum for debate within the communitarian movement. It will also include studies of the small communities founded in this period, which stood as examples of the variety of approaches to community and to which Congress delegates turned to support or condemn their colleagues' positions.

2. 1. The progress of co-operation in Devon

The London Co-operative Society's September discussion also revealed the variety of forms adopted in the search for community. The society, following Owen's descriptions, planned a community housing two thousand members, on an acre per member. The plan required subscriptions towards a minimum share of £10, a considerable amount for a working man. A report delivered at the meeting demonstrated that this was not the only

¹ *Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, I. 11. 25 September 1825
W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below*, pp. 113, 119

approach being taken in this period. A member spoke of the Downlands community in Devon, a small group founded with little capital, very different from the London society's plan.² With their contrasting plans, the Devon and London co-operators marked the boundaries of the debates over community in these early years.

In the summer of 1826 both the Devon and Exeter Co-operative Society and the London Co-operative Society sought to fund a community through the sale of shares. Yet while the London Co-operative Society continued to advertise for shares, and began to look for land, the Devon co-operators refused to wait for the promise of shares to be realised and located themselves on the land. Their precipitate action demonstrates well the impatience of co-operators to reside in community. It speaks of a strong desire for the communitarian life, a desire illustrated by the claim that one hundred families sought membership of the community in the summer of 1826.³

In common with many other groups at this time, the Devon co-operators were led by their desire for an immediate start to communitarian life to concentrate on a small-scale community, instead of the large, expensive communities projected by Owen. A focus on such small experiments permits an exploration of this desire and of the various forms that it took through this period. Contemporary establishments such as Orbiston and New Harmony were in many ways the exception rather than the rule, whereas Downlands was to be repeated many times across the country in the following years. Furthermore, an examination of the many societies and communities of the period reveals the degree to which community was a malleable concept, open to interpretation and the subject of much debate.

² *Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, III. 144. 16 September 1827

³ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I. 7. July 1826

The Devon and Exeter Co-operative Society's community began in 1826.⁴ The society was in contact with the London Co-operative Society, and its prospectus was available from the London society's offices at 36 Red Lion Square. The two organisations raised similar amounts. By February 1826 London Co-operative Society shares totalling £4,000 had been taken out.⁵ In Exeter, over 500 people had come forward with funds, mostly in the form of small donations, although one hundred £25 shares were taken out, and £2,000 had been offered by two or three wealthy patrons. The shares and donations totalled between £6,500 and £8,500.⁶ Thus in the spring of 1826 the two organisations were in similar positions.

By July 1826 a group of men from the Devon and Exeter Co-operative Society had purchased a small estate for a community. The community's activities were reported in the London Co-operative Society's periodical, *The Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*. A Mr. Herbert provided a personal link between London and Devon, and the two organisations remained in contact throughout the life of the community. Herbert had some experience of communities, having visited the Rappites at Harmonie in America.⁷ The community's main promoter was Jasper Vesey, a hosier and linen draper from Exeter who was well-known in the local co-operative movement.⁸ Vesey brought a significant financial contribution and seems to have provided much of the drive and inspiration.⁹ The estate totalled thirty-seven acres, and was described by Herbert, visiting from London, as being in a 'most delightful' location about six and a half miles from the city of Exeter and ten from the coast.¹⁰ The group was to take possession on Lady Day, 25 March, but had come to an arrangement under

⁴ The Devon and Exeter Co-operative Society's community has previously been included in Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth-Century England*, pp. 46-48

J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, p. 170

R. G. Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain*, p. 50

Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, p. 151

⁵ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I. 2. February 1826

⁶ *ibid.*, I. 5. May 1826

⁷ *ibid.*, I. 1. January 1826

⁸ Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth-Century England*, p. 46

⁹ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I. 9. September 1826

¹⁰ *ibid.*, I.7. July 1826; I. 8. August 1826

which they could take as much as they needed immediately, as long as they re-imbursed the landowner for the crops on the land. The co-operators took six acres, and immediately set thirteen members to work on the land.

The inhabitants' first priority was housing for themselves, and for the others who would follow. There were reportedly one hundred co-operators in Exeter waiting anxiously to depart, with their families, for the community. By August twelve cottages had been completed. Vesey believed that the group could build accommodation for four hundred families for only £1,000, a sum far lower than those suggested by Owen and others. Vesey rejected Owen's projections of an outlay of £50,000 to £200,000, and claimed that a community of 2,000 could be established for £5,000. Vesey based his calculations on his 'economical plan', which involved a new, and vastly cheaper, method of building.¹¹ Vesey was not the only communitarian to raise such a plan, and similar suggestions for cheaper modes of construction emerged in other community plans, including the Queenwood community in Hampshire.¹²

By September 1826 the members of the community were reported to be 'proceeding in their various occupations with the greatest alacrity and vigor [*sic*], on the full practice of the principle of equal distribution or community of property.'¹³ Their major concern at this time was that Vesey would withdraw from the community, taking his funding with him. These fears proved correct, and when Vesey was forced to end his involvement, apparently due to unavoidable domestic circumstances, the community also ended.¹⁴ Vesey himself had lost £3,000 in the venture.¹⁵ Yet the members had been encouraged by what they had achieved in the short time the

¹¹ *ibid.*, I. 8. August 1826

¹² *New Moral World*, VI. 56. 16 November 1839

G. C. Penn, the London co-operator, suggested that turf and clay igloos would prove a cheap means of building a community (*Owenite Co-operation 1828-42: Goldsmiths' Collection*, University of London, GL A828 fol.)

¹³ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I. 9. September 1826

¹⁴ *ibid.*, I. 9. September 1826, II. 1. January 1827

¹⁵ John Evelyn, *An Address to the Labouring Classes on the Plans to be Pursued and the Errors to be Avoided in Conducting Trading Unions* (London, 1830), p. 20

community lasted, and within a few months of its collapse they had begun another community in the same area. The members, while regretting Vesey's withdrawal, did not condemn his behaviour but rather were grateful that he had shown that a community could be established 'with much smaller capital than most of its advocates had supposed.'¹⁶ The London Co-operative Society echoed this sentiment, declaring that,

...we were ourselves long since of that opinion; and confirmed in it now we know that the working classes can, by uniting their little, and forming themselves into communities, raise themselves from their present wretchedness to a state of the highest superiority in real enjoyment and happiness, over that of their present highest superiors.¹⁷

Despite the welcome this second community received, its members complained of not receiving more practical support from its London friends. The community, now named Downlands, still suffered from a lack of capital, but the community's income exceeded their expenses. By the summer of 1827 the members had expectations of a good harvest, and the community's trades were sufficiently successful to provide an income in the meantime. While eager to present a picture of steadily increasing prosperity, the members appealed for aid from London. The community considered expanding its educational provision to include local children, as it had received requests from neighbouring villages. It asked the London Co-operative Society to help find women prepared to teach at Downlands.¹⁸ The schooling at the community appears to have consisted of practical instruction in a trade, conducted by one of the female members. In expanding their educational arrangements, the community sought to

Vesey was later involved with promoting trading unions.

¹⁶ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, II. 1. January 1827

¹⁷ *ibid.*, II. 1. January 1827

¹⁸ *ibid.*, II. 9. September 1827

increase the range of instruction, but continued to confine its provision to girls, suggesting that the practical content would remain significant.¹⁹

While seeking the London Co-operative Society's help in employing more teachers, Downlands also took the opportunity to berate the London society for its previous lack of support. When the community had first been announced, the *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald* had expressed its hope that the venture would not distract co-operators from the need for one, large-scale experiment, rather than scattered small-scale efforts.²⁰ Despite a later improvement in relations between the two organisations, the community now appealed for more practical help. Writing from the community, Mr. Martin claimed that a 'few hundred pounds more would, I am certain, place our success beyond doubt'. Martin, despite seeking further funding, remained convinced that the small-scale approach of Downlands would prove successful, stating that he would 'not be surprised if we succeed *better* and *sooner* than the establishments where the experiment is trying on a larger scale.'²¹

The establishments that Martin wrote of were almost certainly those of Orbiston in Scotland and Owen's New Harmony community in America. Martin wished the other experiments success, although at the time of writing both would have either just collapsed or been on the brink of doing so. In the summer of 1827 Orbiston closed and New Harmony ceased to exist as an Owenite community. Whether Downlands survived them by any length of time is not known, for reports end in September 1827. Although the Downlands community lasted for at least fifteen months (from the time of its establishment at the first estate), a period not greatly shorter than that of Orbiston or New Harmony, the latter have attracted far more attention from historians. Yet, as an example of working men attempting to 'raise themselves from their present wretchedness', Downlands and similar ventures occupy a significant place in the history of Owenite

¹⁹ *ibid.*, II. 9. September 1827

²⁰ *ibid.*, I. 4. April 1827

communitarianism in Britain. Its existence demonstrates the presence of a strand in the communitarian movement that aimed at the immediate formation of communities.

The fate of these ventures was significant in influencing the arguments of those who participated in the debate over the coming years. Not all who studied them, however, drew the same conclusions. William Thompson, one of the main influences on the early co-operative movement, used the examples of New Harmony and Orbiston to argue the necessity of further, immediate, experiments.²² Those who argued for immediate action included those who favoured a single, large experiment, and those who preferred to see a plurality of experiments. At a debate at Owen's Institution in London in November 1832 a representative of the latter viewpoint voiced his objections to a letter which argued against 'petty and premature experiments' as mere distractions. The challenger stated that he 'wished to see experiments tried every where [*sic*] and under every different form.'²³ The same argument had surfaced in the London Co-operative Society's objections to the Devon and Exeter Co-operative Society. William Pare, however, drew the opposite conclusion, arguing that the two ventures had proved the need for further preparation.²⁴ Thompson and Pare here illustrate the two principle arguments which were to dominate the debate.

2. 2. Debates in Congress

One of the major forums for debate over community in the 1830s was the series of Co-operative Congresses. With the collapse of the Downlands and Orbiston communities there was no major community experiment in Britain for the remainder of the 1820s. The question of establishing a new community was a central issue at the First Co-operative Congress in May

²¹ *ibid.*, II. 9. September 1827

²² *Manchester Guardian*, 11 June 1831

²³ *Crisis*, I. 36. 10 November 1832

²⁴ *Weekly Free Press*, V. 219. 19 September 1829

1831. In the circular calling the Congress, issued by the Manchester Association, community was one of the key issues to be discussed.²⁵ The committee behind the circular was responding to the First Birmingham Co-operative Society's recent suggestion that co-operative societies across the country should co-operate in founding a community. The Birmingham co-operators hoped that this would unite the various societies, and encourage their members through providing a practical demonstration. 'The first community will illumine and make clearly visible the track they should pursue'.²⁶

The Birmingham plan was discussed by Congress when it assembled in Salford in late May, 1831. William Pare, a delegate from the First Birmingham Co-operative Society, proposed that Congress should support the formation of a community.²⁷ Congress passed the resolution, and adopted the plan suggested by the Birmingham co-operators. This called for each of two hundred co-operative societies to supply one member, with a share of £30, to the nascent community. The total capital of the community would thus be £6,000. While raising capital through shares was not new, this plan was significant for two main reasons. Firstly, it was the first attempt to raise funds for a community on a national basis. Previous attempts had all been local affairs, whereas now an effort was to be made to

²⁵ 'To the Owenian Co-operative Society' in *Co-operative Congresses, Reports and Papers* (Goldsmiths' Collection, University of London, GL A831)

The suggestion for a meeting of co-operative societies originated with the First Huddersfield Co-operative Society, itself responding to several local societies (*Weekly Free Press*, VI. 278. 6 November 1830). The suggestion was welcomed by William Lovett in April 1831 (*Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets: A Political Monitor*, 6 May 1831), and shortly afterwards the Manchester Association issued the circular calling the Congress.

²⁶ *Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets: A Political Director*, 30 April 1831

²⁷ 'Resolutions, &c. Passed at the First Meeting of the Co-operative Congress' in *Co-operative Congresses, Reports and Papers*

William Pare (1805-1873) was born in Birmingham. He played a major role in the establishment of the First Birmingham Co-operative Society and the Birmingham Labour Exchange. With the formation of the Association of All Classes of All Nations, Pare was involved with the Birmingham branch, and briefly served on the Central Board. Active in local politics, he belonged to the Birmingham Political Union and was elected to the Town Council in 1838. He became Superintendent Registrar for Births and Marriages in 1837, until he was forced to resign due to his socialist views in 1840. Pare was a successful railway statistician and later a manufacturer. (R. G. Garnett, *William Pare: Co-operator and Social Reformer*, Co-operative College Papers 16 (Loughborough, 1973))

harness the resources of the national co-operative movement. Secondly, the Birmingham co-operative society had cited William Thompson, not Owen, as the influence behind their plan. Pare's resolution, in calling for a community based on 'mutual co-operation, united possession, and equality of exertions, and of the means of enjoyment', quoted the full title of Thompson's *Practical Directions*, clearly showing his influence.

The acceptance of his approach by the Birmingham co-operators, and its subsequent endorsement by the First Co-operative Congress, emphasises the prominent position held by Thompson in the co-operative movement at this time. Thompson had first achieved prominence with the publication of his *Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth* in 1824. This work had impressed Owen himself, and he had taken it with him as he sailed to launch his New Harmony community in the same year. With Owen absent Thompson soon became a major figure in Britain.²⁸ Despite Owen's initial support, their differing concepts of community soon led the two men into conflict. Thompson's last major publication, *Practical Directions*, established the dominance of his view of community in the co-operative movement, and this was confirmed at the First Congress.

In many ways Thompson's view of community was extremely close to Owen's. In his publication of 1830 Thompson defined community as being based on mutual co-operation, equal distribution and united property, a view close to Owen's statement in the earlier *Report to the County of Lanark* that communities would rest 'on the principle of united labour,

²⁸ William Thompson (1775-1833) was an Irish landowner. He first met Owen during Owen's Irish tour in 1822. He was also a friend of Bentham. A major theorist, his works include *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth most conducive to Human Happiness, applied to the newly proposed System of Voluntary Equality of Wealth* (London, 1824), *Appeal of One-half the Human Race, Women, against the Pretensions of the other Half, Men, to retain them in political, and thence in civil and domestic Slavery; in Reply to ... Mr. Mill's celebrated 'Article on Government'* (London, 1825, re-printed New York, 1970), *Labor Rewarded. The Claims of Labor and Capital conciliated: or, how to secure to Labor the whole Products of its Exertions...* (London, 1827), and *Practical Directions for the speedy and economical establishment of Communities, on the principles of mutual co-operation, united possessions and equality of exertions and the means of enjoyments* (London, 1830)

The principal work on William Thompson is Richard K. P. Pankhurst, *William Thompson*

expenditure, and property, and equal privileges'.²⁹ His description of the physical layout of the ideal community diverged little from Owen's depiction. The buildings would be arranged around a central square and accommodate a maximum two thousand members. Yet the two men entertained very different opinions on the formation of the first communities.

Thompson wrote *Practical Directions* to aid the formation of communities, and to provide the working classes with the knowledge that would enable them to do so. While Owen sought the support of the upper classes, Thompson focused on the working classes and directed his efforts to facilitating the immediate formation of a community. *Practical Directions* contained a huge amount of information on theoretical and practical aspects of community building, covering areas such as heating, land use, temporary structures, and industry.

Thompson had long been an advocate of the immediate formation of a community. In mid-1826 he had been involved with the projected Cork Co-operative Community in his native Ireland.³⁰ This community was based on the rules of the London Co-operative Society, and was to begin in 1827, but little more was heard of the plan.³¹ The late 1820s found Thompson in London, where he participated in discussions with London co-operators. He urged an immediate start, and advanced his own plan for a small community of ten families with a capital of £1,200 to £1,500.³² In early 1830 Thompson again suggested the formation of a community in Ireland, to be known as the Ross Carberry Co-operative Community, on his estate near Cork.³³ This approach led Thompson into conflict with Owen, who had returned to England from New Harmony in 1827. In a letter to

²⁹ William Thompson, *Practical Directions*, pp. 3-9

Robert Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark' in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. I., p. 305

³⁰ Richard K. P. Pankhurst, *William Thompson*, pp. 135-136

³¹ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I. 9. September 1826, I. 10. October 1826

³² Richard K. P. Pankhurst, *William Thompson*, p. 140

³³ *Weekly Free Press*, V. 240. 13 February 1830

Owen in early 1830, Thompson attempted to portray their attitudes as complementary, rather than opposing.

I am looking out with hope and pleasure for your development of intermediate arrangements with the aid of political power to introduce our views gradually. While you are boldly operating on the whole mass, I am endeavouring to arrange a little part of the social machine, not forgetting its connections with the whole.³⁴

However, tension between the two continued to mount, culminating in conflict at the Third Co-operative Congress in 1832.

From the mid-1820s through to his death in 1833, Thompson came to represent a strand with the co-operative movement that prioritised the immediate formation of communities. The question of patronage was also relevant to support for Thompson's approach. In *Labor Rewarded*, Thompson wrote that, on reading Owen's plans, he initially 'turned away with disgust from a system ... which then seemed to me to court the patronage of the non-representative law-makers'.³⁵ While Thompson moved away from this position, it was one that would have been recognized by many working-class co-operators. Owen's desire for upper-class and government support was a highly divisive issue, as became clear at the Third Co-operative Congress in 1832. That Thompson did not share Owen's views on this point, and indeed argued that political reform would further the co-operative cause, was an additional factor in explaining his popularity among co-operators.³⁶ Thus the desire for community in the co-operative movement found a more appropriate champion in the figure of Thompson. Support for Thompson is explained partly by the extent to

³⁴ William Thompson to Robert Owen, 18 March 1830. Robert Owen Correspondence Collection (hereafter ROCC) 211. Quoted in Richard K. P. Pankhurst, *William Thompson*, pp. 155-156

³⁵ William Thompson, *Labor Rewarded*, p. 98

³⁶ For Thompson's support of political reform see *Labor Rewarded*, pp. 118-119

which both the natural desires of the co-operative movement, and the practical steps taken by co-operators, correlated with his approach.

2. 3. Chat Moss and Barnsbury Park: two small-scale experiments

Historians have suggested that, by the time of the First Co-operative Congress in May 1831, two further small-scale communities had been established in Britain. These experiments emerged in two of the main centres of co-operation, London and Manchester. While the North London Community can be detailed with relative confidence, the status of the suggested community at Chat Moss, Manchester, is far more elusive. The suggestion that there was a Chat Moss community in the early 1830s appears to have arisen from a series of misunderstandings between historians.³⁷ Amongst this confusion, it is apparent that an experiment was begun on Chat Moss by Elijah Dixon, although not in the 1830s. This community was almost certainly that covered by Paul Pickering in another context.³⁸ In 1841 Dixon and the Christian Co-operative Joint Stock Community purchased fourteen acres on the Moss. Formed in 1840, by 1841 the Manchester-based society had fifteen members and £200.³⁹

³⁷ W. H. G. Armytage dated the community to 1832, a date that appears to be based solely on a mis-reading of A. E. Musson's article on co-operation in Lancashire (W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below*, p. 140; A. E. Musson, 'The Ideology of Early Co-operation in Lancashire and Cheshire' in *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 68 (1958), pp. 124-125). Musson himself suggested that the venture may have taken place in 1830. He linked a venture begun by the Manchester co-operator Elijah Dixon to a venture reported by G. J. Holyoake (G. J. Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation, revised and completed* (2 vols., London, 1906), vol. I., p. 103). However, Holyoake's report of a co-operative farm on the Moss in 1830 also seems to be based on a mis-reading, this time of William Pare's account of his lecture tour in the north of England (*Weekly Free Press*, VI. 265. 7 August 1830). Pare did visit a farm on the Moss, but makes no mention of it being run by co-operators. As all of the details given by Holyoake, save for the suggestion that it was a co-operative farm, are to be found in Pare's report, it would appear that Holyoake was mistaken on this issue. The farm visited by Pare, which was involved in re-claiming the Moss for agriculture, may well have been on part of the Moss owned by Edward Baines of Leeds. Baines was reported to be one of the few men to attempt any systematic reclamation of the Moss by George Beesley (George Beesley, *A Report on the State of Agriculture in Lancashire* (Preston, 1849), pp. 35-36). The arrangements were left to a farming organisation (Salford Archives, U84). Alternatively, Beesley mentions Evans and Reid, who conducted experiments on drainage similar to those reported by Pare to have been practised on the farm.

³⁸ Paul A. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford*, p. 119

³⁹ *New Moral World*, VIII. 13. 26 September 1840
Northern Star, V. 212. 4 December 1841

The experiment illustrates the variety of influences which could be brought together under the heading of community in this period. Elijah Dixon himself demonstrates the blend of agrarian and radical views with Owenism. A committed Christian and Chartist, Dixon was active in communitarian circles from the early 1830s. In 1832 he was involved with the Social Community Company's attempt to raise funds for a community.⁴⁰ He considered the possibility of establishing a community on the Moss as early as 1830, in a lecture at the Manchester Mechanics' Institute.⁴¹ The Christian Co-operative Joint Stock Community also included a range of influences, merging a commitment to Christianity with support for co-operation. Radical agrarian elements were also present. In 1841 a correspondent from the society wrote 'Many thousand acres of England's best land would be in possession of the operatives in less time than our society has been in existence; if they would but act as is their bounden duty and interest,' and spoke of possessing land as the path to redemption from their current circumstances.⁴² Pickering persuasively illustrates the blend of these elements and Chartist beliefs in the community, but in describing it as a Christian Chartist experiment, and precursor to the Chartist Land Plan, he perhaps ascribes too little significance to the Owenite communitarian background.⁴³ However, experiments such as this demonstrate the difficulty of applying rigid classifications, and illustrate the variety of influences that could be brought together within Owenite communitarianism.

This merging of varying influences can also be seen in the second small venture of the early 1830s. The North London Community was founded at Barnsbury Park, between Islington and Highbury, in 1831.⁴⁴ This

⁴⁰ *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, October 1832

⁴¹ *Weekly Free Press*, VI. 273. 2 October 1830

⁴² *Northern Star*, V. 212. 4 December 1841

⁴³ Paul A. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford*, p. 121

⁴⁴ The North London Community is included in Malcolm Chase's *The People's Farm*, pp. 146-147, 157-159. Chase dates the community from October 1831 (Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, p. 157), the date given in the reports of the Third Congress ('Statistical Table of Co-operative Societies Represented in Congress' in *Co-operative Congresses, Reports and Papers* (Goldsmiths' Collection, University of London, GL A831)). It is possible that the later date refers to the official enrolment of its rules, or some similar event. However, from Petrie's letter printed in *Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets: A*

area of London was not heavily built up in the 1830s, and thus provided the access to land that the community sought. It was located on land belonging to Pierre Baume, a French émigré. Baume's own organisation, the Society for Promoting Anti-Christian and General Instruction, was an important focus for radical circles in Finsbury.⁴⁵ In late 1830 a Home Office informer reported that Baume had let his bookshop, in Windmill Street, Finsbury, to James Watson, and had taken six acres of land at Highbury.⁴⁶ Baume moved to Highbury, and began to cultivate the land himself. According to Holyoake, Baume's land soon became known as the 'Frenchman's Island' after Baume himself. Baume, however, preferred the name, the 'Experimental Gardens'.⁴⁷ Holyoake reported that 'at that time his land was covered with furze and mysterious looking cottages, in one of which he lived.' Baume was given to roaming the land with a loaded pistol in his pocket, which discouraged unwelcome visitors.⁴⁸

It was in these cottages that the North London Community was established. A group of London artisans occupied one or more of the cottages, intending to continue at their trades but to work the land in their spare time. George Petrie, one of the members, wrote an account of their operations.⁴⁹ His account reveals the blend of ideologies that underpinned the community. Petrie explicitly cited Robert Owen as an influence, claiming that the North London Community was founded on his principles. Yet he was also a trade unionist, and was later involved with the GNCTU. He wrote for the periodical *Man*, under the pseudonym 'Agrarius'.⁵⁰ His choice of pseudonym indicates one of his influences, for Petrie held strongly

Political Olio, 5 March 1831, it is evident that the community was operating by at least March 1831.

⁴⁵ Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, p. 157

⁴⁶ HO 64/11 fo. 177

⁴⁷ *Crisis*, II. 22. 8 June 1833

⁴⁸ G. J. Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation*, vol. I., pp. 219-220.

Holyoake remarks that Pentonville Prison was later built on part of Baume's land.

⁴⁹ *Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets: A Political Olio*, 5 March 1831

Lancashire Co-operator, I. 2. 25 June 1831

⁵⁰ Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, p. 146

agrarian views. Petrie located both the cause of present distress and its solution in the land.

The great evil to be regretted ... is, that the great bulk of the people have been decoyed from the land ... into cities and large towns ... Let them resolve to return to their lawful inheritance; let them take small allotments of land, and act on the principle we are pursuing, and ere long they will be the legal possessors of it.⁵¹

Yet Petrie's argument was not atavistic. He argued for the use of machinery, to be purchased from the profits of cultivating the land, reflecting Owen's influence. In time, the workers would be able to drive capitalists from the market. By these methods, labourers would prove that their labour was the source of all wealth, and that labourers could possess this wealth themselves. Returning to the land was a way of avoiding the capitalist marketplace, and of gradually working to succeed it. However, Petrie demonstrates, as does Elijah Dixon, the blend of attitudes that could be entertained by an individual.

The community on Baume's land consisted of three or four families, totalling about ten people in all. They spent their spare time cultivating the few acres they had rented from Baume, and in their first year made a profit of £100.⁵² In London, close to a main road running south towards King's Cross into the city, they were not far from a market for their goods. Whether this was sufficient to support the community is not known, but if they had continued to find work in their respective trades it seems possible. In September 1832 the community was reported to be prospering, and to be considering taking a further plot of land.⁵³ However such reports should be treated cautiously. John Powell, a London co-operator now living in

⁵¹ *Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets: A Political Olio*, 5 March 1831

⁵² *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, May 1832

⁵³ *ibid.*, New Series, September 1832

Birmingham, complained that societies were given to 'over-colouring' their accounts, and then refusing further information. He intended this complaint for 'a "community" in London', a reference that presumably applies to the North London Community, whose report was published just before Powell's letter in *Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets*.⁵⁴ As well as the land and their trades, the community attempted to establish another source of income by running a school. In June 1831, when the community could not have been long established, Petrie reported that the school had several scholars. These may have been children of members, however.⁵⁵ The school was still running a year later, and the community also had a library at this time.⁵⁶

In April 1832 the community sent three delegates to the Co-operative Congress. What became of the society after this point is unclear. Malcolm Chase dates the end of community to 1836, when Petrie died.⁵⁷ Baume retained the land until at least 1837, when he reported that his 'Experimental Gardens' was returning £200 a year.⁵⁸ However, it is not clear if this refers to the community. Baume continued to be involved with London co-operation, offering his land as the site of community on a number of occasions from the early 1830s.⁵⁹ In 1834 Baume advertised cottages on his land as being for rent, suggesting that the location would be suited to Sunday gardening. Details could be obtained from the offices of the periodicals *Man* and *Hue and Cry*, where Petrie was also taking orders for tailoring.⁶⁰ The community sent no delegates to the following Congresses, although the Fourth and Fifth Congresses were held outside London and the community may not have been in a financial position to send delegates that far.

⁵⁴ *Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets: A Political Observer*, 16 April 1831

⁵⁵ *Lancashire Co-operator*, I. 2. 25 June 1831

⁵⁶ 'Statistical Table of Co-operative Societies Represented in Congress' in *Co-operative Congresses, Reports and Papers*

⁵⁷ Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, p. 159

⁵⁸ Pierre Baume to Robert Owen, 30 June 1837. ROCC 920

⁵⁹ *Crisis*, II. 22. 8 June 1833; II. 35.+ 6. 31 August 1833

Pierre Baume to Robert Owen, 30 June 1837. ROCC 920

⁶⁰ *The People's Hue and Cry or Weekly Police Register*, I. 19. 10 August 1834

The circumstances of Petrie's death in 1836 provide a curious footnote to his participation in the community. G. J. Holyoake recalled that Petrie went mad, attributing it to the community, saying 'He became an inmate of one of Mr. Baume's experimental cottages on the Frenchman's Island, where he became insane in a month.'⁶¹ It is just possible that this was due to his wife's infidelity, which may have followed Petrie's espousal of Owen's views on marriage and their time at Barnsbury Park. William Lovett insinuated that Petrie's mental decline was due to his wife's infidelity. In recalling Petrie's participation in the Third Co-operative Congress of April, 1832, Lovett wrote that Petrie, answering a speech of Owen's, stated that his wife would follow him into community. Lovett added,

He then little thought, poor man, that her virtue and his philosophy would so soon be put to the test, and that his mental powers would give way before it, for so it happened soon after.⁶²

Whether Petrie's wife was indeed unfaithful is unclear. Critics of socialism such as John Brindley certainly used the episode to attack Owenism. It does appear that Baume cohabited with Petrie's wife following Petrie's death, although Baume denied any relationship. Baume also denied allegations made by Richard Lee that he had poisoned Petrie.⁶³

2. 4. The Birmingham Congress

Community was again a major issue when Congress met for the second time in Birmingham, in October, 1831. The last Congress's call for shares from the nation's co-operative societies produced little in the way of practical

⁶¹ G. J. Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation*, vol. I., p. 129

⁶² William Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett* (London, 1876), p. 50

⁶³ My thanks to Malcolm Chase for his article on George Petrie from the forthcoming J. Bellamy and J. Saville (eds.) *Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume 10* (Macmillan, 1999)

results. The Manchester bank Heywood and Co. held receipts for a few shares, but not in sufficient numbers.⁶⁴ The rather informal arrangements of the First Congress for the establishment of a community having proved unsatisfactory, a committee was formed, on the suggestion of Benjamin Warden, a London co-operator, to handle the arrangements and to draw up a prospectus for the community.⁶⁵ Support for the immediate formation of a community had not diminished since the delegates had last assembled. Yet not all agreed on the best way to introduce community. The essential division was between advocates of an immediate start and those who favoured preparation.

Local delegates, whose resolution had provided the basis for the First Congress' discussion of community, were firm advocates of an immediate start, and spoke of local demand for action. John Rabone argued,

Community is now the chief aim of all Co-operative Societies. It has been a long time in their opinion, that the time is come when the thing should be tried, and we must not delay. The Committee must act with unity and diligence, or the Societies would not be satisfied with them.⁶⁶

Thomas Reynolds, of the First Birmingham Co-operative Society, argued for the immediate formation of a community, stating, 'Many Members had withdrawn from the Societies, in despair of ever reaching a Community.'⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Voice of the People*, I. 24. 11 June 1831

⁶⁵ John Powell and James Powell, *Proceedings of the Second Co-operative Congress*, p. 13 Warden represented his own First Western Union, as well as the First and Second Tailors and the First St. George's Unions ('Co-operative Congress. A List of the Co-operative Societies represented by Delegates or Letters, at the Co-operative Congress, held in Birmingham the 4th, 5th, and 6th October, 1831' in *Co-operative Congresses, Reports and Papers* (Goldsmiths' Collection, University of London, GL A831)).

A Marylebone saddler, Benjamin Warden was highly active in London co-operation. He was a prominent member of the First Western Co-operative Union, and in 1832 opened the First Western Union Exchange Bank. He also belonged to the BAPCK and the NUWC. Warden was behind the formation of the Social Community in 1833. Active in Finsbury Spencean circles, he later belonged to the Finsbury branch of the Rational Society and was president of the East London Branch 1 of the Hodsonian Society.

⁶⁶ John Powell and James Powell, *Proceedings of the Second Co-operative Congress*, p. 13

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

This belief in a popular pressure for community runs throughout the reports of the early Co-operative Congresses.

While there was undoubted support for a community at Congress, there was some dissent over the methods by which it would be attained. Thomas Hirst, from Huddersfield, spoke assuredly of their future success: 'We have ascended one step of the co-operative ladder, and reached the second; and if we persevere, success is certain.'⁶⁸ While others shared his belief, there was much discussion over how and when the movement was to attain the next rung on the ladder.

While the Birmingham co-operators stressed the eagerness for community in their societies, John Gill voiced his concern. What should be done, he asked, if only a minority in a society wanted community? The implication is that Gill's Kendal Co-operative Society was not as ready for community as those in Birmingham, and questions Rabone's confident statements above. Vincent Cook replied that they must be educated, thus raising one of the key issues in the debate.

Such an approach had helped to win the support of Cook's Birmingham society for community. Cook himself favoured the establishment of a community as the best demonstration of the validity of their ideas, claiming that 'one Community would do more good than a hundred thousand grocers' shops'. Yet there were others who argued for further preparation before operations could begin. William Pare sounded a note of caution when he stated that more information was needed before community operations could begin. He was supported by George Skene, from London, who spoke of the need to study the failed communities at New Harmony, Orbiston, and Exeter. Co-operative trading should continue, as a means of winning support among the working classes. A delegate from the First Belfast, Francis Beatty, suggested the formation of 'Enlightening Societies' in towns, to help prepare the way and raise funds for community.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

The question of how the great divide between co-operative trading and community was to be bridged was the central issue here.

Robert Owen was present, but played little part in the debate, and as at the previous Congress was distancing himself from the views of the delegates, whose attitudes were matched more closely by Thompson. Thompson argued that wealthy friends of the movement should be approached for assistance with funding, an approach he had suggested in his *Practical Directions*.⁶⁹ Owen preferred instead to dismiss previous attempts at community. 'Such Communities as I have recommended, have never yet been in existence - have never been attempted - and therefore have never failed.'

Owen was here attempting to establish himself at the head of the movement, by claiming an unassailable position as the only one who truly understood the communitarian ideal. In dismissing the experiments at Orbiston and Exeter, Owen emphasised the gulf between himself and the co-operators, who saw them as examples of what could be achieved, and as opportunities to learn from experience. Skene spoke at the congress of his acquaintances in London who had been at Orbiston and Exeter, and were now ready to come forward once more to form a community. Owen was rapidly marginalising himself in the community debate, and as if to emphasise this, he was replaced as chairman on the last day of the congress by William Thompson.

The overall tone of the debate was one of wholehearted support for the establishment of a community. Delegates may have queried the exact timing, or argued for the need to garner greater support, but the ultimate aim was never questioned. These debates demonstrate very clearly the tension between those who emphasised immediate action, and those who argued that the time was not yet ripe, and that further preparation was necessary. This debate would be repeated endlessly in the years to come.

⁶⁹ William Thompson, *Practical Directions*, p. 11

2. 5. The London Congress

The Third Co-operative Congress met in April, 1832, at Owen's Institution of the Industrious Classes in Gray's Inn Road, London. The extent of the divergence between Owen's views of community and those of the working-class delegates became obvious. Not only did Owen's refusal to countenance an immediate start clash with the desires of the delegates, but his political views, in particular his approval of government support, conflicted with the radical politics of many delegates. At stake here was not only the question of how to achieve the transition to community, but also the very nature of that community. Owen's support for upper-class and government aid conflicted with the delegates' views of a small, democratic effort made by the working classes for their own salvation. This was illustrated by the clash between Owen and Thompson, with the latter representing the views of the delegates.

The committee appointed at the previous Congress had made little progress. Only two societies had replied to the circular calling for the subscription of shares to a community. The First Birmingham had sent £6, for two shares, the only society to actually send money. Kendal also replied, stating their desire to subscribe, but not sending anything by way of a deposit. The committee attributed this lack of response to the diversion of societies' funds into employing their own members, and the North West of England Co-operative Company, which was being formed at this time.⁷⁰ Members of the committee hurried to exonerate themselves. Joseph Styles, Samuel Austin, and Benjamin Warden all explained that the lack of progress did not result from their own negligence or apathy. William Thompson, however, was more explicit in the reasons he gave for the committee's failure.

⁷⁰ William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, p. 86

Thompson laid the blame for the paucity of results directly at Owen's feet. According to Thompson, Owen had entered the committee with little intention of fulfilling their task as set by the Second Congress. Owen had dismissed their limited task, arguing that they should form a 'committee for universal correspondence', a role far removed from the immediate, practical concerns of Congress. Furthermore, Owen declared that 'he would not consent to have his name associated with any committee who was for making a beginning with a smaller sum than 240,000*l.*' This had 'rather startled' his colleagues, and Owen's subsequent withdrawal 'had paralysed the exertions of the committee'. Thompson, in an oblique attack upon Owen's refusal to participate in practical arrangements, concluded by stating that he 'trusted that the congress would now appoint another committee, consisting of practical men'.⁷¹ In the light of Owen's subsequent behaviour at Congress, Thompson's account seems plausible. Throughout the following debate, Owen argued against immediate action and attempted to dissuade the delegates from forming any concrete plans to do so.

The initial reaction of the delegates to the committee's report was to re-emphasise the need for immediate, practical action. Peter Bishop, from Birmingham, again reminded Congress of his society's resolution, for the formation of a community on Thompson's plan, and urged the delegates to draw up a plan. Pare, William Lovett and the Reverend Joseph Marriott all emphasised this point. Only Nash, from Sheffield, sounded a more cautionary note.⁷² Yet even this display of a determination to begin community operations did not prevent Owen from adopting the same position that he had done in the committee. While delegates were emphasising the need for a practical plan, Owen 'said that he had heard much about the necessity of forming a community, but he had heard nothing proposed that was likely to be successful.' He carried on, dismissing the intention to establish a small-scale community, which was integral to the

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 87

⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 87-88

plans being discussed by the other delegates. While the committee had just reported their failure to achieve any significant response to a call for a community with a capital of £6000, Owen now embarked upon a justification for a community with a far larger capital.

Against a background of calls for an immediate beginning, Owen argued for large communities, with government support. This led to heated disputes with the independent and radical delegates, and clarified their differing concepts of community. In the place of Owen's large communities, the delegates argued for small attempts, made independently by working men, with their own resources, and reflecting their radical political views. Owen reassured delegates that 'a large community might be formed with more ease, and in a shorter time, than a small one'.⁷³ Yet Owen offered no practical advice as to how this was to be achieved. Instead, he continued to distance himself from the general opinion of Congress by dismissing the efforts of all assembled there.

Every person present, probably, had his own views of a community; but he believed them all to differ most materially from his views; and he further believed that none of their plans, when attempted, would succeed.⁷⁴

Owen concluded this speech on the Thursday with a remark which could hardly have been more carefully calculated to arouse the ire of his audience. He assured the delegates that the British government, and those of Europe, were convinced of the value of his ideas, and wished to implement them. 'They only waited for the public opinion to be formed and matured, to effect those happy changes which co-operation was adapted to realise.'

Earlier in the Congress, on the Tuesday and Wednesday, a debate had emerged over Owen's proposed Address to the Governments of Europe

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 89

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 90

and America which urged governments to adopt his system.⁷⁵ Owen naively expressed his hope that the government would support his plan once its advantages became obvious. He even argued that political reform could slow the introduction of his plan. Owen here adopted an apolitical stance; he was not concerned with the form of government, as long as it led to the realisation of his system. Once his system was established, politics would cease to exist in their current form. Yet Owen's concerns were far removed from those of the delegates. Watkins, William Benbow, William Lovett, and John Skevington all challenged Owen's indifference to the form of government. Simpson voiced the concerns of many delegates.

He would ask whether it could be believed that the principles of co-operation could effect their proposed object, while the government remained in its present state?⁷⁶

This opposition resulted in the Address being referred to a committee to carry out alterations. When it appeared before Congress once again, it was passed, although not without further opposition. William Thompson stressed that the 'societies must not relax in *their* exertions, notwithstanding the coolness and apathy of Government.'⁷⁷ This opposition to Owen's desire for government aid was not an isolated occurrence. Shortly after Congress concluded its business, Owen's suggestion at the London Institution that a memorial on distress be sent to the government provoked an angry outburst from George Waddington. Waddington would sooner go to the ironmonger's with half a crown, buy spade, and put a man on the land than go to the government.⁷⁸ Yet, despite the clear opposition in the Congress to both Owen's apolitical stance and to anything that resembled an appeal for government aid, Owen returned to this issue in his speech on the Thursday. Once more, this provoked clashes with many of the delegates.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 53-54

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 54

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 60

⁷⁸ *Crisis*, I. 37. 17 November 1832

Once Owen's speech had concluded, Lovett, Pare, and Joseph Styles retired to draw up a resolution diametrically opposed to Owen's approach to community. The resolution stated that Congress was 'determined to renew and redouble their exertions to establish, as speedily as possible, a community'.⁷⁹ In supporting the resolution, Lovett urged the necessity of doing something for themselves and the working classes generally, 'without waiting for the government to take them by the hand.' Pare seconded the resolution, arguing that Owen had not only overestimated the support likely to be forthcoming from the upper classes, but that he had underestimated the capabilities of the working classes. Many other delegates came forward in support of the resolution, including John Finch, George Mandley, Reverend Dunn and Joseph Styles. James Flather was the sole voice to question the resolution, arguing that co-operators were not yet ready for community. Benjamin Warden rapidly rounded on his fellow member of the First Western Union. Even allowing Flather's argument some validity, Warden felt that it offered no objection to community.

Was it likely, he asked, that they could become much wiser or better while they remained in the present wretched state of society? He denied that they could, and therefore he was for an attempt to form an incipient and experimental community.⁸⁰

Nearly half of the delegates at Congress were recorded as participating in the debates over community. The overwhelming impression is one of a determination to establish a community as soon as possible. Owen's opposition to a small-scale, working-class community was decisively rejected. The emphasis among the delegates was on an immediate beginning, on a community established by the working classes themselves with a relatively low investment. William Carson, delegate from Wigan, reported on attitudes in the north of England, where after

For George Waddington's career, see chapter 12.

⁷⁹ William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, p. 90

'reading the works of Messieurs Owen and Thompson, the people were anxious to commence a community.'⁸¹ Carson himself thought that he could acquire 1,000 acres near Liverpool. He suggested that each co-operative society should send one man, and support him, but pay no wages. It was this approach to community that dominated Congress. Owen's desire to seek government support was far removed from this desire for an immediate beginning. ✓

In opposing an appeal to government, the delegates were not solely arguing for an immediate start. The question of government backing also had great bearing upon the nature of the community. Waiting upon government aid did not sit well with the radical beliefs of many delegates. Part of the attraction of community was that it was a method whereby the working classes could achieve their own salvation, by their own labour, and under their own direction. Thus Owen's calls for the support of capitalists were also challenged. Owen dismissed the amount of £6,000, the sum suggested by the Second Congress, as insufficient, claiming that even £60,000 would be of little use. In part, this may be seen as a covert attack by Owen upon Thompson. The sum of £6,000 had been suggested as backing for a community upon Thompson's plans, and in rejecting the figure Owen was careful also to assure Congress that Thompson knew little of community building. Owen himself was, of course, in a far better position to gauge the necessary finances. Yet the question of financing also related to the question of how the community was to be managed.

Owen's appeal to the national establishment clashed with the preference of the delegates for a community under the control of the working classes themselves. Here the democratic concept of community held by many delegates became explicit. William Lovett made this point when arguing that there was no need to 'wait for others to do that which they could do themselves'. Lovett called for working men to come forward,

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 91

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 92

‘and commence operations at once.’ He stressed the democratic, working-class bias of the proposed community when he said that members should be chosen from among co-operators and workers, and that no one would be able to buy several shares and chose members themselves. Lovett also clashed with Owen over the question of the government of the community.

Reflecting the arguments over the Address to the Governments of Europe and America, Lovett challenged Owen’s statement that ‘committees and majorities’ could not be used to manage a community, and that there must be one ‘conducting head’. Owen was here almost certainly influenced by his experience at New Harmony. Upon arriving in Liverpool from America in August 1829, Owen complained that the Americans were not capable of governing themselves, and that he abandoned all idea of reforming them, a view he repeated in Congress.⁸² The continual arguments and divisions at New Harmony had apparently led Owen to distrust democracy, and he now advocated an interim mode of government on a more authoritarian basis, until the community was firmly established. To Lovett, this smacked of despotism. Owen countered Lovett by arguing that, in time, there would be perfect equality. Owen’s plan would have brought a high degree of individual participation in government. He argued for communities to be run by a committee composed of all those within a certain age band, for example thirty-five to forty-five. Thus the only distinction in the community would be that of age or experience, which Owen saw as the same, and as the ‘only just and natural distinction’. Under this system

every individual may ... participate equally in the business of government, may in fact acquire ... his just proportion of the government of the world.⁸³

⁸² *Weekly Free Press*, V. 216. 29 August 1829

William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, p. 89

⁸³ Robert Owen, ‘The Social System’ (1826-7) in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. II., p. 80

Gregory Claeys argues that Owen's projected hierarchy according to age was 'far more egalitarian than any society contemplated by the radical reformers'.⁸⁴ Yet, while this would, as Owen argued, give all their share in government, Owen's management of his organisations in the present state of society reflected his belief in the need for a less democratic form of government in an un-reformed world. Earlier in the Congress, Owen had been confronted by Benjamin Warden over the question of the constitution of the London-based Institution of the Industrious Classes. Warden argued that the Institution was wholly under the control of Owen, as governor, and that the council had only an advisory capacity. He described it as 'a perfect despotism', in contrast to the co-operative societies, which were based on 'perfect equality of rights'.⁸⁵ Once again, Thompson's views were closer to those of the delegates. Thompson favoured a democratic government in community. After the First Congress of 1831, Thompson had remained in Manchester, where he gave a couple of lectures. At one of these he answered James Tucker's suggestion that Thompson should have sole control of establishing a community.⁸⁶ Thompson replied that there should be no one with any power not delegated, and removable, by the constituent body.⁸⁷

During the Thursday debate on community Owen's statements ran into continual opposition from the delegates. The debate covered the central issues relating to community: sources of funding; the question of further preparation or an immediate start; and the issue of government. In each case, Owen found himself almost isolated. The general current of the Congress was against him. His plans for community were revealed as very different from those of the delegates. William Thompson correctly identified a key point of difference between Owen's position and that of many delegates when he remarked that 'they imagined two kinds of community; one of which would be a state of bliss, the other a kind of

⁸⁴ Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints*, p. 83

⁸⁵ William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, p. 43

⁸⁶ *Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets: A Political Monitor*, 6 May 1831

⁸⁷ *Manchester Times and Gazette*, III. 136. 4 June 1831

superior workhouse or workshops for the poor.' He argued that they should act immediately, within the limitation imposed by their funds. Yet he was confident, he added in humorous swipe at Owen, that with 2,000 people and enough capital, 'he would show to the world, an institution that might even please Mr. Owen'.⁸⁸ Thompson's emphasis was on starting immediately, and if this meant that the beginning would be on a small-scale, that was what he advocated. The Dutch pauper colonies and the establishment at Ralahine were cited as evidence of what could be achieved without vast resources.

Owen's arguments at Congress may have been driven largely by his opposition to Thompson's influence, and a desire to place himself at the head of the movement. His position appears to have been aimed at opposition for its own sake, rather than because it reflected his own desires. Only six months earlier, at the Second Congress, Owen had supported the formation of a community, and this was a stance that he would return to, as will be seen later. Yet at the Third Congress Owen seems to have been attempting to discredit the immediate formation of a community, and with it Thompson's plan. This interpretation is supported by William Lovett's recollections of the Congress. In his autobiography, Lovett said of the Congress,

We had much talk, but did very little business; the chief object of interest to many (that of forming an incipient community upon the plan of Mr. Thompson, of Cork) being stoutly opposed and finally marred by our friend Mr. Owen.⁸⁹

On the Thursday, during the debates over community, the delegates adjourned for dinner. When they returned, Lovett reported that

⁸⁸ William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, pp. 92-93

⁸⁹ William Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, p. 48

...our friend Owen told us very solemnly, in the course of a long speech, that if we were resolved to go into a community upon Mr. Thompson's plan, we must make up our minds *to dissolve our present marriage connections, and go into it as single men and women.* This was like the bursting of a bomb-shell in the midst of us. One after another, who had been ardently anxious for this proposal of a community, began to express doubts...⁹⁰

According to Lovett, the debate in Congress had focused on the issue of whether Thompson's or Owen's approach to community would be adopted. Owen's action was explicitly intended to damage Thompson's standing and to prevent the adoption of his plan, something which it achieved successfully. The accuracy of Lovett's recollections is clearly open to doubt, as his autobiography was written between 1840 and 1874, at least eight years after the event. Yet it is supported by other evidence. According to Lovett, it was decided that Owen's speech would not be included in the official report of Congress. However, Lovett reported that 'One poor fellow, Mr. Petrie, an enthusiast in his way, quite agreed with his brother Owen, and made a speech which many blushed to hear...'⁹¹ Petrie's statement is included in the report, just after the delegates returned from the adjournment.

The tension between Thompson and Owen culminated at the Third Congress. Owen's behaviour suggests a man struggling to maintain his standing, and countering Thompson's popularity by arguing that no one understood his plans, a tactic which he would use again in debates over the Queenwood community. Whatever the explanation for Owen's stance, it is clear that Congress did back the position of Thompson. Or rather, Thompson's vision was more in tune with the desires of the delegates. The concept of community that came to dominance at Congress was of a small-

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 50

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 50

scale, democratic effort, made by the working classes, for the working classes.

2. 6. Attitudes towards community

Present at the Third Congress were two delegates from the North London Community. Their presence provides a reminder that community could be approached through a variety of forms. While the Congresses discussed large, national plans, and while Owen spoke of communities costing hundreds of thousands of pounds, co-operators were turning to small-scale ventures. Debates in Congress may have focused on the question of how to form a community, but it is clear that implicit within their arguments were a variety of concepts of community. The attraction of community stemmed from a number of factors, including a practical response to particular difficulties, as well as the hope it offered for widespread social reform.

As has been seen above, the experiments which were begun in this period were all small-scale, regional affairs. Support for the various national projects may not have been forthcoming, but men were prepared to participate in their own local ventures. In part this may be ascribed to an impatience, a desire to begin without waiting for subscription lists to be filled and for more meetings of delegates in distant places. However, it is also clearly related to the actual attraction of community itself. It was argued earlier that part of the appeal of community was that it offered a form of relief whereby the working classes could work out their own salvation, through their own labour, free from control by the upper classes. The democratic appeal of community may have encouraged the formation of small experiments, established without the need for national committees or complex regulations. On a practical level, it was also clearly a simpler matter for a group from a particular area to make the necessary arrangements among themselves. They would probably already have known each other, perhaps belonging to the same co-operative society or

See above for a discussion of Baume, Petrie and the North London Community.

otherwise sharing similar backgrounds. It is easy to see that a group of co-operators may have put more faith in their own efforts than in those of a distant, unknown, committee.

Yet this is only part of the explanation for the frequency of these small-scale operations, both projected and realised. A major reason lies in the practical appeal of community. For the theorists of community, their ideas opened the way to the remaking of human society, and the dawn of a new age in human history. Although Owen attempted to have his plans implemented as a form of poor relief, his vision was far wider than this. For some of those touched by his ideas, however, the practical side to communitarian planning could be their main interest. Community was seen to offer a solution to the problems faced by many of the working classes in this period, of unemployment, changing work patterns, and the collapse of various industries. Uniting to take land was seen as a pragmatic step. The land provided a source of income, to supplement wages earned through a trade, and could also prove a means of support when employment was scarce. In this, community merely reflected traditional practice, for it was common for labourers to leave towns and seek employment in rural areas when times were bad.

This approach to community can be seen in the small establishment at Failsworth, near Manchester. Here in early 1832, a group of four men took a house and a plot of land. They intended to work the land, while continuing to follow their trade, fustian cutting, as usual. The men were all members of the Owenian Co-operative Society in Manchester. The incentive to this step had been provided by their inability to find sufficient work at their trade. The use of land to supplement an income is clearly not necessarily communitarian. However, the Failsworth co-operators explained their actions in terms of community, and avowed that 'their affairs are to be managed on community principles'.⁹² They were

⁹² *The Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, May 1832
See also Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, p. 156

welcomed by the *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, which described them as a 'little community' and headed its article 'Incipient Community'. This approach can also be seen in a letter written by a Salisbury cutler, Henry Shorto, to Owen in 1835. Shorto himself followed Owen's activities, and was a regular reader of the Owenite journal the *New Moral World*. He wrote to tell Owen of a friend of his, whose trade no longer provided a sufficient income, and who was now planning to purchase ten acres of land and live there with two other families. Of his friend's plan, Shorto wrote:

This would be a poor substitute for your beautiful arrangements, but he would try even this substitute could he feel assured that it would give him a permanent living unmixed with those anxieties concerning the future which now disturb his minds. [sic]⁹³

Community could spring from practical necessity as much as abstract reasoning. Ventures such as that in Shorto's account and the Failsworth community illustrate the close connection between such plans and others which advocated the use of the land as a source of relief. The cultivation of plots of land at weekends and in spare time was supported by many other groups, including trade unions. Tipper, a London member of the Federated Society of Operative Builders, put forward plans for trade unions to purchase estates.⁹⁴ G. C. Penn, an influential member of the First London, left the city for a farm in the country in the summer of 1829. Arguing that cultivating the land was the best solution to hardship, he urged others to spend half of their time gardening, to supplement income from manufacturing. As suggested reading, Penn recommended William Allen's *Colonies at Home* (1826), and William Cobbett's *Cottage Economy* (1822), indicating the extent to which co-operation drew on less radical attitudes towards the land.⁹⁵

⁹³ Henry Shorto to Robert Owen, 11 August 1835. ROCC 745

⁹⁴ See chapter 3.

Clearly it can become difficult to distinguish community plans from a pragmatic response to hardship. Attitudes towards the land, seeing a return to the soil as an escape from economic difficulties, were widespread, and formed a significant part of the attraction of community. It is clear that not all agricultural experiments of this kind can be claimed as communitarian. Yet it should be recognised that many such plans were advocated by people involved with the co-operative movement, who were explicitly communitarian in their aspirations, and who described their actions in terms of community. William Pare suggested at the Fourth Congress that co-operative societies should cultivate land as a means of employing their capital, as there was always a market for food, whereas the demand for manufactured goods fluctuated. Marshall, a visitor to Congress, reported that a co-operative society in Worcester was thinking of taking land. Within the co-operative movement, taking land was advocated on these practical grounds, as a limited form of economic relief. Yet, for others, such small-scale efforts were seen as part of a continuum, a first step on the road to community.

2. 7. The Fourth Co-operative Congress

The Fourth Congress was held in Liverpool in October 1832. The previous month the National Equitable Labour Exchange had opened in London. With its establishment came a shift in attitudes towards community. By late 1832 many of the co-operative societies had closed. The Fourth Congress was itself a relatively subdued affair, when compared with the Third Congress only six months earlier. The Congress provided no further opportunities for conflict between Owen and Thompson. Both were absent, Thompson perhaps suffering from the illness that would lead to his death early the following year.⁹⁶ There were far fewer delegates present, representing fewer societies. With the ending of the co-operative societies came a shift in emphasis. Rather than advocating large, national, schemes,

⁹⁵ *Weekly Free Press*, IV. 206. 20 June 1829

⁹⁶ Richard K. P. Pankhurst, *William Thompson*, p. 180

the focus shifted to preparation and education. Not all of the delegates had abandoned hopes of establishing communities, however, and among these men it was Thompson's approach to community which was most influential.

The steps taken at the previous Congress towards establishing a community appear to have had little impact by the time the delegates met in Liverpool. The Third Congress, following a suggestion of Thompson's, had appointed a committee to collect subscriptions for a community. This committee had been based in London, thus overcoming the difficulties of communication faced by the committee established at the Second Congress. Once one hundred names had been taken, the committee was to take steps to secure land.⁹⁷ Joseph Styles, a member of the committee, reported to Congress that the subscriptions had not yet been filled up.⁹⁸ As at the Third Congress, the progress to community appeared slow. Yet many delegates were not discouraged, and continued to advocate community.

Frederick Wade, a delegate from the Second Sheffield, encouraged Congress with news from his society. In Sheffield, following the discussions at the Third Congress, some of the local co-operators had determined to form a society named the Provident Agricultural Society. On the basis of a weekly shilling subscription, the society would take land and cultivate it as an experiment.⁹⁹ Wade intended his news to raise the spirits of his fellow delegates, who did indeed welcome the report. The Sheffield co-operators demonstrated that a desire for community remained alive and still capable of spurring men to action.

The Provident Agricultural Society and ventures such as Failsworth, discussed above, illustrate the variety of paths taken to community. This was recognised by Thomas Hirst, chairman of the Fourth Congress. Hirst reported that 'Community was the principle object of their pursuit at Huddersfield, and in order to prepare themselves a few of their members

⁹⁷ William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, p. 95

⁹⁸ *The Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, November 1832

would take some land as soon as possible.' For these Huddersfield co-operators, acquiring land near their homes, and continuing to work in their present occupations, was a prudent means of approaching community. As Hirst said, 'they could not get out of the present into the new system of society at a bound.'¹⁰⁰ John Gill, from the First Kendal, revealed the need for an approximation to community when he spoke of the despair among those he represented when they found that they would need £30 each to enter community. Yet the desire for community remained strong.¹⁰¹ For Hirst, these small attempts formed a valuable part of the preparation for community.

There were now many attempts making by the friends of the system to approximate as nearly as possible to a state of Community, by the partial union of a few families on the land, who should be partly engaged in cultivating it, and partly in following the trades by which they were at present supported. He was glad these experiments were about being made, because they were so many adult schools, where a practical knowledge of some part of the system, at least, might be gained.¹⁰²

Hirst's views did not go entirely unchallenged, however. Hirst referred to William Thompson's *Practical Directions* to support his argument that a small experiment could succeed. However, William Pare questioned Hirst's assertion that this small-scale approach would prove a more secure way of attaining community than the large-scale approach of Owen. Pare challenged Hirst, citing William Thompson's statement that at least 200 people should form the basis for a community. Edmund Taylor, from

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, New Series, May 1832

Hirst claimed that the Huddersfield co-operators had received an offer of a loan of £1,500 from a man who had been at New Lanark with Owen, and had visited Orbiston.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² *ibid.*

Birkacre, questioned the readiness of the co-operators for community, arguing that

he had heard much about Community, but he thought a great many who took the subject up, did so very rashly. They talked of getting on the land, but said little of the principles upon which they were to associate. Their minds were not yet sufficiently matured, and it would in his opinion, be productive of much mischief to endeavour to form a Community while this was the case.¹⁰³

Taylor was not the only delegate to argue that further preparation was needed. Joseph Styles stated that in London it was felt that 'it was of little or no use to make these small, and comparatively insignificant, attempts, which had been alluded to.' The London co-operators were now looking to education, or the encouragement of co-operative views suited to community, as the best course of action. Styles was convinced that,

If they would do this, he had no fear as to the pecuniary part of the matter, believing, as he did, that the machinery of Labour Exchanges would furnish this, quite as soon as individuals would be prepared in other respects.¹⁰⁴

2. 8. Robert Owen and the National Equitable Labour Exchange

For the period from the establishment of the National Equitable Labour Exchange in 1832 to the foundation of the Association of All Classes of All Nations in 1835, Owen occupied a range of positions. Advocacy of a preparatory period was coupled with support for community experiments, both on large and small scales, and of single ventures and a plurality of establishments. These positions reflect the boundaries of the debate which

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

occupied the remainder of the movement. The essential question of the communitarian debate in these years, as in the preceding years, remained the question of preparation versus action. If action was the course determined on, there then opened the question of the approach to be adopted: whether to pursue many small experiments, as Hirst had advocated at the Fourth Congress; or to found a single, well financed establishment. All of these positions were defended in these years.

In September 1832 Owen established the National Equitable Labour Exchange at the Gray's Inn Road premises of his Institution for Removing Ignorance and Poverty. It was not the first such institution in London. William King opened his Union Exchange Society in 1827.¹⁰⁵ The British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge also ran an exchange bazaar.¹⁰⁶ Although both exchanged goods, labour notes were not used. Apparently, however, labour notes were used at King's later Gothic Hall Labour Bank and Benjamin Warden's First Western Union Exchange Bank, both opened in 1832.¹⁰⁷

Labour exchanges were to carry Owen's ideas on the labour theory of value into practice by providing a forum for the exchange of goods valued according to the labour involved in their manufacture. Depositors of articles received labour notes, denoting the amount of labour that had gone into the article they had submitted. These labour notes could then be exchanged for other goods. The National Equitable Labour Exchange was briefly successful. The initial rush of depositors was so great that the exchange was closed while goods were valued. The labour notes were, for a short period, accepted by local tradesmen and even theatres.¹⁰⁸ After disagreements with the owner of the Gray's Inn Road premises, the Labour Exchange relocated to Charlotte Street. The London Exchange was envisaged as part of a national movement, and further exchanges were

¹⁰⁵ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, p. 202

¹⁰⁶ William Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, p. 42

¹⁰⁷ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, p. 203

¹⁰⁸ Aleck Abrahams, 'No. 277 Gray's Inn Road' in *Antiquary*, 44 (1908), pp. 130-131

planned. The only exchange to be established outside London was in Birmingham. As in London, the Birmingham co-operative societies had previously opened a bazaar.¹⁰⁹ William Pare, the prominent Birmingham Owenite, was heavily involved in promoting and establishing the exchange, which opened in July 1833.¹¹⁰

Owen enthusiastically supported the cause of the Labour Exchange. During speeches and lecture tours he advocated the establishment of further labour exchanges as a means of attaining the new moral world. Yet, if there is an apparent shift away from community in his utterances of this period, it was only in terms of the language he employed. For Owen, community remained at the centre of his activity. Labour exchanges did not represent an alternative means of reforming society, but merely a method of aiding the establishment of communities through the preparation of society. The improved economic and social relationships fostered by labour exchanges were a practical demonstration of the manifold advantages offered by communities, and were as close an approximation to communities as could be attained while it was still necessary to reach an accommodation with the old, unreformed society. He laid out his approach at the Sixth Co-operative Congress, held in October 1833.

The term community has frightened three-fourths of the population out of their senses. We have therefore no particular reason to make use of this term, since it is yet so little understood by the people, but merely say, we are going to unite to produce the best articles in the best way, and they will find out the truth of their own accord...¹¹¹

Through the use of labour exchanges, the country would come to realise that their needs would be best served by community along Owen's lines. This

¹⁰⁹ *Weekly Free Press*, VI. 262. 17 July 1830

¹¹⁰ R. G. Garnett, *William Pare*, p. 14

J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, p. 205

¹¹¹ *Crisis*, III. 7. + 8. 19 October 1833

was the importance of the labour exchange - as an end in itself it was of little importance for Owen, who described it as

...a bagatelle - a mere pawnbroker's shop, in comparison of the superior establishments which we shall speedily have it in our power to institute.¹¹²

Owen spoke of his meeting with builders in Birmingham, and how he had gradually led them to realise that,

what they wanted was nothing more nor less than arrangements similar in many respects to our projected communities.¹¹³

Owen hoped that familiarity with labour exchanges would lead others to the same conclusion.¹¹⁴

Thus, while Owen advocated the spread of Labour Exchanges, he also re-iterated his vision of ideal communities and spoke of plans for more immediate experiments. In November 1832, at the Institution, Owen brought a model of a community for 2,000 inhabitants, and explained it to his audience over a couple of lectures.¹¹⁵ He also introduced plans for establishing communities. In January 1833 he suggested to one of the Sunday evening discussions that a community for fifty persons could be financed by raising £5 subscriptions at the Institution.¹¹⁶ By July that year Owen suggested an agricultural experiment outside of London.¹¹⁷ The following month he moved away from his previous large-scale proposals, resting on high levels of subscriptions, to suggest that his followers could make arrangements to live together in preparation for community.

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ see Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, pp. 54-55

¹¹⁵ *Crisis*, I. 35. 3 November 1832; I. 36. 10 November 1832

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, II. 1. 12 January 1833

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, II. 23. 15 June 1833

...the disciples whose affairs require them to reside in town may make arrangements to live together in the same neighbourhood; those who can go two or three miles into the country, can select spots for the joint residence of themselves and other fellow-disciples.¹¹⁸

He argued that 'by this kind of arrangement, a very rapid progress may be made towards community.' Owen clearly had not abandoned community. Furthermore, his pursuit of community had led him to occupy a position that he had denigrated at the Third Co-operative Congress of 1832. There he had mocked small-scale efforts, and suggested that co-operators seek funding on the stock exchange. Now he occupied a position not far removed from that of Thomas Hirst at the Fourth Congress, and his argument that all these small ventures provided valuable experience. It may be that, following the death of Thompson in early 1833, Owen now felt free to advocate the establishment of communities. His behaviour at the Third Congress, as suggested above, suggests that his opposition to the community schemes advanced there was rooted in a desire to maintain his standing in the co-operative movement in the face of Thompson's evident popularity. Once Thompson was no longer such a direct threat, Owen may have felt able to return to making practical proposals.

2. 9. Conclusion: education or action?

With the decline in the strength of the co-operative societies and the establishment of the National Equitable Labour Exchange a greater emphasis came to be placed on the preparation of society for the change to community. This was evident at the Fifth and Sixth Co-operative Congresses, held in April and October 1833, respectively. Virtually the whole of the business of the Fifth Congress, as reported in the *Crisis*, was taken up with discussing the Labour Exchange. A similar situation existed

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, II. 29. 27 July 1833

at the Sixth Congress, where there were also many delegates from societies which emphasised education, such as the London-based Social Missionary and Tract Society and the Social Community. There were those, such as George Waddington, who spoke of taking land, but overall such views were in the minority. A belief in the need for further preparation had always been present, of course. In 1829 William Pare concluded from the collapse of New Harmony and Orbiston that further preparation was necessary. This had led him to suggest classes for mutual instruction and improvement among the Birmingham co-operators, a proposal which pre-figured the London Social Community and the later Association of All Classes of All Nations.¹¹⁹ In 1833 the London co-operators adopted a similar measure, forming the Social Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society, for the mutual support and education of its members.¹²⁰ In Manchester, the central co-operative organisation, based at the co-operative school room, focused its activities on education.

Yet the call for action remained an important strand in the debate of this period. Letters sent to the *Crisis* illustrate this division between those who argued for preparation and those who argued for an immediate start. In November 1833, J. H. wrote dismissing previous attempts to found communities. They could lead to no more than 'a weak collection of cottage competitors, or ... half-market gardeners', he wrote, but no community. All such attempts would fail until the 'mental, moral, and physical powers necessary to insure success are in existence'.¹²¹ A few issues later, a 'Mr. Nobody' replied. How could people ever become fit for community, he asked, while remaining under the influence of the competitive system? Nobody argued that the only way to determine the validity of J. H.'s argument was to put it to the test, in an actual experiment.

¹¹⁹ *Weekly Free Press*, V. 219. 19 September 1829

¹²⁰ Benjamin Warden to Robert Owen, 21 June 1833. ROCC 640

Crisis, II. 26. 6 July 1833

For greater detail see the following chapter.

¹²¹ *Crisis*, III. 11. 9 November 1833

He cited William Thompson as one who had believed in making an immediate, practical beginning.¹²²

These two letters outline the essential terms of the debate. On the one hand, there were those who argued that man, in his present state, was unsuited to community life. Until people were prepared and educated, a true community could not be realised. This position reflected Owen's attitude on his return from America, where he said of his experience at New Harmony that 'He had found the people to be in a state not to act in community; they were not competent to govern themselves.'¹²³ This was not to say that man could be perfected outside of community, but merely that in his present state man could not even attempt to live in community. The counter argument was that, as man's current condition was due to the workings of competitive and irrational society, how could he be expected to improve without leaving it for community? Further letters to the *Crisis* continued the debate, until in late December 1833 the editor refused to print additional contributions. Dismissing considerations of the question of fitness, the editor wrote that

No man is fit for a community, in a refined sense of the word, but every man is fit to try; but it will be a poor community that is initiated with such slender means as are at present possessed.¹²⁴

By mid-1834 the brief conjunction between co-operative groups and the wider aspirations of trade unionists, artisan groups, and radicals had ended. The Labour Exchange closed its doors, and the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union ceased activity. Yet the essential approach of this phase was continued into Owen's next major organisation, the Association of All Classes of All Nations, formed in 1835. Initially based in London, the Association continued the pattern of lectures and discussions

¹²² *ibid.*, III. 17. 21 December 1833

¹²³ William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, p. 89

that had been offered by the Institution. The Association's Community Fund took on the role previously performed by the Social Land Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society. No longer could co-operators complain of a lack of unity between the various groups that had inhabited the Institution.¹²⁵ With the Labour Exchange gone, the activities of the Institution, the Social Community, and the Social Land Community were all incorporated into the one organisation, the Association of All Classes of All Nations.

¹²⁴ *Crisis*, III. 18. 28 December 1833

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, III. 10. 2 November 1833

CHAPTER 3. LONDON AND MANCHESTER FROM THE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES TO THE ASSOCIATION OF ALL CLASSES OF ALL NATIONS

3. Introduction

Having outlined the main themes within the debates over community in the previous chapter, here the focus is on the variety of communitarian societies and schemes that sought to translate theory into practice. By examining co-operative organisations in London and Manchester, this chapter illustrates the range of the contemporary debate over community. The period from the mid-1820s to the late 1830s witnessed a frequently shifting, fluid network of local organisations, all with community as their goal but differing over their interpretations of community and the preferred method of its attainment. While previous studies have tended to focus on the organisations with which Owen was involved, from the Labour Exchange through to the Association of All Classes of All Nations, an examination of these local, independent societies provides an understanding of the context from which the community experiments of the period emerged.

Societies rose and fell rapidly, and individuals moved between them or belonged to several at once.¹ In such circumstances it is not simple, or perhaps useful, to rigidly distinguish between different ideologies and approaches. Societies can, however, be distinguished by three general elements. Firstly, societies differed in their concept of community. Secondly, they adopted distinct tactical approaches to community. Finally, organisations fulfilled different functional roles in contemporary society.

¹ It is frequently difficult to ascertain the status of local societies with absolute certainty. The socialist press was given to abbreviating societies' names, although without any consistency. Thus it can be difficult to tell if a society is new, a continuation of a previous society, or an old society being referred to by a different name. The local situation can thus appear confusing. While indicating cases where the identity of societies is unclear, this chapter attempts to refer to societies by a consistent title.

All are inter-related, and so for example two societies with differing views of community could adopt a similar approach to establishing a community.

While primarily structured around themes within the London societies, this chapter also draws parallels with Manchester. These cities were two of the major centres of Owenite activity. Both hosted co-operative Congresses, and the Owenite movement was based in both locations at different times in this period. Yet each city also supported a range of other societies and rival ventures. A focus on a specific location over a number of years permits an exploration of individual co-operators and of the context in which they operated.

3. 1. The growth of co-operation

In 1821 London was the scene of the first Owenite community, with George Mudie's experiment at Spa Fields. After its collapse in 1824, the focus of London communitarians was the London Co-operative Society, which was itself followed by a number of organisations, including the Co-operative Community Fund Association. The three organisations differed conceptually, tactically, and functionally, illustrating a variety of the positions explored in the previous chapter. By adopting communal living in the midst of contemporary society as an approximation to community, Spa Fields attempted to realise some of the advantages of community but without the need to fund a larger-scale venture, a form that was to be revived many times over the following years.² The two later societies, however, concentrated on raising funds for communities on a larger scale. Difficulties in raising funds led the Co-operative Community Fund Association to adopt co-operative trading as a means of raising capital, and this marked the beginning of co-operative trading as the form that dominated the early years of the co-operative movement in London.

² For further examples of this approach see the discussion of Failsworth and Barnsbury Park in the previous chapter, along with Thomas Hirst's theoretical justification of this approach at the Fourth Co-operative Congress.

The Spa Fields community was one of the first attempts to implement Owen's community proposals.³ In 1821 a small group of London printers, including Henry Hetherington, founded the community, following proposals by George Mudie. The aims of the community were limited. Its members lived together communally, sharing household duties and expenses, while pursuing their previous trades. Mudie's plan offered economic savings, as well as opportunities for superior child care and education.⁴ The experiment lasted until 1824. By adopting communal living as a means of approaching community, Spa Fields employed a technique that was to be repeated many times in the following years, in London and elsewhere. Yet Spa Fields is also significant for marking the emergence of a movement, which while based on Owen's ideas, was no longer focused exclusively on Owen himself. One of the first theorists to begin the development of Owen's ideas, Mudie was extremely influential for the later Owenite movement.⁵ The community demonstrates that Owen's ideas found wider acceptance among groups who adapted his ideas to their own means and concerns. This process continued throughout this period, and London was home to many societies with their own interpretations of community.

The London Co-operative Society was founded towards the end of 1824, to form 'Communities of Mutual Co-operation in the production and distribution of wealth.'⁶ Details of the society's proposed community could be obtained from its offices at 18 Picket Street, Temple Bar. Owen attended a public meeting on 26 September 1825 when, after his resolution that an experiment should be made, it was resolved to attempt a community within

³ For Spa Fields see W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below*, pp. 92-95

J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, pp. 168-169

R. G. Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities*, pp. 41-45

Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England*, pp. 43-46

⁴ *Report of the Committee Appointed at a Meeting of Journeymen, Chiefly Printers, to take into Consideration Certain Propositions, Submitted to them by Mr. George Mudie*

⁵ For Mudie, see Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, chapter three.

⁶ *Rules for the Observance of the London Co-operative Society* (London, 1825)

fifty miles of London.⁷ The London Co-operative Society's proposed experiment was far removed from the community of printers at Spa Fields. The society had embraced Owen's vision fully, and their community required the subscription of at least £20,000. Once this sum was subscribed, the first wave of settlers would be sent in to prepare the way. It was expected that these settlers would be able to begin to supply their own needs after the first six to eight months.⁸

The amount of capital needed before operations could begin indicates the type of community envisaged by the society. The society hoped for high levels of financial support from the upper classes. Provision was made for three levels of subscription, at £100, £40, and £10. More than one share entitled the investor to a return of five per cent. At the other end of the scale, the initial work was to be performed by the £10 subscribers, who would prepare the ground and the first houses. They would be joined by the subscribers of £40 after the first harvest, and the final class would enter once arrangements were complete. Operations would not begin until £20,000 had been pledged, and as this would require 2,000 subscribers at the lowest rate, it seems likely that the society hoped for a significant proportion of high level and multiple subscriptions. These figures, and the reliance on capitalist investors seeking their five per cent, were clearly in accordance with Owen's own community plans.⁹

The society also followed Owen in its description of the principles and internal arrangements of the community. The prospectus condemned the misery in the midst of the means to produce comfort for all, and held individual competition and private accumulation responsible for the contemporary want, ignorance, and anxiety. Mutual co-operation in the production of wealth, and of equality in its distribution, was perceived as the

⁷ *Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, I. 11. 25 September 1825; I. 12. 2 October 1825

⁸ *Articles of Agreement for the Formation of a Community on Principles of Mutual Co-operation, within Fifty Miles of London. Drawn up and Recommended by the London Co-operative Society* (London, 1825), p. 14

⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 14-15

solution.¹⁰ The London Co-operative Society did, however, depart from Owen in its careful treatment of the question of religion. The rules guaranteed freedom of opinion, especially in questions of religion. At a New Year's speech before the society in January 1826, it was said that,

Already much mischief has been done by the injudicious conduct of some of our best friends. The new system has unfortunately been too much identified with speculations on other subjects, which the public mind is not yet prepared to discuss ... which have therefore been extremely ill timed, and have served only to strengthen the prejudices already imbibed...¹¹

This reluctance to associate the cause of co-operation with Owen's attacks on religion recurred frequently, and was still being repeated by the Leeds Redemption Society twenty years later.¹²

Other areas showed the clear influence of Owen's plans, as advanced in the *Report to the County of Lanark*. A balance was to be maintained between industry and agriculture, and members were to become proficient in both. The provisions for child care also reflected Owen, and dormitories were to be provided for children, as long as their parents agreed. Machinery would perform the more unpleasant tasks.

Reflecting the tensions within the co-operative movement at this time, the society's plans also revealed the influence of theorists besides Owen. The attitudes of the society towards women echo strongly the attitudes of William Thompson, whose *Appeal to One Half the Human Race* was published in the same year, and whose collaborator, Anna Wheeler, was active in co-operative circles in this period.¹³ Thompson himself was

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 3-4

¹¹ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I. 2. February 1826

¹² For the Leeds Redemption Society see chapter 10.

¹³ Richard K. P. Pankhurst, *William Thompson*, pp. 70-75

involved with the society, and mentioned it in his *Labor Rewarded*.¹⁴ Through Wheeler and Thompson the society was also open to the influence of Charles Fourier, the French utopian, as can be seen in its attitude towards work in the ideal community. Although all were expected to contribute, individual tasks were to be voluntary, and jobs were to be changed frequently.¹⁵ Wheeler, who had met Fourier in 1823, did much to promote his ideas in co-operative circles at this time, including lending his works to Thompson. The London Co-operative Society appears to have published translations by Thompson of parts of Fourier's work as *Political Economy Made Easy* in 1828.¹⁶

The progress of the London Co-operative Society was slow. Towards the end of 1825 the society relocated to 36 Red Lion Square. At the beginning of 1826 publication of the *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald* began, to aid the society in its propaganda role. Yet the community proposal did not attract the expected support. While the society required £20,000, by February 1826 only £4,000 in shares had been taken out.¹⁷ Despite the low levels of public interest, the society's secretary, James Corss, advertised for information on land values, particularly on the west coast. A few months later Corss advertised for an estate of 500 to 2,000 acres. These advertisements were never to be acted upon. At the beginning of 1827 the society repeated its intention to found a community, but there was no further mention of the plan in the society's periodical.¹⁸ A few years later the plan enjoyed a brief revival when it was presented to the Co-operative Congress of April 1832, in a mildly altered form.¹⁹ By this point the high levels of investment required for a community as envisaged by the

¹⁴ William Thompson, *Labor Rewarded*, pp. 107-108

¹⁵ Jonathan Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Ca., and London, England, 1986), p. 278

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 366-370

¹⁷ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I. 2. February 1826

¹⁸ *ibid.*, I. 2. February 1826; I. 4. April 1826; II. 1. January 1827

¹⁹ William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, pp. 108-118.

Of the committee appointed to draw up a prospectus for a community, at least three members came from London and had been involved with the London co-operative movement at the time the plan was first presented. Owen himself was also involved on both occasions.

London Co-operative Society were being questioned. William Thompson's advocacy of smaller-scale communities, as at the 1832 Congress where this plan was presented, was meeting with much support. The tension between these two differing concepts of community was not a recent development at the time of the 1832 Congress.

In July 1826 a new society was formed to found a community near London. Formed by a few members of the London Co-operative Society, the Co-operative Community Fund Association rejected its parent society's grandiose aspirations, and proposed a relatively small-scale venture for only fifty members.²⁰ It aimed to provide its members with land, 'from which they may derive the chief of their future support, on the system of MUTUAL LABOR [*sic*] and EQUAL DISTRIBUTION.' The final aims of the London Co-operative Society were adopted. Yet the fund to be raised was significantly lower, at £1,250. Although the price of shares was high (£25), this sum was to be raised by subscriptions of 4s per week. The fund was to be raised by its members, and did not seek external assistance from capitalists.²¹ By January 1827 the society had £100 and forty members, mainly mechanics, and by April the society hoped to begin operations in the autumn.²² Yet funds were not advancing sufficiently rapidly, and the following month an Auxiliary Fund was announced. This fund was significant as it was to be formed from the profits of trading. A store was to be established, selling goods cheaply. The fund's founder argued that people would now be able to aid co-operation without any additional effort on their part.²³ The Co-operative Community Fund Association was not the only organisation to think in this way. The issue of the *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald* that had first published news of the Auxiliary Fund also printed a letter from William Bryan of Brighton

²⁰ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I. 7. July 1826

²¹ *ibid.*, I. 7. July 1826

²² *ibid.*, II. 1. January 1827; II. 4. April 1827

²³ *ibid.*, II. 5. May 1826

advocating a similar scheme.²⁴ The popularity of co-operative trading, with community as its avowed goal, soon spread.

The two societies' attempts to fund a community illustrate the difficulties faced by the movement. Between them, the London Co-operative Society and the Co-operative Community Fund Association embodied different approaches to community. The question of whether to source funds from wealthy supporters, or to fund communities from within the working classes alone, divided the two societies and endured throughout the period. The tension between these approaches was clearly present in Queenwood, the last major Owenite community in Britain.

The societies' limited success questioned their reliance on subscriptions. Given the large sums to be raised, if this was not to be done over a considerable period of time the weekly subscription had to be set at a high rate, thus placing it beyond the reach of many.²⁵ The Co-operative Community Fund Association's 4s subscription could have been a significant portion of its working-class members' weekly wage. Both societies believed that the working classes had the resources to fund a community, and that the problem was more one of willingness than ability to do so. Pointing out the amounts in savings banks, the London Co-operative Society ascribed its failure to raise funds to insufficient comprehension of co-operative principles.²⁶ The Co-operative Community Fund Association's answer to the question of how to tap working-class resources, co-operative trading, proved increasingly popular.

²⁴ Sidney Pollard, 'Nineteenth-Century Co-operation: from Community Building to Shopkeeping', p. 82

²⁵ As an illustration of this problem, the Manchester-based Social Community Company would have taken fifteen years to have accumulated its fund, with a subscription of only 3d per week towards a share of £10.

²⁶ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, II. 1. January, 1827

As an indication of the sums held in savings banks, in 1842 the Manchester and Salford bank for savings had 15,192 depositors with deposits totalling £416,283 6s 3d (G. R. Porto, *Progress of the Nation in the various Social and Economical Relations, from the beginning of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1851), pp. 615-616).

3. 2. The beginning of co-operative trading

Co-operative trading spread rapidly across the capital. By April 1830 there were forty-two societies operating across the city.²⁷ Trading was justified as a means of reaching community. As George Skene, a founder member of the first London trading society, wrote, 'The grand aim of co-operative societies is ... to raise a capital sufficient to purchase and cultivate land, and establish manufactories of such goods as the members can produce for themselves, and to exchange for the productions of others; likewise to form a community, thereby giving equal rights and privileges to all.'²⁸ The first co-operative trading society in London was the London Co-operative Trading Fund Association, usually referred to as the First London. It was established by a group from within the London Co-operative Society, which included the brothers Philip and George Skene and G. C. Penn. For the first few months the society operated from the same premises as the London Co-operative Society, at 36 Red Lion Square, but it soon moved to 2 Jerusalem Passage in Clerkenwell. From April 1828 to Christmas 1829 James Watson was the society's storekeeper, and he was followed by William Lovett.²⁹ Watson had been introduced to Owen's ideas by Thomas Hooper, later a member of the British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge.³⁰

As the first society, the First London was looked to for advice.³¹ Members of the society travelled around London encouraging the formation of further co-operative organisations.³² The increasing propaganda role of the First London led to the formation of a society specifically for that purpose. George Skene was again instrumental in founding the society, and was its first secretary. Initially named the London Association of the

²⁷ *British Co-operator*, I. 1. April 1830

²⁸ *Weekly Free Press*, V. 243. 6 March 1830

²⁹ Edward Royle, *The Infidel Tradition from Paine to Bradlaugh* (London, 1976), p. 103
William Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, p. 41

³⁰ Edward Royle, *The Infidel Tradition*, p. 103
Weekly Free Press, V. 236. 16 January 1830

³¹ William Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, p. 42

³² *Weekly Free Press*, IV. 196. 11 April 1829

Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge, the society operated from the Clerkenwell offices of the First London, but included members from other London co-operative societies.³³ When the First London moved premises for the second time, to 19 Greville Street, the society accompanied it, and soon after re-named itself the British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge (BAPCK). At Greville Street the BAPCK operated a bazaar for the exchange of goods, open to all London societies, while the First London had its offices on the floor below.³⁴ The change of name was not misleading. In fulfilling its role of co-ordinating the various societies, spreading the message of co-operation and fostering discussion, the society was soon in contact with many organisations, across the country as well as within the city.³⁵

Trading was merely a means to an end, and community was the ultimate goal. Yet co-operative societies had a sufficiently broad appeal to attract men with a variety of different ideals. The trading itself would have been the main attraction for some members, as societies offered cheap, and unadulterated, essential goods, such as flour. Some societies would have offered an outlet for manufactured goods, while some would also have used society funds to employ their own members. There were thus practical reasons for joining such a society. While some may have joined solely for the material benefits, others would have joined for more ideological reasons.

3. 3. James Tucker: a London co-operator

The BAPCK was run by a committee of delegates from the London co-operative societies. This section will focus on James Tucker, one of the local independent co-operative leaders. By examining an individual member of the committee, some idea can be gained of the range of ideas that came together under the umbrella of co-operation at this time. Tucker was involved with a number of societies, and proposed a range of co-

³³ *ibid.*, V. 223. 17 October 1829

³⁴ William Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, p. 42

operative schemes. His ultimate goal was community, yet his proposals illustrate the different influences drawn together within co-operation, and the concerns of those active in the movement. When considering individuals who participated in the movement, it becomes apparent that to apply labels such as 'Owenite' or 'co-operator' risks imposing a framework that, while aiding understanding on one level, threatens to distort analysis on another. Individuals entertained ideas that do not fit clear-cut categories. /

The co-operative movement attracted support for a range of reasons. Support partly stemmed from the fact that the movement addressed the practical needs of the time, providing solutions to the problems of unemployment and shifting labour patterns. The movement also provided an organisational basis for radical political activity. This can be seen in the participation of BAPCK members in the National Union of the Working Classes (NUWC) and in the campaign against the Six Acts' raising of the price of the press. The pages of the *Poor Man's Guardian* and the *Weekly Free Press* carried reports of meetings at which men such as Benjamin Warden, James Watson, George Petrie, Charles Jennesson and others were present.³⁶ These men were also active within the BAPCK. The society included men who were not drawn by Owen's communitarian vision, as well as others who would later reject it, such as William Lovett. Yet even the official stance of the BAPCK, that co-operative trading was a means to community, encompassed a variety of attitudes. The line of progression from co-operative trading to community passed through a number of positions, and the relative importance of the various stages could vary from person to person.

When George Skene left his position as secretary to the First London to become one of the founders of the BAPCK, James Tucker was one of his successors. A coal merchant, Tucker operated from East London, not far

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 42

³⁶ For Benjamin Warden see p. 47, n. 65.

from Limehouse Reach and the West India Docks.³⁷ Active in the First London, Tucker also attended, and occasionally chaired, meetings of the BAPCK. While describing himself as an Owenite, Tucker advanced a series of suggestions that demonstrate how malleable the concept of community was. His schemes occupied interim positions, drawing their inspiration from community in addressing contemporary problems, and providing an approximation to community in an imperfect society. In July 1829 he suggested that benefit societies introduce an additional subscription, to be used to purchase an estate. He calculated that the London societies could easily raise £13,000 in a year through a weekly subscription of only pence. The estate would house children and the aged, whose labour would soon finance the establishment. The children would be educated in manufactures and agriculture.³⁸

Education was central to a later proposal, this time for a co-operative school. Again based on the land, this school was to consist of a series of cottages, which, reflecting Owen's parallelogram, were to be arranged in a square enclosing the estate. Children would work on the land, and be educated in the schoolhouse. The venture would be funded by the sale of the estate's produce. While each family would live separately, and rent their homes individually, the land would be farmed collectively and profits divided equally among the tenants.³⁹ November 1833 found Tucker acting as secretary of the Friendly and Protective Agricultural Society, an organisation that aimed to support its members as a benefit society while seeking to found communities.⁴⁰

Tucker's proposals illustrate a number of themes in the co-operative movement that are not exclusively Owenite, such as the concern for education and the emphasis on the land. Yet Tucker also demonstrates the variety of forms that could be adopted in the search for a method to

³⁷ *Weekly Free Press*, IV. 198. 25 April 1829

³⁸ *ibid.*, V. 210. 18 July 1829

³⁹ *ibid.*, VI. 271. 18 September 1830

⁴⁰ *Crisis*, III. 11. 9 November 1833

implement Owen's vision of community. The importance of the return to the land in Owen's communitarian proposals was clearly not unique to Owen. Many previous theorists had stressed the importance of the land in any scheme of social reform, including Thomas Paine and Thomas Spence. Both were strongly influential, and the continuing presence of agrarian ideas in radical thought is clearly significant in explaining the importance of the land in proposals such as Tucker's. The land had a practical value too, and could serve to provide a form of unemployment relief, as in the proposals of the Halfpenny-a-Week Land Fund. The secretary of this society was called Tipper, a member of the Federated Society of Operative Builders, as well as of the BAPCK committee with Tucker.⁴¹ The two proposals have many similarities, seeking to use subscriptions to locate members on the land, where they could raise their standards of living, both materially and culturally. Yet the two proponents had differing perceptions of their final goals.

The Halfpenny-a-Week Land Fund can be seen as, primarily, a form of unemployment relief, although Tipper also argued for the social advantages for the unions of owning an estate, writing:

Every Union might have such a country establishment, and then who would not rather walk out a few miles, and spend his Sundays or other holidays with his brothers there, than saunter from one gin-palace to another, whose splendour seems to exalt over and mock at the ignorance, poverty, and rags of their supporters.⁴²

The explicit goal and purpose of the society was to aid its unemployed members. Tucker's proposals are not of the same order, however. Although these plans did not conform to the Owenite ideal, this should not

⁴¹ *Poor Man's Guardian*, III. 153. 10 May 1834
New Moral World I. 6. 6 December 1834; I. 7. 13 December 1834
Crisis IV. 12. 28 June 1834

⁴² *Poor Man's Guardian*, III. 153. 10 May 1834

prevent them from being considered as part of the drive to community. Tucker explicitly located his proposals in the course of action supported by the co-operative stores. The initial premise of the stores was that trading would raise funds to expand trading and manufacturing, and then be used in the purchase of land, with community as the ultimate goal. Tucker saw his plans as occupying an intermediate stage in this continuum, helping to prepare the way for true communities as envisaged by Owen. The proposal for the co-operative school, outlined above, envisaged such establishments as preparatory schools for community.

Such establishments ... would be universities for parents as well as children, as each tenant would experience the benefits to be derived from mutual co-operation, as far as they engaged, and might be prepared to enter into a closer union, and remove from thence to larger establishments.⁴³

Tucker felt that training in co-operative living was essential if Owen's vision of improved character was to be realised. Indeed, Tucker took issue with Owen on this point, arguing that circumstances would have to be changed if superior character was to be produced. Owen's position, that improved circumstances required first a degree of preparation and education, was dismissed by Tucker.⁴⁴ Thus, while Tucker's proposals may not immediately appear to belong to a strictly Owenite vision of community, they were intended as a means of realising that vision. Tucker also indicates the range of opinions that could blend together in support for community. He was a member of the BAPCK, a society with radical political leanings, and indeed he himself advanced a proposal for a society to advocate universal suffrage.⁴⁵ These plans reveal involvement in issues that were common working class concerns in the period - unemployment, education, old age support. Community was a vague concept, and James Tucker shows how flexible it was, even as he remained influenced explicitly by Owen.

⁴³ *Weekly Free Press*, VI. 271. 18 September 1830

⁴⁴ *The Magazine of Useful Knowledge and Co-operative Miscellany*, I. 3. 30 October 1830

3. 4. Co-operation in Manchester

During the late 1820s co-operation spread through what were later to be the provincial centres of Owenism. While this chapter focuses on London and Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool also both emerged in these years as major co-operative areas. William Pare and John Finch, the principal co-operators in each city, were to be prominent in the later Owenite movement. As was seen in the previous chapter, the Birmingham co-operators played a prominent role at the First Co-operative Congress. The first Birmingham co-operative society was formed, largely by William Pare, in late 1828, and was the fourth co-operative society in the country.⁴⁶ A year later there were three Birmingham societies.⁴⁷ All of the local societies formed an auxiliary to the BAPCK, based in London.⁴⁸ They also joined together in a union to establish a bazaar, opened in 1830, and an infant school.⁴⁹ John Powell, the former London co-operator, was secretary of both the bazaar and the First Birmingham. Pare perceived trading as the best path to community, believing that the failures of Orbiston and New Harmony had shown the need for further preparation. Trading would not only raise funds, but also provided an opportunity for the education and preparation of the public.⁵⁰

In late 1829 Pare discussed forming co-operative societies with men in Coventry and Liverpool. In Liverpool, he may well have been in touch with John Finch.⁵¹ Finch was behind the formation of the First Liverpool Co-operative Society, announced in January 1830, with Finch as its

⁴⁵ *Poor Man's Guardian*, IV. 235. 5 December 1835

⁴⁶ For William Pare, see p. 37, n. 27.

See also R. G. Garnett, *William Pare*

⁴⁷ *Weekly Free Press*, V. 219. 19 September 1829

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, V. 236. 16 January 1830

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, V. 235. 9 January 1830; VI. 262. 17 July 1830

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, V. 219. 19 September 1829

⁵¹ John Finch (1784-1857) was an iron merchant and prominent Liverpool co-operator. He was behind the Liverpool Co-operative Society, formed in 1830. Finch was later active in the Liverpool branch of the Rational Society, and was also acting governor of the Queenwood community. He was also strongly involved with the temperance movement. (R. B. Rose, 'John Finch, 1784-1857: a Liverpool Disciple of Robert Owen' in *Transactions, Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 109 (1958), pp. 159-184)

treasurer and Joseph Johnson its secretary.⁵² By the following month its membership had increased to fifty.⁵³ In the summer of 1830 the society was renting a store, with an assembly room and a library. However, by 1831 there was only one further Liverpool society.⁵⁴

In Manchester, as in London, co-operation in the early 1830s was focused on trading. The local movement was significant nationally, and the city hosted the first Co-operative Congress in 1831. Manchester co-operation was similar to London, being based on a large number of small societies, overseen by an umbrella organisation. This was the Manchester and Salford Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge, which mirrored the position of the BAPCK in London. It was composed of delegates from a number of Manchester and Salford co-operative societies. Like the BAPCK, the Association was also predominantly Owenite, as was reflected by the societies from which its members were drawn. Of the committee of seven, at least four were members of societies that aimed specifically at the possession of land for a community.⁵⁵

The situation in Manchester and its environs was thus similar to that in London. The Manchester Association and the BAPCK fulfilled similar roles, and both explicitly saw co-operative societies as means to finance communities. That the Manchester Association was strongly influenced by Owen should not be interpreted as meaning that the Manchester co-operative societies all shared its views. As in London, co-operation had a broad appeal. Of the eleven Manchester societies listed by the Manchester Association in 1830, two did not intend to purchase land, but rather to divide the profits.⁵⁶ Clearly, societies that aimed at land could still attract members more interested in cheap produce. Indeed, John Lynch,

⁵² *Weekly Free Press*, V. 237. 23 January 1830

For John Finch see R. B. Rose, 'John Finch'

⁵³ *Weekly Free Press*, V. 239. 6 February 1830

⁵⁴ R. B. Rose, 'John Finch', p. 163

⁵⁵ *British Co-operator*, I. 6. September, 1830

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

corresponding secretary of the Manchester Association, complained that few seemed to understand the principle of co-operation.

There appears to be a prevailing ignorance in many societies throughout the country, as to the final aim of Co-operation, viz. the raising of a common and undivided property, (aided by trading or manufacturing), to bring us in possession of the land, and thereon to live in community.⁵⁷

Lynch suggested forming a national organisation similar to the Manchester Association, to co-ordinate local societies and spread understanding of the purpose of co-operation. Like the BAPCK, the Manchester Association was in communication with societies across the country.

Members of the Manchester Association included E. T. Craig, in 1830 president of the Owenian Co-operative Society, but who was later involved with the communities at Ralahine and Manea Fen.⁵⁸ Also present in the Association were Joseph Smith and James Rigby, who were to be significant figures in the Owenite movement in Manchester.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ E. T. Craig (1804-1894) was born in Manchester and trained as a fustian cutter. He was involved with the early co-operative movement, and was president of the Owenian Co-operative Society in 1830. Craig edited the *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*. In 1831 he left for the Ralahine Community, which ended in 1833. On his return to England, Craig founded the Ealing Grove school with the support of Lady Byron. Leaving in 1835, Craig went on to be assistant editor of James Hill's *Star in the East* newspaper, based in Wisbech, and taught at Hill's school. He later taught at the Manea Fen community. After the collapse of the Owenite movement Craig became involved in journalism. (R. G. Garnett, 'E. T. Craig: Communitarian, Educator, Phrenologist' in *Vocational Aspect of Secondary and Further Education*, 15 (1963), pp. 135-150)

⁵⁹ James Rigby (1802-?) was born at Salford, in 1802. After working in a cotton mill as a child he was apprenticed to Joseph Smith, a plumber and glazier. His interest in co-operation began when he heard William Pare lecture in Manchester in 1829. Along with Joseph Smith he was involved with the Salford co-operative store and school. Rigby was later involved with the National Regeneration Society, begun by Owen and Fielden to agitate for an eight hour day in factories. When Joseph Smith built the Salford Institution, Rigby was active there as a teacher and lecturer. He was later highly active in the Rational Society, serving on the Central Board and as a social missionary. He was also a deputy governor of the Queenwood community. After the collapse of the Owenite movement he worked as Owen's personal secretary. (*Northern Star*, V. 216. 1 January 1842) Joseph Smith, having been active in the early co-operative movement, was also a prominent member of the Rational Society, serving as a social missionary. He later emigrated to America. (*Radical*, I. 11. July 1887)

predominance of the textile industry in Manchester was reflected in the backgrounds of the co-operators. However, as in London, local leaders tended to be artisans rather than factory operatives. While James Rigby and Elijah Dixon, also a member of the Association, worked in factories when young, both later left. Rigby was apprenticed to Joseph Smith, a plumber and glazier, while Dixon pursued a variety of trades. Those who were involved with the textile industry tended not to work in mechanised roles, reflecting both male employment patterns in factories and the extent to which mechanisation had spread by the 1830s. For example, Craig worked as a fustian cutter, and his co-operative society sold fustians.⁶⁰

The co-operative movement in Manchester had a broad appeal and drew on a range of influences. This is illustrated here by the figure of Elijah Dixon, the prominent local co-operator who was later involved with the Chat Moss community. His family had moved to Manchester seeking employment just after the turn of the century, when Elijah Dixon was aged eleven. He found work in a mill in the Ancoats district, where he began work as a scavenger, before becoming a piecer and then a spinner.⁶¹ Upon leaving the mill, Dixon worked in a number of trades. One anecdote of his first attempts at independent employment tells of his abortive effort to establish himself as a milk seller. His first and last attempt ended when a wasp stung the donkey transporting the milk, causing the donkey to roll in the street.⁶² Dixon later worked manufacturing pill boxes and then matches. In 1841 he began a timber yard and match manufactory, which proved successful and in 1850 had 450 employees.⁶³

The 1830s found Dixon a highly active member of co-operative circles in Manchester. At this time he was running a shop in Oldham

⁶⁰ R. G. Garnett, 'E. T. Craig', p. 138

⁶¹ T. Swindells, *Manchester Streets and Manchester Men* (Manchester, 1908), p. 216
W. E. A. Axon, *Annals of Manchester* (1886), pp. 358-359

⁶² Joseph Johnson, *People I Have Met* (Isle of Wight, 1906), p. 137

T. Swindells, *Manchester Streets and Manchester Men*, p. 218

⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 219-220

Road.⁶⁴ Dixon was a member of the Manchester Association which called the First Co-operative Congress, at which he was one of the chairmen.⁶⁵ He attended meetings of the Manchester District Council, a body formed to coordinate the local co-operative societies, and he was also involved with the Salford Co-operative School.⁶⁶ Like many other co-operators, Dixon merged his belief in co-operation with a variety of other ideals. He was politically radical, and in May 1832 he participated in demonstrations over the Reform Bill, arguing 'that every man had a right to a share in the choice of representatives in the House of Commons.'⁶⁷ Dixon had been a radical from his youth, and in 1817 had appeared before Lord Sidmouth on a charge of treason following his participation in a Reform Conference in London in the winter of 1816. He had also been present at Peterloo.⁶⁸

His advocacy of political reform was coupled with a belief in the solution offered by co-operation. In speeches delivered in Manchester and the surrounding area Dixon stressed the advantages offered by a co-operative community. Following Owen, he condemned the arrangements of present society and the impact they had on the upbringing of children, who were being trained under an irrational system. He portrayed cities as a primary cause of national distress. Like many other co-operators, he was also eager to present co-operation as practical Christianity, rather than endorse Owen's attacks on organised religion.⁶⁹ Yet his speeches in favour of co-operative union reveal the influence of a range of other ideas. Dixon was clearly influenced by agrarian ideas, which he merged with his belief in co-operation. He argued that possession of land by the rich was an essential cause of their ascendancy over the poor. He rejected the basis of the current distribution of land, seeing it as stemming from William the Conqueror, and

⁶⁴ 'To the Owenian Co-operative Society' in *Co-operative Congresses, Reports and Papers*
⁶⁵ *ibid.*

'Resolutions, &c. Passed at the First Meeting of the Co-operative Congress' in *Co-operative Congresses, Reports and Papers*

⁶⁶ *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, July 1832; New Series, October 1832

⁶⁷ *Poor Man's Guardian*, I. 49. 19 May 1832

⁶⁸ W. E. A. Axon, *Annals of Manchester*, pp. 358-359

thus resting on violence. There was little hope for an improvement without co-operators achieving access to land. Dixon advised a co-operative society at Eccles to purchase land and work it in their spare time.⁷⁰ He did not argue for the forcible re-distribution of land, but suggested that the working classes should take waste land and land used merely for pleasure and cultivate it. Joseph Johnson remembered that Dixon's attempt at farming Chat Moss was intended to show how productive waste land could prove, and Dixon's long discussions of waste land, recalling,

his eager and unceasing talk all the long summer day on his two favourite and oddly diverse themes - the utilisation of waste lands, and Universalism as expounded in the Bible.⁷¹

Dixon illustrates well that the co-operative movement drew on a number of different influences. An individual figure could combine ideas from a range of sources, rendering the use of rigid labels both difficult and inaccurate.

3.5. The Charlotte Street Institution and the Social Community

As has been seen in the previous chapter, by 1832 the focus of the co-operative movement began to shift towards the labour exchanges. The decline in co-operative trading led to a shift in the movement's approach to community. Greater emphasis was now placed on preparation and education, reflected in the emergence of Owen's Institution as the centre of London Owenism. Yet this approach was not entirely dominant, as is illustrated here by the Philosophical Land Association. Small-scale practical action persisted, as in the case of the First Female Co-operative Association. Its aim was to assist in 'facilitating social arrangements by enabling the members to live in contiguous dwellings'.⁷²

⁶⁹ *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, May 1832; New Series, October 1832

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, New Series, May 1832; New Series, October 1832

⁷¹ Joseph Johnson, *People I Have Met*, pp. 139-140

See chapter 2 for Dixon's farm on Chat Moss.

⁷² *New Moral World*, I. 9. 27 December 1834

A number of exchange bazaars appeared in London from the early 1830s. Owen became involved when he was offered premises on Gray's Inn Road, where he opened the National Equitable Labour Exchange in September 1832.⁷³ Like co-operative trading, the labour exchange had a broad appeal, attracting committed Owenites as well as working men seeking an answer to the problems of unemployment and the labour market. For Owen himself, the labour exchange was a way to demonstrate to a sceptical public the truth of his vision. Community remained the goal, while labour exchanges were a way of benefiting from the strong working-class support for his plans that had emerged during his time in America.⁷⁴ Around the National Equitable Labour Exchange arose a number of organisations to spread Owen's vision.

After Owen's return to England, he was involved in a number of organisations based in London. The centre for Owen's operations in the capital was the Institution of the Industrious Classes, originally based, with the National Equitable Labour Exchange, at the Gray's Inn Road premises offered by a Mr. Bromley. The Institution was forced to move to Charlotte Street in early 1833. A wide range of activities was conducted at the Institution. Discussions and lectures were held. A Social Missionary and Tract Society was established, to distribute information.

Following a series of discussions at the Institution as to the best way of advancing their cause, Benjamin Warden presented the proposal for the Social Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society (referred to hereafter as the Social Community) in July 1833. This society illustrates the shift towards an emphasis on preparation. Warden had written to Owen in June informing him of the proposal and of his intention to submit it to the

⁷³ For a discussion of Owen and artisanal support for labour exchanges, see I. J. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London. John Gast and his Times* (Folkestone, 1979), chapter 13.

⁷⁴ See Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, pp. 51-55

meeting.⁷⁵ The proposal had also previously been approved by the Social Missionary and Tract Society. Warden called on all those influenced by Owen's maxim that character is formed for, and not by, man to

immediately collect together and form a family compact to shield and protect their members from the inroads of the irrational system of competition and contest.⁷⁶

Warden had earlier been a firm advocate for the foundation of an incipient community. At the Third Congress in 1832 he had rejected calls for the postponement of community until the people could be educated, arguing,

Was it likely, he asked, that they could become much wiser or better while they remained in the present wretched state of society? He denied they could, and therefore he was for an attempt to form an incipient and experimental community.⁷⁷

Yet Warden had been involved with the Institution from its foundation, and by early 1832 had focused his activities there, having ceased to participate in the NUWC and the First Western Union.⁷⁸ Warden had not abandoned his independent position entirely, and a few years later he was prominent in the East London branch of the Hodsonian Community, an organisation that did not meet with the approval of the London Owenites. However, at this point Warden represented a wider shift among Owenites in the capital. Joseph Styles reported to the Fourth Congress in late 1832 that London co-operators were concentrating their efforts on education in preparation for community, confident that the labour exchanges would supply funds in due

⁷⁵ Benjamin Warden to Robert Owen, 21 June 1833. ROCC 640

⁷⁶ *Crisis*, II. 26. 6 July 1833

⁷⁷ William Carpenter, *Proceedings of the Third Co-operative Congress*, p. 91

⁷⁸ *Poor Man's Guardian*, I. 32. 21 January 1832

course.⁷⁹ It was this approach that led to the formation of the Social Community.

By referring to the Social Community as a 'family compact', as quoted above, Warden neatly encapsulated the concept behind the society. Members of the Social Community were to assist other members in their area, and to prefer fellow members when seeking services.⁸⁰ One example of the mutual assistance the society offered was the voting of 30s to the widow of a recently deceased member.⁸¹ They would also come together for meetings and discussions. The aim was to couple practice and theory, and by aiding each other they would be encouraging their own education and moral development. Peel, a delegate at the Sixth Congress in late 1833, summarised the purpose of the society. The aim was to leave the present state of society, and this would be achieved by two means. Members would serve both to demonstrate the truth of their ideas to others, and would re-educate themselves to make themselves fit for community.

We are all of us very unfit, with our present prejudices, to enter into community ... We must all go to school first, and unlearn what we have been taught; we must leave old circumstances, and enter into new...⁸²

The ultimate aim was land for a community, but Peel stressed that land would be useless without the prior education of its occupiers. The emphasis was firmly on education, and on the sense of belonging to a community of like-minded people within wider London society.

⁷⁹ 'Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of Delegates from Co-operative Societies of Great Britain and Ireland', printed in *The Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, November 1832

⁸⁰ *Crisis*, III. 13. 23 November 1833

⁸¹ *ibid.*, III. 17. 21 December 1833

⁸² *ibid.*, III. 7. + 8. 19 October 1833

The Social Community grew rapidly, and had three hundred members by September 1833.⁸³ These members were divided into local classes, and there were fifteen classes meeting across London in December of the same year.⁸⁴ The society as a whole was managed by a council formed by the local class superintendents. Members had lists of fellow members in their areas, giving their trades as well as their addresses, so that they could help to give each other employment.⁸⁵ The society hoped to establish schools and lecture rooms in each district. Two of its members, T. V. Grettan and B. Portbury, both of whom served as secretary, established the school at Owen's Institution.⁸⁶ The ultimate hope was to spread across the country. A branch was formed in Manchester, and it is possible that branches were formed elsewhere, including Worcester, Richmond, and Twickenham.⁸⁷ The Social Community was intended as a national organisation, formed from local branches reporting to a central body. In this, and through the social and educational events it offered, the Social Community prefigured the later Association of All Classes of All Nations.

The Social Community was not the sole society to have adopted this approach in London at this time. A similar society, the Society of Rational Reformers, operated from the former premises of the First London, now re-opened by William Lovett as a coffee house, from late 1833.⁸⁸ Like the Social Community, the Society of Rational Reformers met for mutual instruction and to cultivate moral feelings. They also planned a school.⁸⁹ Joseph Styles, W. H. Bohm, and George Foskitt all belonged to the society. All three had belonged to the BAPCK, which had shared the premises of the First London. Foskitt had belonged to the First London itself, while Styles

⁸³ *ibid.*, III. 3. 21 September 1833

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, III. 17. 21 December 1833

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, III. 13. 23 November 1833

⁸⁶ W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators 1750-1880* (London, 1967), pp. 75-76

⁸⁷ *Crisis*, III. 22. 25 January 1834; III. 3. 21 September 1833; II. 34. 24 August 1833; III. 7. + 8. 19 October 1833

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, III. 4. 28 September 1833

William Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, p. 88

⁸⁹ *Crisis*, III. 4. 28 September 1833

came from the First Westminster and Bohm from the Metropolitan co-operative societies. Both Styles and Bohm had also served on the Metropolitan Co-operative Council. These men had not lost sight of the goal that had driven their activities in the BAPCK, that of community. Their approach had changed, however, shifting from trading to moral preparation. At the Sixth Co-operative Congress in late 1833, Foskitt criticised the labour exchanges for offering no moral improvement, although friendly to them in general. The Society of Rational Reformers is another indication of the variety of influences drawn into the co-operative movement. Although formed from members of co-operative societies, with their collapse the society emerged to stress a single side of their previous activities, education.

The Philosophical Co-operative Land Association was conceived in opposition to the prevailing views on community formation. The main force behind the society was William Cameron, a Scottish tailor. Cameron became a follower of Owen's in early 1822, and had been willing to join the abortive Motherwell community.⁹⁰ He later moved to London, where he remained interested in Owen. The Philosophical Co-operative Land Association was conceived by Cameron as a way of preparing people for community. It also embodied an approach to community that diverged from Owen's own views at the time. Cameron rejected London co-operation's focus on the labour exchanges, and collected subscriptions with which to purchase land. While he thus differed tactically from the Social Community, his society fulfilled a similar function in providing a social focus for co-operators.

Like James Tucker, Cameron strongly opposed Owen's view that people's character should be prepared before any attempt was made at founding a community. Cameron condemned this argument as being tantamount to saying, 'Live, horse, and you will get grass!'⁹¹ Instead, he

⁹⁰ William Cameron to Robert Owen, 3 August 1823. ROCC 359

⁹¹ *Cosmopolite*, I. 17. 30 June 1832

argued that theory and practice should go hand in hand, as the best method of progressing and of demonstrating to others the efficacy of their ideas. It was this that made Cameron's plan distinctive. Cameron rejected co-operative trading, claiming that it wasted resources that would be better employed in land. His suggestion of a shilling subscription to a fund that would then be used to acquire land was conventional.⁹² However, Cameron wished to foster social feeling before the members could move to their community. He suggested weekly meetings 'in order that they may become acquainted with, and attached to one another, the better to prepare them for acting in concert, under the contemplated arrangements of community'.⁹³ A month after first proposing his plan, Cameron reported that a meeting had 'determined on making the experiment'.⁹⁴ The society based itself on Cromer Street, where they held regular meetings.⁹⁵ Its secretary was Eamonson, a bookseller whose shop was only two doors away from Owen's Institution on Gray's Inn Road.⁹⁶ Within a few months they had a capital of £5, and were considering ways of making their income more productive, such as living together or purchasing foodstuffs in bulk.⁹⁷ How long the society lasted is unclear. Cameron himself was later involved with the Community Friendly Society in 1836.⁹⁸

Notwithstanding the emphasis on education and general preparation for community evident at this time, the question of land was not far from the surface among the London societies. Despite calls for unity in the Social Community, within the society there were differing views. The early reports from the society had made no mention of land, presenting themselves solely in terms of preparation for community life. Yet the issue of land soon arose.

⁹² This was apparently reduced to 6d in practice: *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, September 1832

⁹³ *Cosmopolite*, I. 17. 30 June 1832

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, I. 21. 28 July 1832

⁹⁵ *Crisis*, I. 25. 25 August 1832

⁹⁶ *Cosmopolite*, I. 25. 25 August 1832

Crisis, I. 38. 24 November 1832

⁹⁷ *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, September 1832

⁹⁸ *Rules to be observed for the government and management of the Community Friendly Society* (London, 1836), p. 34

See also Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, pp. 159-160

At the Sixth Co-operative Congress delegates from the Social Community pursued different lines on this question. Grettan and Peel stressed the educational role of the society. Meres, however, reported that the council of the society intended to take land within a few weeks for an incipient community. Waddington, also a delegate of the society, proposed an experiment based on spade cultivation.⁹⁹ It would appear that nothing came of the society's experiment, but the issue of land came to dominate the society's activities.

The Social Community was initially successful. Regular meetings were held, and members met for tea on Sunday afternoons. However, the society declined rapidly from what had appeared to be a promising beginning. There were eighteen classes in October 1833, only fifteen in December, and the society had largely collapsed by the turn of the year.¹⁰⁰ Prior to its collapse, the society had formed the Social Land Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society. This society began to meet in January 1834, although its existence was not official until March that year.¹⁰¹ Initially part of the Social Community, which had renamed itself the Moral Union late in 1833, the Social Land Community was formed to discuss the issue of acquiring land, and subscriptions were collected to further this goal. While the Moral Union collapsed, the Social Land Community began meeting in Colville Court, just off Charlotte Street and not far from the Institution. With this change of purpose, the society had to begin to raise funds for its projected community. As so many societies had done before it, the Social Land Community turned to trading, beginning with sales of tea in the autumn of 1834.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Crisis*, III. 7. + 8. 19 October 1833

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, III. 7. + 8. 19 October 1833, III. 17. 21 December 1833

Poor Man's Guardian, III. 175. 11 October 1834

¹⁰¹ *Crisis*, III. 19. 4 January 1834, IV. 7. 24 May 1834

Rules to be observed for the government and management of the Community Friendly Society, p. 9.

Frederick Bate was the secretary for this initial period, after which time he was succeeded by Henry Rose.

¹⁰² *Poor Man's Guardian*, III. 175. 11 October 1834

3. 6. The end of co-operative trading in Manchester

Just as in London, the collapse of co-operative trading in Manchester produced a shift of emphasis among the co-operators. The movement was forced to re-think its tactical approach to community. While many favoured a shift towards education, others retreated to an older tactical form, collecting subscriptions to fund community experiments.

In Manchester the central co-operative organisation focused its activities on education. In February 1833, Jackson, former secretary to the First Salford Co-operative Society, wrote to the *Crisis*. The Manchester trading societies had now collapsed. The co-operators turned their attention to education.

...the Co-operatives in this town, being of opinion that men and women must first acquire benevolent feelings, and a desire for moral improvement, or they will never cordially unite or continue long together; and they are quite convinced that ignorance alone is the great barrier to the progression of social amelioration ... They have therefore cast aside the drudgery of the shop system, and turned their attention to the culture of the mind.¹⁰³

With the collapse of the Oldfield Road Co-operative Society in 1831, the members had transferred their attentions to education. Lloyd Jones recalled that they began a school when the co-operative society ended in 1831, while John Ashton remembered the Manchester co-operators beginning a school in 1829.¹⁰⁴ With the collapse of co-operative trading, the school provided the focus for the Manchester Owenites in the early 1830s. Activities centred on the Manchester Co-operative Institution, which seems to have organised the school as well as other lectures and

¹⁰³ *Crisis*, II. 4. 2 February 1833

¹⁰⁴ Lloyd Jones, *The Life, Times, and Labours of Robert Owen* (London, 1890), pp. 46-48
Radical, I. 11. July, 1887

discussions.¹⁰⁵ The Institution involved men who had participated in the co-operative store, and who would continue to be influential figures in the Owenite movement, such as Lloyd Jones, Joseph Smith, and James Rigby.¹⁰⁶ It would appear that the propaganda duties of the Institution were carried out by the Manchester and Salford Association for the Dissemination of Co-operative Knowledge, later the Manchester Association for the Promotion of Social Happiness. By 1835, the Association had divided itself into classes of ten people, who met regularly for mutual instruction, much in the manner of the Social Community in London.¹⁰⁷ There were other societies in Manchester that were associated with the Institution, such as the Social Community Company and the Manchester branch of the London-based Social Community, both of which were represented by Rigby at the Congress of October 1833.¹⁰⁸

The Social Community Company was formed in Manchester late in 1832, and was closely linked to the central co-operative institutions in Manchester. Elijah Dixon and George Mandley, both members of the Manchester Association, addressed meetings promoting the Social Community Company in September 1832.¹⁰⁹ Dixon also belonged to the Manchester District Council (a co-ordinating body for local co-operative societies). Joseph Smith and James Rigby were associated with both the Social Community Company and the Manchester Association. Like the Philosophical Land Association in London, the society did not follow the

¹⁰⁵ *Crisis*, IV. 9. 7 June 1834

¹⁰⁶ Lloyd Jones (1811-1886) was a Manchester fustian cutter. Under the influence of E. T. Craig, he became involved in the early co-operative movement in Manchester, and was active in the Salford co-operative store. A good public speaker, with the formation of the Association of All Classes of All Nations Lloyd Jones served as a social missionary. After the end of the Owenite movement he was involved with the Leeds Redemption Society. He later moved to London and became a master tailor. In London he established the *Spirit of the Age* periodical, with Robert Buchanan and Alexander Campbell. He also founded the League for Social Progress, and was involved with the National Reform League. Lloyd Jones was later involved with the Christian Socialists and the resurgent co-operative movement. He was also an active journalist, and wrote for the *Bee-Hive* and the *Industrial Review*. (J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, p. 220; J. Bellamy and J. Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (9 vols., London, 1972-1993), vol. I., pp. 201-204)

¹⁰⁷ *New Moral World*, I. 20. 14 March 1835

¹⁰⁸ *Crisis*, III. 7. + 8. 19 October 1833

¹⁰⁹ *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, October 1832

general shift towards education. The aim of the Social Community Company was to raise funds for a community. Following the pattern established in 1824 by the London Co-operative Society, the Company aimed to raise two thousand £10 shares, through weekly subscriptions of 3d per week, an approach that appears to represent a retrograde step.¹¹⁰

The subscription method had been found wanting only recently by Congress, and by the local societies in the late 1820s. Yet its employment by the Social Community Company was intended to address problems arising from co-operative trading, itself initially a response to the failings of subscriptions. Co-operative trading, while offering potential benefits to the working classes, was not welcomed by all sections of the community. It proved, not surprisingly, unpopular with shopkeepers, who lost trade, as well as with some employers. Hostility aroused by trading could make it difficult to pursue the trading scheme. Returning to subscriptions was intended to answer this problem.¹¹¹ However, the initial difficulties that had led to trading in the first place had not been addressed. Not least was the considerable time taken to amass the capital through subscriptions, over fifteen years in the case of the Social Community Company. Should the society not manage to found a community in Britain, its members were prepared to emigrate to America.¹¹² It would appear that their efforts to found a British community came to little, despite attempts to purchase land on the Isle of Man, and in the spring of 1834 twenty-three of their number left for Cincinnati to found a community there.¹¹³

3. 7. The Association of All Classes of All Nations

By mid-1834 Owen's involvement with the labour movement had ended. The National Equitable Labour Exchange had closed, and most of the

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, New Series, September 1832

The arousal of hostility by co-operative trading was also an issue for the Wisbech United Advancement Society in the late 1830s, e.g. *Star in the East*, II. 95. 7 July 1838

¹¹² *Crisis*, III. 7. + 8. 19 October 1833

¹¹³ *ibid.*, III. 13. 23 November 1833; IV. 5. 10 May 1834

London co-operative societies had also collapsed. With them went Owen's attempts to organise the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. Owen's experiences with the labour exchanges had not weakened his vision, and there was still considerable support in the capital.

Owen founded a number of abortive societies before the formation of the Association of All Classes of All Nations in May 1835.¹¹⁴ The AACAN was to last until 1845, and provide a truly national network of support. It was launched on May 1, 1835 at a meeting at the Charlotte Street Institution. Its aim was to spread Owen's views through lectures and discussions, and ultimately to found communities. Members of the AACAN contributed towards both the AACAN, and to a specific Community Fund.¹¹⁵ The activities of the AACAN in London continued naturally from those of the Social Community, and the routine at the Institution changed little. As before, discussions were held on a Wednesday evening, and there was a tea party on Sunday afternoons. Owen now lectured on a Sunday morning.¹¹⁶

The AACAN did not immediately replace the earlier London societies. In its early days, it was merely one of a number of organisations in the capital with community as its goal. At the time that the AACAN was being established, George Waddington was seeking support for an incipient community. He held a public meeting, at which a committee was formed, in April 1835. The committee later visited ground intended for the experiment, but it is not known what became of the plan.¹¹⁷ The Social Land Community continued to operate, now meeting at the Community Coffee House at 94

¹¹⁴ The Association of All Classes of All Nations was supplemented by the National Community Friendly Society in 1837, with the later formed to collect funds for a community and replacing the Association's Community Fund. The two organisations were merged at the 1839 Congress, and the Association of All Classes of All Nations was renamed the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists. In 1842 this title was officially abbreviated to the Rational Society. Throughout this work the abbreviation AACAN will be used for the Association of All Classes of All Nations, while the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists will be referred to as the Rational Society, unless otherwise indicated.

¹¹⁵ *New Moral World*, I. 28. 9 May 1835; I. 30. 23 May 1835

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, II. 64. 16 January 1836

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, I. 26. 25 April 1835; I. 27. 2 May 1835; I. 30. 23 May 1835

John Street (off Tottenham Court Road), where Waddington also held his meetings at this time. The society's office and store were at the same address. In 1836 the society enrolled itself under the Friendly Societies legislation, and changed its name to the Community Friendly Society. William Cameron, the founder of the Philosophical Co-operative Land Association, was a member. Henry Rose remained as secretary until replaced by Anthony Peacock, who had been involved with the Eastern Institution.¹¹⁸

The Community Friendly Society serves to demonstrate the relationship between the AACAN and local supporters. The society continued to operate independently of the AACAN, even after the formation of the National Community Friendly Society as an organisation intended to deal specifically with the founding of a community. Its members attended events along with members of the AACAN. In May 1838, the Community Friendly Society was granted a charter by the AACAN, and thus became Branch 32, with Anthony Peacock as secretary.¹¹⁹ However, the branch returned their charter at the Fourth Congress of the AACAN in 1839 due to low attendance.¹²⁰ Despite this, the society seemed still to be operating in September 1839, when its members showed an interest in the community at Manea Fen in Cambridgeshire.¹²¹ Indeed, a teacher named Henry Mote would later leave for the community from the society.

The Community Friendly Society was not the only society to be operating alongside the AACAN in London. In 1838 a society named the Educational Friendly Society emerged. Like the Community Friendly

¹¹⁸ *Rules to be observed for the government and management of the Community Friendly Society*

Report of the Community Friendly Society (1837) in Anthony Peacock to Robert Owen, 8 May 1837. ROCC 884

¹¹⁹ *New Moral World*, IV. 184. 5 May 1838

'Statistical Table of the Branches of the Association of All Classes of All Nations' in *Proceedings of Third Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations, and the First of the National Community Friendly Society* (Birmingham, 1838)

¹²⁰ *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations, and the Second of the National Community Friendly Society* (Leeds, 1839), p. 17

¹²¹ *Working Bee*, I. 8. 7 September 1839

Society, it was officially enrolled as a Friendly Society. It was formed to provide shares in the National Community Friendly Society's community scheme for those who could not afford to do so themselves. The society had the considerable amount of £1,000 lodged in the bank to enable it to fund twenty people, as shares were £50 each. In the summer of 1838 Pierre Baume, the society's secretary and auditor, toured the West Riding seeking suitable candidates.¹²² The society's members were not new to co-operation. Baume, who was involved with the earlier Barnsbury Park Community, was a rather eccentric figure who operated on the fringes of the Owenite movement for a number of years. He had arrived in London in about 1825, and had made a number of efforts to found a community in the city.¹²³ William Devonshire Saull, a city wine merchant and the society's treasurer, likewise had a history of involvement in the co-operative movement.¹²⁴ In the late 1820s he had been a member of the London Co-operative Trading Fund Association, and at this time he was participating in the Labourer's Friend Society, which aimed to provide labourers with land at reasonable rents.¹²⁵ The Labourer's Friend Society was a philanthropic society formed by gentry and clerics, which advocated allotments as a solution to poverty that did not threaten the established order.¹²⁶ That Saull was also involved in co-operative societies indicates the central importance of the land to social reform in this period, and the range of attitudes that were brought together by co-operation.

The desire for community was clearly still present in London in the mid-1830s, as the persistence of communitarian proposals and societies demonstrates. The AACAN built on this support, slowly establishing a number of branches across the capital. At its height, there were nine

¹²² *New Moral World*, IV. 173. 17 February 1838; IV. 177. 17 March 1838; IV. 193. 7 July 1838

¹²³ See G. J. Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation*, vol. I., pp. 218-220, 546-550

¹²⁴ Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, p. 149

¹²⁵ *New Moral World*, IV. 178. 24 March 1838

¹²⁶ Jamie L. Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States 1800-1862* (Stanford, 1999), pp. 45-46

branches in London.¹²⁷ One example of how pre-existing support was incorporated into the AACAN is the formation of Branch 16, in Finsbury. Branch 16 included a number of men who had long been prominent in London Owenite circles. Benjamin Warden, the founder of the Social Community, and an active co-operator from the late 1820s, was an influential member of the branch and its president for a time.¹²⁸ Charles Jenneson, who at times served as secretary and delegate to Congress, was a member of Spencean circles in Finsbury.¹²⁹ He had participated in the co-operative societies and the BAPCK. Jenneson had also been a member of the Social Missionary Union, the name given to the Social Missionary and Tract Society when that organisation had been revived in 1834.¹³⁰ Anthony Peacock, secretary to the Community Friendly Society from 1836, and earlier to the Eastern Institution in 1834, acted as the branch's secretary after Jenneson, who happened to be his next-door neighbour in Finsbury.¹³¹ Jenneson had been involved in re-launching the Eastern Social Institution in 1835, and it became the branch's meeting place.¹³²

3. 8. Manchester and the Association of All Classes of All Nations

As in London, the foundation of the AACAN in Manchester built upon earlier activity in the city. After the launch of the AACAN in May 1835, the Manchester Association called members from Manchester, Salford, Bolton,

¹²⁷ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, pp. 239-242

¹²⁸ *London Social Reformer*, I. 1. 2 May 1840

For Benjamin Warden see p. 47, n. 65.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, I. 1. 2 May 1840; I. 2. 9 May 1840

¹³⁰ *Crisis*, III. 29. 15 March 1834

Charles Jenneson was an active London co-operator. Like his friend Allen Davenport, Jenneson was involved with Finsbury Spencean circles and was a member of the Finsbury section of the NUWC. In addition to the societies mentioned above, he was also a member of the London Co-operative Trading Fund Association and was secretary to the First London Manufacturing Community in the early 1830s. Jenneson, like Benjamin Warden, was a member of both the Finsbury branch of the Rational Society and the East London Branch 1 of the Hodsonian Society. In the late 1840s he was involved with the Co-operative League and the London branch of the Leeds Redemption Society.

¹³¹ *Rules to be observed for the government and management of the Community Friendly Society*

Report of the Community Friendly Society (1837) in Anthony Peacock to Robert Owen, 8 May 1837. ROCC 884

Crisis, IV. 1. 12 April 1834

New Moral World, VIII. 19. 7 November 1840

Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, p. 167

Oldham, and Stockport together to discuss the best way to aid its success, believing it their duty to do so, as men committed to the same principles.¹³³ James Lowe wrote to Owen, informing him that the Manchester supporters would do all they could to spread the message of the new system.¹³⁴ The London Owenites welcomed the support offered by Manchester, and called for others to follow their example.¹³⁵ Manchester should not be regarded as merely following London's lead. Owenism was strong in Manchester, more so than in the capital. Lloyd Jones recalled the dissatisfaction of Manchester Owenites at the proceedings of the London Congress in 1836, and the feeling that 'We had among us in Manchester more life and energy'.¹³⁶ The vibrant support for Owenism that existed in the area was demonstrated by the opening of the Salford Social Institution, a large meeting place for the local Owenites, and the first in the country.¹³⁷ Salford later formed the first branch of the AACAN outside London. Another Social Institution was established in Bolton only a few months later.¹³⁸ Lloyd Jones wrote of the high level of activity in Manchester:

People from the surrounding districts flocked into Manchester and Salford on Sundays, and during the week-days held, in their own neighbourhoods, meetings which were usually addressed by deputations from Manchester.¹³⁹

Following the pattern of the earlier Manchester Association and of the Community Friendly Society in London, the Manchester Owenites established another society explicitly intended to found a community. This was the Salford Community Association, founded in late 1836 with George

¹³² *ibid.*, II. 80. 7 May 1836

¹³³ *ibid.*, I. 27. 2 May 1835

¹³⁴ Jas. Lowe to Robert Owen, 8 May 1835. ROCC 732

¹³⁵ *New Moral World*, I. 28. 9 May 1835

¹³⁶ Lloyd Jones, *The Life, Times, and Labours of Robert Owen*, p. 53

¹³⁷ *New Moral World*, II. 62. 2 January 1836

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, II. 75. 2 April 1836

¹³⁹ Lloyd Jones, *The Life, Times, and Labours of Robert Owen*, p. 55

A. Fleming as its secretary.¹⁴⁰ This organisation was intended to be truly national, with Manchester acting as the central branch at least until the 1837 Congress met. It is a reflection of the strength of support in the region that Manchester now proposed itself as a centre of the Owenite movement. The aim of the Community Association was to raise a weekly subscription of a half-crown from five hundred members, a considerable sum that would give an annual income of £3,250.¹⁴¹ One year after a membership of five hundred had been reached, and the subscriptions collected, the society would begin plans for its community.¹⁴²

The strength of support in the area led to the 1837 Congress being held in Salford. The 1837 Congress demonstrated the extent to which the AACAN developed out of previous organisations. This Congress determined the form of the Owenite movement for successive years, and that form was largely derived from pre-existing structures.¹⁴³ The AACAN was officially enrolled under the Friendly Societies legislation, as organisations such as the Community Friendly Society had done. Manchester became the centre of the movement, with the establishment of a Central Board with a Home Department in Manchester and a Foreign Department in London. A Social Missionary and Tract Society was founded, on the model of the society established at the London Eastern Institution in late 1836.¹⁴⁴ The Community Fund of the AACAN was superseded by the establishment of the separate National Community Friendly Society, which absorbed the Salford Community Association, with

¹⁴⁰ *New Moral World*, III. 110. 3 December 1836

George Alexander Fleming was active in the early co-operative movement in Salford, including the Salford co-operative store and the co-operative school. He was instrumental in the founding of the Salford Community Association in 1836. Fleming was later prominent in the Association of All Classes of All Nations, and was editor of the *New Moral World*, and later of the *Moral World*. After the end of the Owenite movement, he was involved with the League of Social Progress and the Co-operative League.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, III. 105. 29 October 1836

¹⁴² *ibid.*, III. 110. 3 December 1836

¹⁴³ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 59

¹⁴⁴ *New Moral World*, II. 100. 24 September 1836.

This society stemmed from the Social Missionary and Tract Society established at the Charlotte Street Institution in 1832, and revived by Robert Alger in 1834.

Fleming continuing as secretary.¹⁴⁵ The progress of the AACAN had been slow, but by the 1837 Congress the AACAN had incorporated the major Owenite institutions in both Manchester and London.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the principal societies in London and Manchester over the period, and has attempted to illustrate the many themes and attitudes linked to the drive to community. There were many other societies formed in both cities that could not be included. The periodicals of the period give glimpses of small societies of which little is known or can be said. Yet, taken together, these organisations demonstrate the appeal of community. Community links them together, but the societies illustrate the range of ideas that come together under that heading.

A focus on a specific location over a period of years gives an indication of the context from which community proposals emerged. By considering particular plans or organisations against the background of other local ventures, their relevance in ongoing debates can be gauged. This approach also illustrates the range of these debates, as different societies stressed different areas of Owenite activity. Thus some societies stressed moral improvement and education, while others concentrated their energies on obtaining land. Community was a vague and flexible concept, permitting a wide range of forms of communitarian activity. James Tucker demonstrates the variety of proposals that were included in contemporary debates. Focusing on these two cities also permits the study of individuals, such as Tucker, and reveals the difficulty in applying rigid labels to their activities. People could entertain ideas that may appear to the historian to be incompatible, and an awareness of this should benefit an understanding of the appeal of community. Community stood as the ultimate aim of many in both London and Manchester, but its practical manifestations demonstrated a variety of attitudes and approaches.

¹⁴⁵ For Congress reports see *New Moral World*, III. 136. 10 June 1837

CHAPTER 4. THE RATIONAL SOCIETY AND ITS RIVALS 1835-41

4. Introduction

Formed in 1835, the Association of All Classes of All Nations marked the beginning of a new phase in the search for community. The co-operative societies, hitherto the basis of the communitarian movement in Britain, had largely failed. Their place was taken by the nation-wide structure of branches which grew up around the AACAN, initially based in London. Thorne has argued that Robert Owen, in forming the new society, was reacting against the independence of the labour movement.¹ Certainly Owen occupied a greater position of authority than he had done among the co-operative societies. Yet the extent to which the AACAN was fully controlled by Owen should not be overestimated. As the branches spread, they built on pre-existing local organisations, and included many figures who had been active in the co-operative societies.² Local branches maintained a degree of independence, and did not unquestioningly accept decisions from the centre. Furthermore, although the largest organisation, the AACAN was not in full control of the movement. Alternative organisations, such as the Community Friendly Society of London, continued to exist alongside the AACAN. This independence, coupled with a continuing desire for community, ensured that when rival ventures arose, they threatened to destabilise the AACAN.

Throughout the period covered by this chapter, demand for practical activity continued. This demand was not contained by the activities of the AACAN, and instead found expression in a number of unsanctioned communities. The most substantial of these was the Manea Fen community, which lasted from 1839 to 1841, and this chapter will focus on the relationship between the community and the AACAN, or the Rational

¹ Robin Thorne, 'Change and Continuity in the Development of Co-operation, 1827-1844' in Stephen Yeo (ed.), *New Views of Co-operation* (Routledge, London, 1988), p. 38

Society as it was known for most of this period. It was established by William Hodson, a Cambridgeshire farmer, who intended it as a contribution to the success of the movement. Yet Hodson was not welcomed by the Rational Society. His community threatened not only to distract attention from the official Queenwood community, but also, through Hodson's advocacy of democratic self-government, to challenge the Rational Society's views on community. Manea Fen attracted both those unwilling to wait for the Rational Society's own activities and those who saw in the independent community a platform for opposing the Rational Society's views and policies.

A number of other small communities were also planned and established in this period. Of the remainder, the largest was the Pant Glas community in Wales. This was founded by a splinter group from within the Liverpool branch of the Rational Society, and, like Manea Fen, demonstrates the danger demand for a community posed to the unity of the Owenite movement. Established through an impatience to get into community, the venture was condemned by the Rational Society as a distraction and a threat to the success of the movement's official activities. Such experiments demonstrate that this period was not entirely dominated by the Rational Society's official Queenwood community, and that the diversity of ventures of the 1820s and early 1830s continued into the later 1830s and early 1840s.

4. 1. The Association of All Classes of All Nations

The Association of All Classes of All Nations was formed to carry Owen's vision into practice. The new society continued the social and educational activities that had been provided by the co-operative societies and the labour exchanges before it. Members were required to contribute to its Community Fund. This fund was later replaced by an independent organisation, the

² See chapter 2 for a discussion of the establishment of the Association of All Classes of All Nations in London and Manchester.

National Community Friendly Society, at the Congress of 1837. By the time of this Congress, the second of the AACAN, the society had greatly increased its representation. Its beginning had been slow, with only one regional delegate present at the previous Congress, but by the time of the 1837 Congress the AACAN was a truly national organisation with a network of provincial branches.³ Later Congresses appointed social missionaries to spread understanding of co-operation within their allotted districts. While the Co-operative Congresses had attempted national schemes for a community, the AACAN was the first single organisation to draw upon national support for its plans.

Growing as it did from the Charlotte Street Institution of the early 1830s, the AACAN initially reflected attitudes to community dominant within the Institution. Owen's views at this time tended to emphasise preparation over demands for immediate action, and this approach was largely adopted by the Social Community which had arranged events at the Institution.⁴ The AACAN's first annual report, delivered at the 1836 Congress, echoed such sentiments. 'Then let us go on,' urged the report, 'and not be in too great a hurry to begin practical measures, until we are fully equipped for the enterprise.'⁵ As has been discussed earlier, during the co-operative period the debate over community had focused on the question of preparation or action, and the establishment of the AACAN did not stifle advocates of immediate operations. George Waddington in London formed a committee and inspected land for a community in the spring of 1835.⁶ J. W., in a letter to the *New Moral World*, suggested that small numbers of families should live together in preparation for communal living.⁷

³ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 59

⁴ See chapter 3 for detail on the activities of the Social Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society.

⁵ *New Moral World*, II. 81. 14 May 1836

⁶ *ibid.*, I. 30. 23 May 1835

⁷ *ibid.*, I. 40. 1 August 1835

The idea was not new, and had been the aim of the First Female Co-operative Association of 1834. See chapter 3.

By 1837, however, the AACAN had begun to arrange its own practical operations. The formation of the National Community Friendly Society in 1837 provided a firmer basis for organising community operations. Its establishment was welcomed at the 1838 Congress for its furtherance of the movement.

The people now see a practical and peaceful mode of putting into operation the principles of a system, which might else have seemed to them nothing better than a bright vision of happiness which they could not attain.⁸

As the Community Fund, and later the National Community Friendly Society, continued to collect subscriptions, demand for a community mounted. By the time of the 1838 Congress there were fears within the society that failure to produce a practical demonstration could lose the society much support.

When the 1838 Congress addressed the question of practical operations James Campbell reported from Salford that there were many calling for a community. He believed that the time had come to prove the practicability of their doctrines.⁹ The sense that there was a growing demand among branch members for a practical result from their subscriptions was reflected in the statements of other delegates. A committee appointed by Congress to inquire into the various schemes for funding a community reported that delayed operations 'would tend greatly to cool the zeal and ardour of the most efficient supporters of the cause'. It concluded by recommending immediate practical measures.¹⁰ T. S. Mackintosh agreed, saying that expectations had been raised which would only be disappointed should a start be delayed further.¹¹ While few objected to the committee's conclusions, Congress was simply not in a position to

⁸ *Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations*, p. 13

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 40

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 45

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 48

begin operations immediately. Funding had to be discussed, and a site had to be chosen. Congress finally decided to appoint a committee to inspect possible locations, and a special meeting of Congress would be called to hear its report.¹²

Reactions to Congress's decisions among the branches showed that the delegates had accurately represented the views of the membership. Dissatisfaction at the steps taken by Congress led to a decline in subscriptions in Manchester. In Liverpool the members were said to 'sadly want to know when the establishment will be commenced'.¹³ Unrest among the branches was not calmed by the first report from the land committee appointed by Congress. The land committee called a Special Congress for October 1838, having viewed two estates in eastern England. The first, shown to them by William Hodson, was unsuitable. The second, at Wretton and belonging to James Hill, proprietor of the radical Cambridgeshire paper, the *Star in the East*, was considered a possibility.¹⁴ After viewing his land in September, the AACAN began to make arrangements to purchase the estate, but these fell through due to disagreements over the price and Hill's evident desire to continue with his own plans for the estate.¹⁵ The special Congress had been called before negotiations collapsed, and was thus ultimately disappointing.

4. 2. The Manea Fen community

In August 1838, William Hodson, who helped the AACAN search for an estate, announced his own community at Manea Fen in Cambridgeshire.¹⁶

¹² *ibid.*, p. 48

¹³ *New Moral World*, IV. 196. 28 July 1838

¹⁴ *ibid.*, V. 1. 27 October 1838

¹⁵ *Star in the East*, III. 111. 27 October 1838

For a detailed discussion of the negotiations over the Wretton estate, see Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 70-72

¹⁶ Manea Fen has appeared in previous studies. See W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below*, pp. 145-167

Dennis Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England*, pp. 49-53

J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, pp. 171-172, 180, 190

Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 253-258

His announcement made the subsequent failure of the Wretton negotiations to secure a site for the AACAN's own community more significant, for as demand for a community within the AACAN continued to find no outlet, Hodson's venture threatened to prove a considerable distraction.

William Hodson first encountered Owen during Owen's lecture tour of the eastern counties in the summer of 1838.¹⁷ He soon offered to help the movement, and was initially welcomed. Owen was sufficiently impressed by Hodson to recommend him to the Central Board of the National Community Friendly Society, 'as a scientific and practical Agriculturalist, who was a warm supporter of the New Views, and who proposed to render every assistance in carrying them into practice'.¹⁸ Shortly after meeting Owen, Hodson offered some of his land to the AACAN's Central Board. The Board recommended that he speak to the Estate Committee, which was searching for a suitable location at this time. William Pare, chairman of the Board, welcomed Hodson's offer, and wrote to the Estate Committee expressing his hope that the offer would prove acceptable.¹⁹

At this time the AACAN was willing to consider such offers, as demand among the branches fuelled the search for land. Hodson, however, changed his mind. His enthusiasm now led him to propose his own venture, rather than co-operating with the AACAN. The month after meeting Hodson the Board received a letter from E. T. Craig, schoolmaster for James Hill in Wisbech, informing them of Hodson's intention to form a community himself.²⁰ Hodson later confirmed Craig's letter and requested that a Congress be called to discuss his plans. The impact of Owen's views on Hodson had been sudden and powerful. Within only a few weeks of first hearing Owen, Hodson now planned to embark upon an expensive and complex undertaking. The AACAN responded cautiously to its new-found

¹⁷ *The New Moral World*, IV. 197. 4 August 1838

¹⁸ The National Community Friendly Society, Minute book of Directors, 30 July 1838 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies, 1838-1845* (microfilm ed., Hassocks, Sussex, 1976)

¹⁹ *ibid.*

For William Pare, see p. 37, n. 27.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 17 August 1838

ally. The Board asked for details of his proposal, so that they could judge its practicality and decide whether to call a Congress.²¹

The announcement of Manea Fen immediately divided the movement. For many, the community provided a long-awaited opportunity to begin practical action. For others, Hodson's venture appeared divisive, and jeopardised the future of the AACAN's own activities. Among those who welcomed the community was E. T. Craig, who believed it could prove valuable in winning support for the movement. Craig wrote that there had been much preaching and writing on the subject of community, and more was needed, in order to prepare public opinion. However, one practical experiment would be more use than either in convincing 'landlords and capitalists of the practicability and desirability of communities'.²² Craig, the former president of the Manchester Owenian Society, had left Manchester for Ireland and the Ralahine Community in 1831. His experience there had taught him the importance of facts in gaining support. Craig was here expressing views that would have been shared by many of the members of the Owenite movement. The months following the establishment of Manea Fen were to see many expressions of support from the branches. Members had been contributing regularly to the Community Fund, which had so far produced nothing but seemingly endless debates. Manea Fen came at a time when the initiation of practical operations was being intensively discussed, and it must have seemed to many to have finally answered their hopes.

The most prominent opponent of Hodson's plans was G. A. Fleming, editor of the *New Moral World*.²³ Fleming's opposition was explained by the difficult position he occupied. Part of the function of the *New Moral World* was to act as a focus for the movement, and as a guide for its energies. Fleming rightly, and swiftly, perceived in Manea Fen a threat to the unity of the AACAN. He was forced to steer a difficult course, refusing

For E. T. Craig see p. 90, n. 58.

²¹ *ibid.*, 20 August, 1838

²² *New Moral World*, IV. 200. 25 August 1838

²³ For G. A. Fleming see p. 109, n. 140.

to allow the society to be distracted by the unauthorised experiment in the fens, and yet maintaining enthusiasm for the society's own, and still distant, community. This is clearly reflected in a letter Fleming wrote to Owen in August 1838, saying that the society, 'really must guard against any misguided enthusiasm, but at the same time the cry for immediate operations grows so strong that something must be speedily done by us to meet it.'²⁴ Support for Hodson was not merely a matter of generosity, for if the AACAN diverted funds into the venture, which then failed, it would be a serious blow to the society's financial status. Furthermore, any question of support raised a number of questions as to the degree of control to be exercised by Hodson and by the society, as became evident in the debates over union in late 1840. Fleming was not prepared to risk the society on a venture over which it had little control, and which it regarded as having begun with insufficient preparation. His response was to use the *New Moral World* to criticise Manea Fen, which in turn accused Fleming of bias.²⁵

As Fleming was aware, the timing of Hodson's community threatened to destabilise the AACAN. It was announced at a difficult period, as the AACAN struggled to balance demands for action with the need to establish fund-raising and organisational machinery. Hodson clearly provided an alternative focus for the discontented within the movement, and threatened to distract AACAN supporters away from their own plans. The proposed community was potentially distracting for two main reasons. Firstly, and most obviously, it had the advantage of preceding the AACAN's plans. At the time of Manea Fen's announcement, the AACAN had no concrete proposal, and its later involvement with the Wretton estate was to end in disappointment. Hodson's political opinions and the emphasis he placed on equality provided the second factor in explaining Manea Fen's threat. This emphasis on equality was to provide another source of conflict with the Owenite leadership, which at this time

²⁴ G. A. Fleming to Robert Owen, 22 August 1838. ROCC 1043

²⁵ It is debatable how far these accusations were justified, but on many occasions Fleming was accused of having failed to print responses to attacks on Manea Fen, or letters

was involved in discussions as to the ideal form of government for communities. The 1837 Congress had resolved that communities would be governed by a 'patriarchal power', a single head.²⁶ The more egalitarian government of Manea Fen partly accounted for its attraction among the membership of the AACAN, and in turn ensured that it challenged the society's authority.

Fleming's attitude was not shared by all of the Owenite leaders. Owen himself maintained relations with Hodson. In September 1838 both were present in Salford, where Hodson spoke on his plans for community. According to the report from the Salford branch the 'most lively interest' was shown.²⁷ As has been discussed, Owen was also involved with Hodson's recommendation of the Norfolk estate to the society.²⁸ Hodson also visited the Wretton estate, and carried out a chemical analysis of the soil for the AACAN.²⁹ Isaac Ironside, of Sheffield, was most impressed by Hodson, whom he regarded as being worth as much as 'half a dozen (almost) members of the central board'. Ironside wrote to Owen in early 1839 requesting him to instruct Fleming 'not to throw cold water on Hodson's affair'. He attributed Fleming's attitude to 'a pique against that part of the country, on account of the bad termination of the Wretton affair', the aborted purchase of James Hill's estate mentioned above.³⁰ The leadership of the society should not be considered as an undivided whole with regard to their attitudes to Hodson. Although it is difficult to discern

containing favourable reports. As these items were sometimes printed by Manea Fen itself, from July 1839, on occasion at least the accusations would seem to have been accurate.

²⁶ *New Moral World*, III. 136. 10 June 1837

²⁷ *ibid.*, IV. 205. 29 September 1838

²⁸ The National Community Friendly Society, Minute book of Directors, 18 September 1838 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

²⁹ *ibid.*, 23 October 1838

³⁰ Isaac Ironside to Robert Owen, 15 January 1839. ROCC 1110

Born in 1808, Isaac Ironside was apprenticed to a stove-grate fitter. He was later a successful estate agent and railway shareholder. Ironside was an active member of the Owenite movement in Sheffield, and was instrumental in establishing the Sheffield Hall of Science. He was also a Chartist, and was elected to Sheffield Town Council as a Chartist in 1846. A firm supporter of agrarian and communitarian schemes, he was involved with the Sheffield Board of Guardians' experiment at Hollow Meadows Farm from the late 1840s. (John Salt, 'Isaac Ironside and the Hollow Meadows Farm Experiment' in *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research* 12 (1960), pp. 45-51)

the reaction of individuals to Hodson, it appears that Owen and Pare were less critical, while Fleming argued most strongly against his plans. John Finch was later accused by the Manea Fen community of building support against the community in Liverpool.³¹

Throughout late 1838 the general reaction to Hodson was largely one of support. Hodson offered the opportunity for practical action, and this was welcomed by the majority of the movement, even if the specific form of action he proposed was questioned. This could be seen in a letter from Craig to the editor of the *New Moral World*. Craig argued that Hodson's plans should not be seen as a true Owenite community, but that operations on this more limited scale could be useful both for perfecting practical arrangements for later communities and for building support among the capitalists and landowners. He concluded his letter, 'Without being identified with Mr. Hodson's plan, or approving of *all* he proposes, I sincerely wish and hope he may be successful.'³²

4. 3. Manea Fen: the response of the branches

Manea Fen was initially welcomed by many of the branches of the AACAN, soon to become the Rational Society.³³ As news of the venture spread, and as Hodson toured parts of the country early in 1839, many branches responded by pledging their support to the new community. For these branches, Manea Fen offered the opportunity for practical action, at a time when the Rational Society's own operations still seemed distant. This welcome was not uniform, however, and branch members voiced fears that Manea Fen could prove divisive.

³¹ *Working Bee*, I. 7. 31 August 1839

For John Finch see p. 88, n. 51.

³² *New Moral World*, IV. 203. 15 September 1838

³³ To avoid possible confusion, the name the Rational Society will be used for the remainder of this chapter. The Association of All Classes of All Nations became the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists at the Congress of 1839. This title was later abbreviated officially to the Rational Society at the Congress of 1839.

Just as Manea Fen met the branches' demand for action, so too relations with the branches were valued by Hodson. In part this was because Hodson regarded Manea Fen as a contribution to the wider movement. However, Hodson was aware that Manea Fen would need some form of local organisation to recruit members, and more importantly, to provide access to a market for community goods. This was apparent in the formation of the Manchester committee and the East London Branch 1. For the duration of the community's life, Hodson sought to achieve some form of co-operation with the Owenite branches, while maintaining his plan for a Hodsonian organisation.

Manea Fen found an early ally in the social missionary, John Green, who was later to join the community. In a report of his tour around the northern branches, Green urged the Central Board to support Hodson. 'The time is now come, when something practical must be attempted, or our most true and energetic friends will become apathetic. Mr. Hodson, if supported, must certainly succeed. That support which is necessary, I feel assured, from the feeling displayed in the branches, will be afforded him.'³⁴ When official support for Manea Fen did not materialise, Green resigned his post as social missionary and left to join the community.³⁵ He perceived the demand for practical operations among the branches, and the consequent significance of action as a method of maintaining support, as well as of advancing the movement. Through his role as a social missionary, Green would have been well placed to have gauged the feeling among the branches.

Green's opinion of the readiness of the branches to aid Hodson was reinforced by the branches' statements of support. Following the announcement of the start of operations by Samuel Rowbotham, the community's secretary, late in December 1838, and carried in the *New Moral World* in January 1839, Rowbotham and Hodson toured around a

³⁴ *New Moral World*, V. 16. 9 February 1839

number of branches.³⁶ At this time Hodson hoped that the Rational Society would purchase land near his estate, and join his colony. If this proposal was not adopted he proposed to establish 'Hodsonian' branches to support Manea Fen. These proposals were discussed at many branch meetings. This tour was highly significant in raising support for the community. Unlike earlier small-scale ventures, Manea Fen drew upon a pre-existing national organisation for support and members, a factor that is greatly significant in explaining its initial success. It was somewhat ironic that the first venture to benefit from the Rational Society's network was one that was never officially sanctioned by the movement.

Samuel Rowbotham was present in Salford in January to hear the report of Adam Hutchinson, a member who had been delegated to visit the colony. Hutchinson's report was favourable, and the meeting concluded with a number of resolutions in support of Hodson. It was resolved to aid the community by purchasing any goods it might produce. Such resolutions occurred at other meetings, and may have been suggested by Hodson or Rowbotham, aware of Manea Fen's need for a market. The meeting also requested the Rational Society's Estate Committee to consider land near Hodson's estate for their community, an indication that Manea Fen was not viewed as a rival organisation. Several members of the branch offered their help to Rowbotham. Similar resolutions were passed by the Rochdale and Oldham branches, following lectures by Rowbotham, and by Liverpool.³⁷ Several Oldham members were said to be anxious to go to Manea Fen, and were awaiting replies from the colony.³⁸ Rowbotham lectured to the Huddersfield branch in February, which decided to support Manea Fen through the purchase of its goods, and by any other means possible. It concluded, 'Practical operations are the way to make Socialism popular and prosperous.'³⁹

³⁵ *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations*, p. 29

³⁶ *New Moral World*, V. 12. 12 January 1839

³⁷ *ibid.*, V. 15. 2 February 1839; V. 16. 9 February 1839

³⁸ *ibid.*, V. 16. 9 February 1839

³⁹ *ibid.*, V. 18. 23 February 1839

In February Hodson lectured to the Stockport branch, and the meeting concluded with resolutions in his favour. It was decided that the branch would use all its means to support his venture, and that the Central Board should seriously consider his proposals.⁴⁰ The Bolton branch came to a similar decision in the same month. The report of the Bolton meeting is valuable, in that it revealed the differing reactions to Hodson among the branches, and the reasons for this initial support. The author of the report, Hadfield, the secretary, disagreed with the majority over the support for Hodson, and he did understand why he should command such support. 'Now, considering the distressed condition of the people, and the desire for community which now exists, it is no wonder that he should be listened to, and that many should be induced to leave their homes to join in his experiment.' At the meeting Hodson had raised the possibility of his founding branches, should he not be supported by the Rational Society. Hadfield considered that this would threaten the success of the cause. However, resolutions were passed that the Central Board should consider his proposals. Two members of this branch left to join Manea Fen.⁴¹ Hadfield was not alone in his opposition to Hodson. The Central Board attached a small notice to the end of the Stockport report, announcing their decision not to participate in his experiment. The London A1 Branch later passed a resolution supporting this decision.

The most significant demonstration of support for Manea Fen at branch level was the founding of local organisations to aid the community. In Manchester the Central Committee was formed, primarily to aid in the recruitment of members for Manea Fen. It sent John Green, the social missionary, to report on the community.⁴² The committee provided a link between the distant Manea Fen and the social body, which had been one of Hodson's primary concerns since announcing the community. The tour

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, V. 19. 2 March 1839

⁴¹ *ibid.*, V. 19. 2 March 1839

⁴² *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations*, p. 29

which he had undertaken through the main centres of Owenism in the north of England had been intended to build support there, but the Central Committee was the tour's sole concrete result. Its formation made Manea Fen qualitatively different from any of the other community ventures which had preceded it. The Downlands community of the 1820s had maintained links with the London Co-operative Society, but no previous venture had established a local organisation. In theory, the committee gave Manea Fen access to members from one of Owenism's strongest areas, and provided a potential market for communitarian goods. The committee also established the *Social Pioneer* periodical, to provide a voice for Manea Fen and to enable the community to defend itself against the attacks of the *New Moral World*, of which the *Social Pioneer* wrote, they 'evinced a spirit which, if it be social, we must say that it breathes a new kind of Socialism.'⁴³

Local level support for Hodson was also evident in the formation of the East London Branch 1 of the Hodsonian community. The *Social Pioneer* printed a number of reports from this branch, which appears to be the only branch, as distinct from the Manchester committee, actually established. This branch emerged from the Rational Society Branch 16, in Finsbury, which was an early supporter of Hodson. In 1838 the council of Branch 16 resolved to hold a public meeting to consider the best means 'of promoting the success of this important experiment. All eyes are now turned to practical measures. The meeting is expected to be a very full one, in consequence of the great anxiety on the subject.'⁴⁴ Strong support for Manea Fen is evident in Branch 16's activities. In March 1839 Hodson attended a meeting at the Hall of Science in Finsbury, which was claimed to be the largest meeting for social purposes held in that place, and also a tea party attended by over one hundred people.⁴⁵ Joseph Davidge, the branch's secretary, supported Manea Fen to the extent of joining the community.⁴⁶

⁴³*Social Pioneer*, I. 1. 9 March 1839

⁴⁴*New Moral World*, IV. 204. 22 September 1838

⁴⁵*Social Pioneer*, I. 1. 9 March 1839; I. 2. 16 March 1839

The Hodsonian East London Branch 1, although it shared members with the Rational Society, operated independently. By mid-April the East London Branch 1 numbered fifty-three.⁴⁷ It served to encourage local support for the community, and, like the Manchester Central Committee, had the authority to examine candidates for membership of Manea Fen.⁴⁸ Benjamin Warden, the President, used the *Social Pioneer* to criticise the *New Moral World's* treatment of Manea Fen. Warden objected to the *New Moral World's* account of a resolution opposing Manea Fen passed by the Rational Society's West London branch. He claimed that the resolution, far from being unanimous and reflecting the general opinion of the London members, as was the impression given by the *New Moral World*, was in reality only passed after an acrimonious meeting, and after many who opposed it had left. He also stressed that London in general was not opposed to Manea Fen, and that on the day of the meeting, the tea party to welcome Hodson had been attended by 140 people.⁴⁹ The number of members and of persons attending the tea party indicate a high level of support for the community. Although the East London Branch 1 appears to have been the only one formed, the *Social Pioneer* carried a request to form another branch from a group in Bolton, calling themselves the Democratic Socialists. The name 'Democratic' may in itself be significant, and indicates that part of the attraction of Manea Fen was its emphasis on democratic government, in opposition to the proposals of the Rational Society.

Manea Fen was a potentially divisive influence. Through its advocacy of a more democratic approach, Manea Fen threatened to act as a focus for opposition to the Rational Society. The editor of the *Social Pioneer*, clearly aware that his periodical could be seen as fostering such divisions, was keen to emphasise that this desire to form Hodsonian

⁴⁶ *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations*, p. 28

⁴⁷ *Social Pioneer*, I. 6. 13 April 1839

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, I. 8. 27 April 1839

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, I. 4. 30 March 1839

For Benjamin Warden see p. 47, n. 65.

branches should not be seen as representing a split within the movement, but rather a strong desire for practical operations.⁵⁰ The publication of the *Social Pioneer* itself, the Manchester Central Committee, and the East London Branch 1 all bore testimony to this desire. However, Manea Fen was not as innocuous as the *Social Pioneer* wished to present it. The London meeting described by Warden demonstrates the divisive influence of the community. The *New Moral World* was clearly aware of its impact, and if Warden's allegations were accurate, its downplaying of the disagreements over the community reveal a desire to maintain the unity of the movement.

4. 4. Manea Fen: the response of the leadership

The Cambridge colony did not receive the same degree of support from the *New Moral World* as from the branches. The official beginning of operations at Manea Fen in January 1839 was announced by Samuel Rowbotham through the pages of the *New Moral World*. Rowbotham, himself a member of the Rational Society and former secretary of the Stockport branch, was eager to present Manea Fen as the long-awaited beginning of practical operations. He wrote,

As fellow labourers in the great cause of human redemption, you will hail with delight the relation of matters connected with practical operations. The time has now arrived when something must be done, in addition to wordy expositions and recommendations, or many who have looked with anxious eyes to the enjoyment of a better state of things, will become lukewarm and careless...⁵¹

Rowbotham here voiced the fears of the movement. The Rational Society leadership, including Fleming, were aware of the potential damage to the

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, I. 4. 30 March 1839

⁵¹ *New Moral World*, V. 12. 12 January 1839

society if operations were not begun in the near future. Once Manea Fen had started, the danger of the Rational Society's activities appearing to be no more than 'wordy expositions and recommendations' was greatly increased. Fleming's response was to distance the Rational Society from this venture, and to attempt to diminish its importance. He wrote,

The whole of the business connected with the experiment referred to, is on the individual responsibility, and under the personal controul [*sic*] of Mr. Hodson, and has no farther connection with the body of Socialists, than as they may individually think proper to form.⁵²

The Rational Society itself would not consider commencing practical operations until they were able to meet Owen's prescription of an estate of 500 acres, and a membership of 500 persons. An experiment begun with less could not achieve the results Owen had predicted. Fleming concluded with the rather double-edged remark that Hodson's venture 'may become an useful auxiliary, to more important and conclusive experiments'.⁵³ Fleming was here struggling to maintain the primacy of the Rational Society's own plans, and its position as the sole organisation which fully understood how to implement Owen's vision.

This was not the welcome that the members of the Hodsonian community may have hoped for, and attempts to reduce the significance of Manea Fen continued. The *New Moral World* disputed Manea Fen's claim to be well suited to community operations. It questioned the suitability of the land, and remarked on the possible health risk to persons new to the area, which verged on scaremongering. The estate was said to be too small, which it was according to Owen's plans, which demanded five hundred acres rather than the two hundred available here. The *New Moral World* concluded that the colony could be a useful establishment for training

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

agricultural labourers, but doubted that it could be any more than this. By portraying Manea Fen as a potential auxiliary to future Rational Society operations, the *New Moral World* sought to maintain the society's control of the movement. These objections were to be repeated many times in similar criticisms of Hodson's plans. The *New Moral World* objected to Rowbotham's claims that the banks of the Bedford, an artificial river, would provide a pleasant promenade, criticising the treeless landscape for its lack of grassy banks, winding vistas, and bird song. This seemed a surprising criticism, given the apparent insignificance of Rowbotham's remark.

The emphasis attached to the natural surroundings may have stemmed partly from Owen's views on the significance of nature and of its appreciation by man as a way of providing a sound basis for education and a complete character. Obviously, it was also a method of portraying the community as a pleasant place to be. It may also be linked to contemporary discussions on the nature of the picturesque. Jane Austen earlier satirised a concern for the picturesque in *Northanger Abbey*, but such concerns were here underlying criticisms of the suitability of the fenland landscape to house a community. The site for a community clearly had not only to be practical, but also to accord with contemporary perceptions of natural beauty. This attack on a single remark of Rowbotham's seemed remarkably petty, especially as it generated a running debate over the merits of the fenland landscape. The article seemed determined to criticise all aspects of the colony, and to leave no area at all which the colonists could claim to be beneficial.⁵⁴ That the *New Moral World* should resort to criticism based on notions of the picturesque indicated the depth of its opposition. However, it also indicated that 'community' was a complete concept, embracing all aspects of life. Pleasure derived from an appreciation of the landscape was as important as the ability to support the members economically. Life concerned more than being a 'mere working, eating, drinking, and sleeping animal'.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, V. 15. 2 February 1839

During this period, while the branches were increasingly supporting Manea Fen, the opposition of the Central Board was building. The tone of the *New Moral World* was increasingly critical, as has been seen above. Such criticism was frequently claimed to be in the spirit of friendly advice, but in February 1839 the two societies openly split. This came at a Board Meeting of the National Community Friendly Society. Hodson had written to the board proposing that the society 'adopt the establishment he was now forming in Cambridgeshire, and suggesting the propriety of making the same a branch school of community.' According to the minutes of the meeting, at which both Hodson and Owen were present, a

lengthy conversation took place between Mr. Hodson and the Board which terminated by the President informing Mr. Hodson, on the part of the Board, that negotiations at present pending to enable the Community Society to carry out its objects would prevent their taking any part in the limited proceedings at Manea Fen. At the request of Mr. Hodson his letter was returned to him.⁵⁶

Hodson's attempts to incorporate his venture into the Rational Society's activities appeared to have been terminated. From the very first announcement of his intention to found a community, Hodson had sought the aid and approval of the Owenite movement. He appears not to have regarded Manea Fen as a rival institution, but as a method of aiding the progress of the society's plans. The rather aggrieved tone of many of the descriptions of the treatment of Manea Fen by the *New Moral World* and the Central Board suggested that he may have expected some form of aid, or at least recognition. Yet he was greeted as a distraction, an amateur who threatened the stability of the movement. Of Manea Fen, the *New Moral World* now wrote, 'On reviewing the past history of Socialism, we find

⁵⁶ National Community Friendly Society, Minute book of Directors, 18 February 1839 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

abundant reason for adopting the exclamation, “preserve me from my friends”. The impatience and inexperienced enthusiasm of individuals attempting to aid the cause were given as the reasons for the failures of much socialist activity, including the Labour Exchanges and the Ralahine community. The Central Board explained its refusal to co-operate with Hodson as being due to the imprudence of risking the society’s funds on an experiment unlikely to succeed. ‘Is there one who will be mad enough to risk his money ...upon a scheme evidently devoid of all the requisites to success?’⁵⁷ This decision was later supported by a resolution of the London Branch A1, a branch which had consistently opposed Manea Fen.⁵⁸ Counting many of Owen’s close followers as members, the branch stood for official orthodox Owenism, and its subscriptions were high. The leadership of the society clearly wished to separate themselves from Hodson’s activities, although at this time Manea Fen and the promise of immediate practical activity was still winning support among the branches.

The divisions produced by Manea Fen within the social body are evident in the debate over the admission of Hodson to the 1839 Congress. Despite the meeting with the Central Board in February, Hodson clearly wished to attend the Congress. Presumably he still hoped for some form of support or co-operation. Hodson claimed to have been elected to Congress, which clearly alarmed the Rational Society’s Central Board.⁵⁹ William Pare, the vice-president, had heard that Hodson had been elected by Branch 16, one of the first branches to support Hodson. Pare wrote to the branch, ‘pointing out the impolicy, if not illegality of electing Mr. Hodson as a member of Congress.’ Benjamin Warden, of the branch, replied defending the branch’s decision, but failed to confirm that Hodson was a member. It soon emerged that Hodson was only a candidate member of the London Branch A1.⁶⁰ Pare wrote again, urging Branch 16 to choose another

⁵⁷ *The New Moral World*, V. 19. 2 March 1839

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, V. 21. 16 March 1839

⁵⁹ *Social Pioneer*, I. 8. 27 April 1839

⁶⁰ Association of All Classes of All Nations, Minute book of Directors, 29 April 1839 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

candidate, but received no reply.⁶¹ The board decided that as Hodson was not a member of the society he could not legally be elected to the Congress.⁶² Despite the decision of the Central Board Hodson appeared on the first day of the Congress as a delegate. Pare recounted the Board's decision, and referred the matter to a committee, which duly declared Hodson's election to Congress to be illegal. Hodson's election by Branch 16 had predated his being entered on the books of Branch A1.⁶³

4. 5. Manea Fen: scandal

In April 1839 a scandal erupted at Manea Fen.⁶⁴ At its centre lay Manea Fen's views on marriage, and allegations, never made explicit, that the community had adopted free love. While the accuracy of these allegations is questionable, the affair weakened the community's support among the branches. The principal periodicals to report the scandal, the *New Moral World*, the *Social Pioneer*, and the *Star in the East*, all had reasons for wishing to condemn Hodson. It was seen as fulfilling the *New Moral World's* previous criticisms, although the editor was anxious to emphasise that he did not welcome the crisis. Significantly, the *New Moral World* referred to the unpopularity of its criticisms of Manea Fen, which was the first indication from the periodical that its attacks on the colony did not reflect the popular reaction to Hodson's experiment.⁶⁵ The *Social Pioneer*, organ of the Manchester Central Committee, believed that Hodson had reneged on their agreement for managing Manea Fen's membership. The *Star in the East* had long opposed the scheme, and was presumably content to find its objections justified.

⁶¹ *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations*, p. 20

⁶² Association of All Classes of All Nations, Minute book of Directors, 29 April 1839 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

⁶³ *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations*, p. 29

⁶⁴ For a detailed discussion of this scandal see chapter 6.

⁶⁵ *New Moral World*, V. 25. 13 April 1839

Yet despite the perhaps questionable motives for the portrayal of activities at Manea Fen, the affair clearly lost the community a significant degree of support among the branches. In Manchester, home of the Central Committee and the *Social Pioneer*, the District Board resolved ‘That we deem it requisite for the good order and peace of the association that neither Mr. Wm. Hodson nor Mr. Saml. Rowbotham or any one on their part be allowed to bring forward or to agitate any questions or matter relative to the proceedings of the Cambridgeshire Colony in any of our institutions in this district.’ At Stockport, which had determined to use all means to promote the success of Manea Fen only two months previously, it was decided ‘That as Mr. Hodson’s Colony is a matter of private speculation over which the Central Board has no control, and as neither Mr. Hodson, nor Mr. Rowbotham are members of the association we therefore disclaim all connexion [*sic*] with Mr. Hodson and his proceedings.’⁶⁶

These resolutions marked the beginning of wider opposition to Hodson. A meeting held in Salford in the same month resolved to have no further connection with Manea Fen. This meeting was particularly significant, as it was attended by the Manchester Central Committee, and by three members who had left the community.⁶⁷ One of these members, Charles Crawford, was later to write to the *New Moral World* accusing Rowbotham and Hodson of deceiving their members. Despite the agreements made with Hodson, he claims that none of the members received their wages, and that this was the reason why many of them left. He himself had been there from Christmas to April, without any payment. This letter was intended as a warning to any who may have answered the recent advertisement for members printed in the *New Moral World*.⁶⁸ It is significant that opposition first emerged in these areas, for it was to these areas that members returned from Manea Fen. Rumours and complaints would have been spread by men such as Crawford, returning from Manea Fen to Stockport. The Manchester Central Committee abandoned Hodson

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, V. 19. 2 March 1839; V. 25. 13 April 1839

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, V. 28. 4 May 1839

by May 1839, and its collapse would have aided the spread of opposition in that area. Other areas did not witness such a marked drop in support for the community. The East London Branch 1 remained loyal, after having spoken with a member who left and corresponding with the community. E. T. Craig visited the community and decided that the reaction was out of proportion with the actual activities of the colony. Yet overall the scandal had a significant impact on support for the community.

4. 6. Manea Fen's voice: the *Working Bee*

From July 1839 Manea Fen was able to answer its critics publicly in the newly formed *Working Bee*. This periodical was formed largely for this purpose, as the community wished to counteract the hostile press it received in the *New Moral World*. The *Working Bee*, like the *New Moral World*, was intended for the transmission of propaganda. Replies were also made to anti-socialist critics. The aim of the periodical was to defend the community, and to attempt to win support for its views and activities. For much of the early life of the *Working Bee* the relationship between the Rational Society and Manea Fen remained largely hostile. The *Working Bee* contained repeated references to the bias of the *New Moral World*, along with accusations of censorship. There were many criticisms of Fleming, the editor of the *New Moral World*, for his treatment of Manea Fen. As well as providing an opportunity for the members to answer attacks on the colony, the *Working Bee* also provided a platform for criticisms of the Rational Society, and its own community at Queenwood, established in October 1839.

For much of the first twelve months covered by the *Working Bee* the relationship with the Rational Society remained antagonistic. After an initial criticism of Manea Fen the *New Moral World* made few references to the community, and was perhaps more concerned with the imminent foundation, and then progress of, the Rational Society's own community at

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, V. 33. 8 June 1839

Queenwood. The debate between the Hodsonians and the social body was continued in the *Working Bee*. There were many references to the opposition of the Rational Society, and frequent complaints of its unfair treatment of the community. Through the *Working Bee's* pages the attitude of the wider socialist movement to the community can be discerned.

One of the early issues of the *Bee* carried an anonymous letter from Manchester.⁶⁹ The author attacked Manea Fen, and boastingly said that the *Working Bee* was not for sale at his institution. It is probable that this opposition was due to the scandal over marriage relations at the colony, which caused a significant decline in support in Manchester. The committee formed there to support Hodson had abandoned him by May 1839.⁷⁰ That the *Bee* was not being sold at the Manchester institution suggests that the anonymous author was not alone in his opposition. The letter continued to say that 'when the Rationals commence, it will be a commencement'. That Manea Fen had received widespread support soon after its commencement was largely due to a desire on the part of the branches to see practical operations. This support declined as the Rational Society drew closer to beginning an experiment itself. Opposition was also found in Liverpool, from where a warning that John Finch and others were trying to build opposition to the experiment was received.⁷¹ The *New Moral World* was accused of bias in the *Bee*. In October 1839 it was alleged that Fleming had refused to print accounts of visitors to Manea Fen. Two visitors from London, Firmin and Girnham, had recently been to the estate. According to the *Bee*, Fleming was unable to print such accounts for fear that they would expose his lies about the community.⁷² The same reason was given to support the *Bee's* allegations that Fleming tried to dissuade Thomas Cropper from joining Manea Fen.⁷³

⁶⁹ *Working Bee*, I. 6. 24 August 1839

⁷⁰ *New Moral World*, V. 28. 4 May 1839

⁷¹ *Working Bee*, I. 7. 31 August 1839

⁷² *ibid.*, I. 15. 26 October 1839

⁷³ *ibid.*, I. 21. 7 December 1839

The *Working Bee* also served as a platform for opponents to Rational Society policy who were unable to find a voice in the *New Moral World*. In September 1839 the *Bee* printed a letter from Thomas Hunt, of the London Branch A1, covering a letter from Hunt to Owen that had been rejected by the *New Moral World*. Hunt criticised the recent declarations of Owen on the role of the upper and middle classes in the transition to the new moral world. He attacked Owen's view that community could be achieved more rapidly with the aid of the higher classes. Hunt was concerned by the view of Owen and others that there should be separate communities for the higher and working classes. He wrote that this had produced consternation among the branches and a decline in subscriptions to the Community Fund. The *Bee* largely supported Hunt, adding that the treatment of Hodson by the socialists was not calculated to encourage further support from wealthy backers. It was claimed that Hodson's reception was due to 'a few, who, unfortunately, have a leading [*sic*] among our social friends.' The letter was printed by the *Bee*, not to embarrass the *New Moral World*, but to aid any discussion that could further the cause.⁷⁴ That opposition within the Rational Society was able to find a platform in the *Working Bee* provides a clear indication of the nature of the threat that Manea Fen posed to the socialist movement. The presence of another society, and one based upon the land, which reinforced its claims to validity, could provide an alternative focus for both discontented members and those anxious to join a community.

The start of the Rational Society's community at Queenwood in October 1839 altered the relationship between that society and Manea Fen. The initial reaction of the Hodsonians was to criticise Queenwood, and to compare it unfavourably with their own colony. This attitude was balanced uncomfortably with the still present desire for some form of co-operation with the Owenites. Queenwood was criticised several times in the pages of the *Bee*. In October Hodson recounted his intention to visit Queenwood. He wrote that he arrived in London on his way to Hampshire, but that he

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, I. 11. 28 September 1839

met there Joseph Smith, and a friend of his who had themselves just returned from Queenwood. According to their account the land at Queenwood was poor. Upon hearing this, Hodson decided not to visit the community, as further unfavourable reports could only harm the cause.⁷⁵ This did not prevent the *Working Bee* from publishing a comparison of the two communities, which clearly favoured Manea Fen. This article concluded that Manea Fen possessed superior natural resources. The government of the community was also held to be superior, as it was located on the site, unlike that of Queenwood. It was also alleged that the Rational Society had many disappointed members, who had contributed to the community fund, but now found that they would not be able to enter into community. Manea Fen was freed from this problem, as it accepted no contributions. This point was to be a source of dispute between the two societies in the later discussions on the possibility of union, and reflects Hodson's different views on the government and formation of communities. The editor of the *Working Bee* added that, from reports he had heard, the land at Manea Fen was better suited to community. He regarded the choice of estate as irrational, but remained sure that if farmers could live off the Hampshire land, then the socialists would be able to as well. The editor concluded, 'time will do us justice, and develop [sic] who are the best Socialists.'⁷⁶ The Hodsonians, with almost ten months' experience of community life, were clearly confident of the outcome.

The establishment of Queenwood had another effect on Manea Fen. Whereas Manea Fen had been the only community in early 1839, and had received support because of this, Queenwood now provided another focus for activity. There were now two communities in need of members. This led to a bizarre incident, when Isaac Ironside visited the community, and later informed the head of their brick-making department, William Storey, that he was chosen to go to Queenwood. This produced a furious reaction on the part of the *Working Bee*. Ironside's behaviour was strongly

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, I. 14. 19 October 1839
Storey later returned to Manea Fen.

condemned as damaging to the cause. The *Bee* continued to say that Manea Fen had been frequently ill-treated by 'many of the Social leaders', with attacks made on Hodson, and misrepresentation of proceedings at the colony. It was also implied that there had been other, similar attempts. No further visitors were to be received without orders from Edmund Wastney, the community's secretary.⁷⁷ Storey later wrote a letter to the *Bee* explaining the incident. He had apparently said that he would leave before the society's rules were enrolled, as he was unsure of its position and future stability. Ironside, who was his branch president at Sheffield, had been acting on this assumption. Storey was sure, now that the rules had been enrolled, that it would be a happy community.⁷⁸

While the general tone of the relationship of the two societies was one of hostility, there were incidents in this period that provide exceptions. Hodson visited London in October 1839, and by his own account he was well received. While in London he met Owen, and Hodson claimed that Owen declared himself to be pleased with the progress of Manea Fen. Hodson also spoke at Branch A1, which gave him a good reception, and also at a Hall of Science. Hodson left London musing that the branches there were sufficient to supply all his members.⁷⁹ The question of the Rational Society's ability to provide members was to recur in the discussions on union. Hodson's visit to London raises a number of issues. His account of his reception was at variance with the majority of the articles in the *Bee*, which tended to focus on the opposition Manea Fen had met at the hands of the Rational Society. It is possible that there were different sources of opposition within the Rational Society, and that it cannot be assumed that the society held a single opinion on Hodson. Hodson had specifically exempted Owen, Green and two or three others in the Rational Society when referring to opposition from that body.⁸⁰ Fleming, as editor of

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, I. 15. 26 October 1839

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, I. 20. 30 November 1839

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, I. 21. 7 December 1839

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, I. 14. 19 October 1839

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, I. 2. 27 July 1839

the *New Moral World*, and John Finch were specifically mentioned as individuals attacking Manea Fen. As has been seen, Hodson also encountered opposition in Manchester. However, the leadership of the society in general had at other times been criticised for its treatment of Hodson. Hodson may have adopted this tone through a fear of divorcing himself entirely from the Rational Society. He had not entirely abandoned the notion of co-operation, and it was raised periodically in the *Bee*. It is clear that the Rational Society was also prepared to listen to Hodson, for he was permitted to speak to two branches, and this at a time when the *Bee* alleges the *New Moral World* censored letters relating to its activities.

4. 7. The Pant Glas community: a further rival

With the establishment of the Queenwood community by the Rational Society, the pressure that had existed to form an experiment was relieved. The Rational Society still needed to maintain support and financial contributions, something that was far from assured, but the urgency of 1838 and early 1839 was no longer present. This was to ensure that the establishment of a further community, by the Society of United Friends at Pant Glas in Wales, met with a reception very different from that which had greeted Manea Fen. The *New Moral World* contained no reports of debates over Pant Glas in the branches, whereas Manea Fen had featured heavily in local discussions. The opposition that did surface tended to be localised, largely confined to areas close to where the Society of United Friends had emerged. Yet Pant Glas still served to highlight divisions within the movement, and threatened to distract members of the Rational Society from the official venture of Queenwood.

The Pant Glas community had its origins in the Rational Society's Liverpool branch.⁸¹ The Society of United Friends was formed in the city in

This presumably refers to John Green, the social missionary who welcomed Manea Fen when it was first announced, and who was a member of the community in 1839.

⁸¹ Pant Glas has previously been included in W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below*, pp. 240-243

late 1839 or early 1840. Most of its members also belonged to the Rational Society in Liverpool, and indeed continued to meet at the same location as the Liverpool branch of the Rational Society, in William Westwick's temperance hotel. By January 1840 it had secured the Pant Glas estate and planned to begin operations there as soon as possible. Its secretary, James Spurr, was careful to reject allegations that it stood in opposition to the Rational Society. It had been founded 'not in any *spirit of rivalry* to the parent Society, but in the true spirit of co-operation,' he wrote in January 1840.⁸² Despite such assurances, this was not the way the local movement viewed the society. John Finch, the most prominent Liverpool Owenite, complained that the society had caused 'division and disunion among us'.⁸³ Finch's complaints were echoed by William Westwick, secretary of the Liverpool branch, when he reported to the 1840 Congress. The formation of the society had divided the Liverpool branch and thrown it into confusion.⁸⁴ As the members continued to pay their Rational Society subscriptions, the Liverpool branch was unable to dismiss them from the branch, yet their attempts to win support for their own scheme threatened the branch's unity. The Central Board wrote to the Society of United Friends, urging them to sever themselves completely from the Rational Society, but they refused to do so.⁸⁵

The emergence of the society recalled Hodson's announcement of Manea Fen. Indeed, Robert Owen visited the Liverpool secessionists, and informed them that they stood in the same relation to the remainder of the movement as Hodson.⁸⁶ At the 1840 Congress Thomas Hunt of London, cautioned the delegates against attacks on Pant Glas, reminding them that Manea Fen had been criticised at first but was now in an apparently successful position.⁸⁷ The threat posed by Pant Glas was somewhat different, however, to that of Manea Fen. Manea Fen was a more

J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, pp. 172, 180

⁸² *ibid.*, I. 29. 1 February 1840

⁸³ *New Moral World*, VII. 75. 28 March 1840

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, VII. 83. 23 May 1840

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, VII. 88. 27 June 1840

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, VII. 75. 28 March 1840

considerable undertaking, with backing from a prosperous landowner. At the time of Manea Fen's announcement the Owenite movement had been attempting to stem demand for immediate action while it sought an estate, whereas by 1840 its own operations were underway. Its position was not secure, however, as the Rational Society needed to maintain the flow of contributions to the community funds if it was to survive. Furthermore, although official operations had begun, this was not in itself sufficient to satisfy the whole membership of the Rational Society. With a national membership, it is clear that not all of those who contributed towards the community fund would be able to find a place at Queenwood. Even allowing for those who contributed to the funds without actually wishing to leave for the community, demand for places could easily exceed the Rational Society's ability to provide them. It was impatience to move into a community before places were available at Queenwood that provided the incentive for the formation of the Society of United Friends.⁸⁸ Pant Glas threatened to distract members from devoting their exertions to the Queenwood community. The Liverpool branch was clearly divided by the alternative community, and the movement was concerned that the divisions would spread.

George Connard complained that some members were undecided on which of the two communities, Pant Glas or Queenwood, to support. At Warrington, which he visited as the social missionary for the Wigan district, he found that the local members had 'strayed from their ways like lost sheep'.⁸⁹ After a visit from John Moncas, president of Pant Glas, some had determined to support the rival community rather than Queenwood. The distraction posed by Pant Glas at Liverpool led the 1840 Congress to consider measures for expelling members from branches should such a situation arise again. A similar situation had emerged in the Bolton branch in 1838, where some members had also proposed their own community

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, VII. 83. 23 May 1840

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, VII. 75. 28 March 1840

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, VII. 85. 6 June 1840; VIII. 8. 22 August 1840

rather than wait for official operations, but the scheme had ended in failure.⁹⁰

However, while the Society of United Friends clearly alarmed some within the Rational Society, there were those who welcomed the venture. Unsurprisingly, Manea Fen quickly aligned itself with the new community, and the *Working Bee* carried progress reports and offered a platform from which Pant Glas could defend itself. The *Working Bee* regarded all community experiments as beneficial, and pointedly remarked that ‘We are not of that class which would discourage attempts, in independent quarters.’⁹¹ Other messages of support also appeared in the *Working Bee*. An anonymous co-operator in Liverpool criticised the *New Moral World* for its unsocial attacks on Pant Glas, and suggested that the three communities, Manea Fen, Pant Glas, and Queenwood, should co-operate. The writer indicated that the Rational Society’s choice of estate was not welcomed by all, and that there were elements within the society who believed that they would have done better to have accepted Hodson’s offer of his estate in 1838.⁹² Pant Glas also found support in Warrington, from where it was reported that there were many who planned to leave for the unofficial communities. Some had already left for Manea Fen, while others planned to follow them there or to head to Pant Glas instead.⁹³ The distraction of Pant Glas ended when the community collapsed, at some point in 1841. The three communities were regarded as viable alternatives, and while Pant Glas and Manea Fen survived they inevitably provided an outlet for a demand for community that could not possibly be assuaged by Queenwood.

4. 8. Manea Fen: moves towards reconciliation

While the early period of Manea Fen’s life, from late 1838 to early 1840, was characterised largely by hostility from the Rational Society, the period

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, VII. 88. 27 June 1840

⁹¹ *Working Bee*, I. 40. 18 April 1840

⁹² *ibid.*, New Series, I. 5. 4 July 1840

⁹³ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 13. 15 August 1840

from early 1840 saw a gradual move towards reconciliation. As Hodson's visit to London in October 1839 shows, he was never entirely divorced from the society, but there were moves towards a closer relationship in this period. The first indication of this came with a visit by Fleming to Manea Fen. Fleming stayed with the colonists for a few days in March 1840, as he had business to transact in the area. While there, he revealed a significant shift in his attitude towards Manea Fen. He acknowledged the differences that had existed between himself and the Hodsonians, but said that 'circumstances had since elapsed which had removed that [*sic*] differences'. He was now satisfied that the community would prove successful.

Fleming also spoke of possible methods of co-operation. It was suggested that Manea Fen could make a contribution towards the Rational Society, which would be used to support social missionaries, for the publication of tracts, and so forth. In return the Central Board would extend to Manea Fen the same facilities for the selection of members as those currently employed by Queenwood. Fleming expressed his belief that the two communities could co-operate, without each interfering in the management of the other. The *Working Bee* did not record the response of the colony to these suggestions, other than to say that there was a prevailing sense of satisfaction at the prospects for union and friendship.⁹⁴ Fleming's suggestions indicate a significant volte face on the part of the Central Board.⁹⁵ The difficulties of practical operations, and of maintaining subscriptions to the Community Fund, may have provided the impetus for this proposal.

The clearest indication of a change in the attitude displayed by the Rational Society towards Hodson was the invitation extended to Hodson to attend the Congress of May 1840.⁹⁶ Given the disputes within the

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, I. 37. 28 March 1840

⁹⁵ It is difficult to gauge how accurate the *Bee's* report was, but there was no response from the *New Moral World* to indicate that Fleming was misrepresented, while it did acknowledge that the visit had taken place. (*New Moral World*, VII. 75. 28 March 1840)

⁹⁶ The Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists, Minute book of Directors, 27 April 1840 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

movement over the attempted election of Hodson to the Congress of 1839, it is clear that a shift had taken place within the Rational Society. The *London Social Reformer* reported that Hodson arrived with a drawing of Manea Fen, and 'produced a most enthusiastic demonstration to greet the respectable founder of this thriving Community.'⁹⁷ That he was described as respectable may indicate that memories of the scandal of 1839 remained in the movement. The 1840 Congress devoted a significant proportion of its time to discussing the proposed union between the two communities.⁹⁸ A committee was appointed to consider Hodson's proposals, which were then debated by the whole Congress. Hodson argued that Manea Fen should be an agricultural community, while Queenwood would become an educational centre. The two communities would be funded by loans managed by a Joint Stock Company, which would be formed for this purpose. Hodson also insisted upon self-government for communities, arguing that the members would need full control over their own activities to be successful. This naturally led him into conflict with the Rational Society, which preferred to appoint the governors of Queenwood rather than have them elected by the residents.⁹⁹

The debate which followed the committee's report to Congress revealed general support for the idea of union, but the terms of union were far more controversial.¹⁰⁰ Charles Jennesson, a long-standing supporter of Hodson's, and member of the London Hodsonian branch and of Branch 16, and Rhodes of Huddersfield both supported Hodson's proposals, but they were in a minority.¹⁰¹ Fleming and the social missionaries, essentially the orthodox core of the society, including Ironside, Newall and others, represented the feeling of the majority.¹⁰² Fleming did not oppose the concept of union, but maintained that to achieve it through the plan outlined

⁹⁷ *London Social Reformer*, I. 4. 23 May 1840

⁹⁸ *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement); VII. 85. 6 June 1840 (supplement)

⁹⁹ *Working Bee*, I. 43. 9 May 1840; I. 46. 30 May 1840; New Series, I. 2. 13 June 1840

¹⁰⁰ *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement); VII. 85. 6 June 1840 (supplement)

¹⁰¹ For Charles Jennesson see p. 107, n. 130.

¹⁰² *London Social Reformer*, I. 4. 23 May 1840

by Hodson would fundamentally alter the constitution of the Rational Society. This was not only undesirable, but also beyond the powers of the current Congress, as the Delegates had not been empowered by the Branches to discuss this matter. Fleming, Ironside, Buchanan and others argued that union would be better achieved by Manea Fen becoming a branch of the Rational Society.

Thomas Hunt of London was less anxious to retain the current organisation of the society, arguing that it was only justified by its achievements. He criticised the low level of support for the Community Fund. Hunt saw Manea Fen as offering a means of settling members on the land, and expressed his hope that union would be achieved as soon as was practicable. However, he agreed that Congress could reach no decisions without consulting the members. Congress concluded by resolving that the constitution could not be altered without first taking the issue to the branches. Furthermore, union could be achieved under the current arrangements of the society. Hodson's proposals were rejected by sixteen to four. The debate in Congress also forced Hodson to reveal details of the progress of Manea Fen that rather undermined the force of his proposals. While Hodson argued for communities to be self-governing and funded by loans, his own account of proceedings at the colony showed it to be supported by Hodson himself and that he had significant control over its progress.

Hodson returned from Congress to Manea Fen. Despite the rejection of his proposals by Congress, Hodson returned to the issue in the pages of the *Working Bee*. Hodson claimed that the reports of his meetings with Congress which appeared in the *New Moral World* were inaccurate. This he attributed to the fact that the reports' author, William Pare, and Fleming, the editor, opposed him in the debate. Hodson again expounded the advantages of his plans, and coupled this with criticism of Queenwood, which he claimed to be labouring under debts and disunity. This situation would have

been avoided had his ideas been adopted.¹⁰³ The Central Board reacted to Hodson's representation of Queenwood by instructing Fleming to make it understood that Hodson's account was not impartial.¹⁰⁴

The *Working Bee* continued with its criticisms of Queenwood in an account of a visit by Hodson to the estate. The land and crops did not receive a good report from Hodson, but he reserved his main attack for his account of the morale of the members. 'A listless, dissatisfied, unsettled feeling, prevailed amongst the residents there'. Needless to say, Hodson claimed that a system of internal government would redress the situation.¹⁰⁵ Hodson seems to have intended these attacks to support his arguments for union. They came at a time when Queenwood was facing severe difficulties, and the number of members present at the community had been sharply reduced. Whether Hodson's attacks were politic is hard to assess. Hunt criticised Hodson for the tone adopted in the *Working Bee*. 'Instead of laying before the Social body ... the terms upon which you desire to have the amalgamation effected ... you ... in the columns of that paper have been engaged in sowing the seeds of distrust and dissatisfaction amongst the members of a society with which you seek to connect your own, as the means of strengthening the two'.¹⁰⁶

However, by September 1840 the *Working Bee* announced that the Hodsonians were negotiating with the Central Board over union. While calling for union as the way to advance the cause, the *Working Bee* insisted that whatever the outcome of the discussions, the progress of the cause could not be halted and again raised Hodson's plan for forming his own branches. This combination of entreaties and threats characterised this period of discussion between the two societies. While Hodson would clearly have preferred to have gained access to a market through the Rational Society branches, he was prepared to form his own local network.

¹⁰³ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 2. 13 June 1840

¹⁰⁴ The Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists, Minute book of Directors, 2 July 1840 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

¹⁰⁵ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 13. 29 August 1840

The possibility was also raised partly as a threat to support his arguments for union. An alternative organisation would not have been welcomed by the Rational Society.

However impolitic Hodson's tactics may seem, by October 1840 the Rational Society Central Board resolved that union was desirable, and broadly agreed to Hodson's proposals.¹⁰⁷ Hodson's views on funding, which had been one of the most controversial points at the Congress in May, were still rejected. After protracted negotiations the Rational Society requested details from Hodson with regard to operations at Manea Fen, on the basis of which more specific proposals for union could be made. A series of questions was drawn up by the Central Board and sent to Hodson early in December 1840.¹⁰⁸ Later in the month Hodson attended a Board meeting, where he requested that 'the answers which might be given to the questions of the Board should not be made public, as they might tend to prejudice their [Manea Fen's] affairs'.¹⁰⁹ The situation at Manea Fen at this time was not as healthy as it had been represented by Hodson in his negotiations with the Rational Society.

While the Central Board broadly supported the possibility of the union of the two establishments, the question aroused significant opposition within the movement. The main opponent of union, William Pare, conducted a protracted debate with the Hodsonians through the pages of the *New Moral World* and the *Working Bee*, under the pseudonym 'An Old Socialist and Ex-Officer of the Central Board'.¹¹⁰ Thomas Hunt also questioned the practicality of the proposals. Hodson's proposed lecture tour, intended to build support for the formation of branches, or depots for the sale of Manea Fen goods, also met with opposition. Finch claimed that

¹⁰⁶ *New Moral World*, VIII. 15. 10 October 1840

¹⁰⁷ The Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists, Minute book of Directors, 25 October 1840 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 5 December 1840

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 17 December 1840

¹¹⁰ William Pare adopted the pseudonym after his socialist views led to his being forced out of his post as Superintendent Registrar of Births and Marriages in Birmingham.

it would divide the movement, and argued that it should not be permitted.¹¹¹ The Central Board, although it granted Hodson permission, was partially divided over the issue.¹¹² The question of union was not developed beyond this point, and Manea Fen collapsed in February 1841.

4. 9. Conclusion

With the collapse of Pant Glas and of Manea Fen in 1841 the major challenges to the primacy of the Rational Society's own experiment had ended. Yet these two communities were not the only projects that threatened to draw support away from Queenwood into rival ventures. In August 1838, while the announcement of Manea Fen was producing divisions within the Rational Society, a far smaller venture began unnoticed. A small group of co-operators from Tyldesley, near Manchester, took possession of twenty acres of land on Chat Moss, an area of waste land to the west of the city. The land was taken on a sixty year lease, with the co-operators paying 11s 6d per acre in rent. Three of the members were members of the Rational Society. By 1840 there were eleven members. Like the more considerable ventures of Pant Glas and Manea Fen, this Chat Moss community provided an opportunity for those who saw no probability of getting into the official Queenwood community. In September 1840 it was reported that there were several Manchester members of the Rational Society who had paid their full subscriptions to the community fund, but despaired of ever being received at Queenwood and instead applied to join Chat Moss.¹¹³ Nothing further was heard from the community.

In July 1841 George Waddington, an indefatigable proponent of spade husbandry, approached the Sheffield branch of the Rational Society. He offered to cultivate a piece of land, locating people upon it to form 'a small and successful experiment on the community system'. His offer was

¹¹¹ *New Moral World*, VIII. 24. 12 December 1840

¹¹² The Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists, Minute book of Directors, 17 December 1840 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

¹¹³ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 17. 26 September 1840

rejected for its tendency 'to divert the mind from operations in progress at [Queenwood].'¹¹⁴ A further small scheme, the Co-operative Industrial Association, appeared in 1843. This society was based in Croydon, just south of London. The secretary announced the society's intention to found a small community at Norwood, but it is unclear what became of his plans.¹¹⁵ Proposals and ventures such as these indicate that the position of the Rational Society as the dominant communitarian organisation of the period did not go unchallenged.

Throughout the late 1830s the Rational Society struggled to maintain its unity as demand for a community threatened to split the society. Even after the founding of Queenwood dissatisfaction with progress there provided an incentive for joining other experiments. The treatment of proposals that did not emanate from within the society as rivals demonstrates this concern for unity. The fears of the Rational Society speak of a desire for action that pervaded the movement, and the Rationals fought to contain this desire and direct it to serve the aims of the society. Yet, as support for Manea Fen and Pant Glas shows, this was not always possible. Furthermore, these communities challenged the predominant position of the Rational Society. Their very existence on the land lent to their operations a validity and a call for recognition that elements within the Owenite movement would have denied them. They were regarded by parts of the membership as truly viable alternatives, as equal routes to community, rather than as misguided and potentially destructive efforts. Manea Fen in particular provided a platform for opposition to the movement, and its democratic structure served as a reminder for opponents of the patriarchal government of Queenwood. To accept the primacy of Queenwood is to provide a narrow picture of the demand for community in the period, and of the movement that supported these smaller ventures.

¹¹⁴ *New Moral World*, X. 5. 31 July 1841

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, XII. 17. 21 October 1843

CHAPTER 5. THE IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MANEA FEN

5. Introduction

All those who began communities in this period faced the central question of what precise purpose a community established in the old world served, and how it was to contribute to the transition to the new moral world. Many communities were based on a blend of immediate practical concerns and a desire to contribute to the future success of the communitarian vision. Here the Manea Fen community will be examined in relation to this issue. This chapter will consider the attitudes of the founder, William Hodson, and the members towards the community, and how they viewed it and what they saw as being its purpose. In doing so, allowance has to be made for the difficulty of ascertaining the views of individuals. The primary source for the attitudes of the community, its own periodical the *Working Bee*, is essentially a work of propaganda with a clear bias. Furthermore, identifying the work of individuals is largely impossible. Yet it remains a useful exercise to extract the attitude of *Working Bee* towards community in general, and Manea Fen in particular.

5. 1. William Hodson, community founder

William Hodson, founder of Manea Fen, first came to national prominence in August 1838, when he declared his intention to found a community in an article entitled *Each to All*, printed in the main Owenite periodical, the *New Moral World*.¹ A former sailor and now a landowner, he was already a figure of some local renown, or perhaps notoriety. A self-proclaimed radical, Hodson had clashed with members of the Wisbech town council and with local clergy. It was probably as a result of his local reputation as a radical that Hodson chaired a meeting in the town of March in July 1838.² This meeting was one of those addressed by Robert Owen during his lecture

¹ *New Moral World*, IV. 200. 25 August 1838

² *ibid.*, IV. 197. 4 August 1838

tour of the counties of eastern England in the summer of 1838. It was Hodson's first encounter with Owen and with his ideas, and it had a profound effect. Hodson later dated his involvement with Owenism to the time of this meeting.³ Owen won an immediate supporter in Hodson, and within a few weeks of the meeting, Hodson had issued *Each to All*. While Hodson's turn to Owen's ideas was thus rapid, it was not without foundation. His participation in local life shows him to have been a committed radical and a firm opponent of the established Church, with a genuine concern for the condition of the working classes. Owenism did not clash with these ideas, but rather complemented them. Indeed, he maintained his previous views, supplementing them with ideas drawn from Owen. Hodson appears as a humanitarian local landowner, who objected to the new poor laws and held radical opinions, and who found in Owen's communitarian vision a way to improve the lot of the working classes.

When he first heard Owen speak, William Hodson was aged thirty. He appears to have come from a local family.⁴ Before becoming a landowner, Hodson spent six years at sea, which earned him the name 'Sailor'.⁵ Upon his return from the sea, he established himself as a local landowner, and by 1838 Hodson owned at least two farms. He seems to have bred horses and pigs, and his Upwell farm was known as the 'Piggeries'. When John Green visited his farm at Upwell, a few miles from the Manea Fen estate, in the spring of 1839, he found that Hodson had thirty horses and one hundred and twenty-three pigs.⁶ Hodson and his horses entered into local mythology. He acquired a reputation as a wild horseman, charging bare-backed straight across country, and his horses became 'a sort of byword among the children of the neighbourhood, and were a bugbear to

³ *Working Bee*, 1. 2. 27 July 1839

⁴ A relation of his, named John Hodson, was involved in the Rational Society's attempt to purchase an estate in the area (National Community Friendly Society, Minute book of Directors, 25 February 1839 and March 18, 1839 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*; Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, pp. 71-72). The social missionary John Green met an uncle of Hodson's on the train while travelling to Manea Fen (*Social Pioneer*, I. 3. 23 March 1839)

⁵ *Working Bee*, I. 2. 27 July 1839

⁶ *Social Pioneer*, I. 3. 23 March 1839

the youthful mind.’⁷ That Hodson held two farms and was able to invest significant sums in the Manea Fen venture while only thirty, suggests that he may have come into an inheritance. However he came about his income, Hodson was a significant local figure.

In March 1838 Hodson agreed to stand, for the fourth time, as an Upwell representative on the Wisbech Board of Guardians. Hodson took the opportunity to make his radical position clear. He firmly stated his opposition to the Poor Laws, although he said that he would do all he could to carry them into effect while they stood. The provision for a workhouse chaplain also drew his condemnation.⁸ Hodson was clearly regarded as a radical by locals. One of the other members of the Board of Guardians, with whom Hodson later clashed, explicitly linked him to James Hill, proprietor of the Wisbech radical newspaper, the *Star in the East*, a clear indication of Hodson’s local reputation.⁹ Once elected, Hodson was true to his word. When the question of appointing a chaplain to the local workhouse arose, Hodson was vociferous in his opposition. He opposed favouring the Church of England when dissenting sects were just as respectable. Furthermore, the inmates did not all belong to the Established Church. Hodson did not confine himself to the point at issue, but also attacked the clergy present. The Reverend Fardell later resigned as Chair of the Board of Guardians as a result of Hodson’s behaviour at this meeting. Hodson was not alone in his opposition to appointing a chaplain, and the motion was defeated.¹⁰ However, Fardell later returned, and the motion was subsequently passed.¹¹

Upon Fardell’s resignation, Hodson wrote him an open letter, which was printed in the *Star in the East*. He used the opportunity to express his opposition to the Established Church. ‘It would be the proudest hour of my

⁷ A Past Effort at Socialism: History of Manea Colony (1914). Wisbech and Fenland Museum Papers

⁸ *Star in the East*, II. 80. 24 March 1838

⁹ *ibid.*, II. 93. 23 June 1838

¹⁰ *ibid.*, II. 87. 12 May 1838

¹¹ *ibid.*, II. 91. 9 June 1838; II. 93. 23 June 1838

life could I see the Priestcraft of the present day *entirely annihilated...*¹² Hodson also condemned the tithe system, seeing it as the exploitation of industrious labourers by the clergy. This was not the only occasion on which Hodson challenged the local clergy. Within a few months he had challenged the Reverend Townley of Upwell to a debate, after Townley had made allusions to the socialists.¹³ By this time Hodson had embraced Owen's ideas, and his defence of them to Townley reveals the extent to which they complemented his earlier views. In his letter to Fardell, written in May 1838, before Hodson heard Owen speak, he condemned inequality of wealth. 'I conceive the greatest curse, which can afflict the human race, is the unequalization of property...'¹⁴ He continued to attack tithes and aristocratic patronage, and concluded, there 'would not be half the pauperism there now is, were the fruits of man's labour devoted to its proper object.' Hodson's concern with poverty, and the rightful reward for labour, were both evident in the letter he wrote expressing his willingness to stand for the Board of Guardians.¹⁵ At that time he voiced his doubts that the Poor Laws could alleviate poverty, and he appears to have found the solution in Owen's ideas. In writing to Townley, in August 1838, after he had issued *Each to All*, Hodson stated that

my doctrines are for the happiness of the labouring population; I want to elevate their condition, so that they may be removed from the fear of poverty, and be able to provide themselves with all the necessary comforts of life.¹⁶

Owenism did not represent a conflict with Hodson's earlier radical views. Rather, it presented an alternative method of achieving his aims. The extent to which Hodson adopted elements of Owenism and combined them with his brand of radicalism is clear in the two major statements of his views, *Each to All*, and his letter to Feargus O'Connor.

¹² *ibid.*, II. 89. 26 May 1838

¹³ *ibid.*, II. 102. 25 August 1838

¹⁴ *ibid.*, II. 89. 26 May 1838

¹⁵ *ibid.*, II. 80. 24 March 1838

In August 1839 Hodson used the pages of Manea Fen's periodical, the *Working Bee*, to deliver an appeal to Feargus O'Connor.¹⁷ The letter revealed a platform that would not have been unusual in this period, whereby Hodson married familiar demands for political reform with elements of the moral and economic critique of Owenism. He opened by presenting the customary arguments for political reform, arguing for short parliaments, vote by ballot, no property qualification, and paid members of parliament. These were all points of the Charter. Hodson also attacked the excessive burden of taxation, again a familiar radical argument. Yet he combined these arguments with elements of Owenism. Hodson used both moral and economic arguments to attack the existing economic arrangements. He condemned the individualised and competitive system for its effect on man's character. A concept of labour as the source of all wealth was used to criticise the current distribution of wealth, and Hodson argued for the replacement of money by an exchange medium which reflected the amount of labour in the goods being exchanged. He also criticised the current arrangements for the employment of machinery, which brought it into conflict with human labour. Despite his support of the radical position, he eschewed politics as a means of achieving reform, and argued instead for unions along Owenite lines which would direct their energies into practical measures to support themselves. Hodson's letter to O'Connor is a fuller exposition of the position he also took in *Each to All*, his announcement of the Manea Fen community.

Each to All, the first public statement of Hodson's views, revealed the strong influence of Robert Owen.¹⁸ This address stressed the importance of union if the working classes were to free themselves from exploitation and degradation. The concern with the condition of the working classes, present in his letters to the *Star in the East* during 1838, and in his letter to O'Connor, was a central element in his proposed community. The solution

¹⁶ *ibid.*, II. 102. 25 August 1838

¹⁷ *Working Bee*, I. 6. 24 August 1838

he adopted was obviously influenced by Owen. He presented a picture of a community based on equality, where material comforts would be guaranteed and fear of the workhouse would no longer prevail. In a number of points, the debt his ideas owed to Owen is clear. His description of the facilities to be found in community could have been taken almost directly from any of Owen's own numerous depictions, such as that in the *Report to the County of Lanark*. Hodson wrote of a communal dining room, supplied by a common kitchen fitted out with the latest scientific equipment, and machinery would be used to reduce labour. Like Owen, Hodson held out the promise of a significant reduction in the hours of labour needed to attain a high level of material comfort.¹⁹ His more theoretical statements also showed Owen's influence. Hodson's formulation of the rights of the individual, 'that no man has a right to ask you to do that for him, who will not in return do the same for you,' was shared with Owen, as seen in Owen's *Six Lectures Delivered in Manchester* of 1837. Hodson may have only recently come to Owenism, but he had quickly assimilated its key points.

On one level Manea Fen was intended to improve the material conditions of the working classes. Yet Hodson also considered the community as part of the wider Owenite movement and as a contribution to the ultimate success of Owen's vision. Throughout the life of Manea Fen, as has been seen in chapter four, Hodson sought the co-operation and assistance of the Rational Society. Throughout Hodson consistently represented Manea Fen as a part of the wider movement. His aim was, as he wrote in July 1839, 'to facilitate an incipient practical Community'.²⁰ The

¹⁸ *New Moral World*, IV. 200. 25 August 1838

¹⁹ In 1914 Henry Nix, the son of a commissioner for reclaimed fen land who was acquainted with Hodson, recalled visiting Manea Fen. 'On one occasion when I was I suppose about 10 years old I accompanied my father to the Colony. ... I remember to have seen a larger water colour in Sailor's Parlour illustrating what the Colony was expected to be. I remember a remark of my father (with reference to Sailor's theory that if work as well as other things was equally shared that 4 hours work per day would suffice) Sailor dont [*sic*] set the example as he only talks. That appears to be the case now with all the regenerators of Society they wont [*sic*] do any manner of work.' Henry Nix to Mr. Pearson, 23 May 1914. Wisbech and Fenland Museum papers.

²⁰ *Working Bee*, I. 2. 27 July 1838

phrase 'incipient community' was in use among the co-operative movement from the early 1830s. It denotes a way of thinking about the transition to the hoped-for future state of society. Benjamin Warden, a prominent London Owenite, provided a neat summary of the position during a speech at the London-based Owenite Institution in 1833.

Mr. Owen ... says 'form incipient communities', you that are ready to form thereupon a new course of action, to relinquish by degrees all individual arrangements and unite for your own and the public good; begin now to assemble yourselves in the most convenient and favourable localities, and by clearing away the first obstacles to community, prepare the means ... for all those whose circumstances will not yet enable them to join you...²¹

This would appear to have been the manner in which Hodson regarded Manea Fen, as a contribution to the wider movement and to the transition to the new moral world.

5. 2. The membership

Soon after William Hodson first announced the Manea Fen community he received numerous applications for a place in the new colony. These applications came from the areas where support for the Owenite movement was strongest, London and the northern urban centres.²² The rapidity of this response indicates the strength of the demand for a practical venture that existed among the branches of the Rational Society at this time. The relationship between Manea Fen and the official Owenite movement has been discussed in detail in the preceding chapter, and the intention here is to examine the sources of the membership of the Cambridgeshire colony and their perceptions of the community that they left their homes to join.

²¹ *Crisis*, II. 26. 6 July 1833

²² *Star in the East*, II. 104. 8 September 1838

As has been argued above, William Hodson saw his venture as a contribution towards the progress of the Owenite movement, rather than as a rival or a distraction, which was how many of his opponents portrayed the colony. Hodson's attitude naturally led him to seek support among the Rational Society's branches, and it was to these local organisations that he initially turned in building up Manea Fen's membership. An active promoter of his own venture, Hodson replied to applications for a place at Manea Fen by publicly stating his intention to tour those areas that had expressed an interest. Applications had come from London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, and Sheffield.²³ On his tour Hodson would explain his plans and begin both to encourage members and to build a support base among the Owenites of those areas. Support in these areas would be essential not merely for supplying members, but also for providing a market for community goods. Both were necessary to the continued existence of the community. Whether Hodson made this tour is unclear, and he may well have delayed it, for January 1839 found him and Manea Fen's secretary, Samuel Rowbotham, visiting Owenite branches in the north of England.

During January and February 1839 Hodson and Rowbotham moved through Salford, Rochdale, Liverpool, Oldham, Huddersfield, Stockport, and Bolton.²⁴ These were all centres of Owenism, and in most the local branches offered support to the nascent community. While Hodson was attempting to gain some degree of official recognition and support from the leadership of the Owenite movement during this tour, he was also careful to raise the idea of 'Hodsonian' branches. Intended partly to exert some pressure on the Rational Society while it considered its response to Hodson, this was also a reserve plan to protect against the eventuality that Manea Fen would be left without a support network. Hodson's proposal for

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *New Moral World*, V. 15. 2 February 1839; V. 16. 9 February 1839; V. 18. 23 February 1839; V. 19. 2 March 1839

branches resulted in two organisations, the Manchester Central Committee and the East London Branch 1.²⁵

It was through this tour and these organisations that much of the early membership of Manea Fen was recruited. When Rowbotham spoke to the Oldham branch in January 1839 several members of the branch had applied to join Manea Fen, and were awaiting a response from the colony.²⁶ After Hodson addressed the Bolton branch in the following month, two members left to join Manea Fen.²⁷ These two members were almost certainly T. Fletcher and James Flitcroft, both bricklayers.²⁸ The secretary of the Owenite London Branch 16, which was closely associated with the Hodsonian East London Branch 1, also left to join the community.²⁹ David Jones arrived from the East London Branch 1.³⁰ By March 1839 there were twenty-nine members resident at Manea Fen, with nine children. These were largely representative of the community's membership over the following years. They came from areas where Owenism was strong, such as London, Sheffield, Stockport, Bolton, Warrington, and Manchester. They largely belonged to various artisan trades, and the first draft of members included a joiner and carpenter, an engineer, a plumber and glazier, a smith, a shoemaker, and several bricklayers.³¹

5. 3. The *Working Bee* and theoretical perceptions of community

While Hodson evidently combined Owenism with radical views, ascertaining the views of individual members of Manea Fen is a complex task. The primary source for the attitudes of the colonists is their own journal, the *Working Bee*. Publication began in July 1839, and the journal provided the colony with a much needed platform to defend itself against its

²⁵ Both organisations have been detailed in the preceding chapter.

²⁶ *New Moral World*, V. 16. 9 February 1839

²⁷ *ibid.*, V. 19. 2 March 1839

²⁸ *Social Pioneer*, I. 3. 23 March 1839

²⁹ *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations*, p. 28

³⁰ *Social Pioneer*, I. 5. 6 April 1839

³¹ *ibid.*, I. 3. 23 March 1839

critics, both inside and outside the Owenite movement. The scandal of April 1839 lost Manea Fen the support of the Manchester-based Central Committee, and their publication, the *Social Pioneer*. The *Working Bee* was a true community venture, and said of itself

It is 'got up' by co-operative exertion for common benefit, and will be a most convincing proof, we trust, to put into the hands of the sceptic of the practicability of our plans.³²

The *Working Bee* was typical of the socialist publications of the period, containing a range of articles covering Owenite theory, general knowledge, and entertaining anecdotes. It was printed at Manea Fen, and written by the members.

The title of the *Working Bee* reflected the community's ideals, and its emphasis on shared labour and communal living. The hive had long been used as an example of the benefits of common exertion for a common reward. Classical authors had employed the metaphor to illustrate the workings of the ideal *polis*.³³ The bee hive was a popular symbol among the Owenites, and appeared on a large number of printed works.³⁴ When the Salford Owenites went on a branch outing in 1838 they carried with them a banner decorated with a bee hive, over the motto 'Labour, mental and physical, the only source of wealth.'³⁵ The hive provided the basis for numerous allegories and metaphors in the Owenite press, such as the poem 'The Drones and the Working Bee' published in the *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator* in 1832.³⁶ A correspondent to the *Crisis* adopted the

³² *Working Bee*, New Series I. 1. 20 July 1839

³³ For example, see Virgil, *Georgics* IV. 153-157: 'They alone have children in common, hold the dwellings of their city jointly, and pass their life under the majesty of law. They alone know a fatherland and fixed home, and in summer, mindful of the winter to come, spend toilsome days and garner their gains into a common store.'

³⁴ See the title page to Robert Owen, 'Two Discourses on a New System of Society' (1825), in Gregory Claeys (ed.), *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. II., p. 1

³⁵ *New Moral World*, IV. 191. 23 June 1838

³⁶ *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, July 1832.

name 'The Working Bee' in 1833.³⁷ Its use was not confined to socialist circles, as was illustrated by the name of the Beehive Sick and Burial Society of Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire in 1833, but here the metaphor still represented common endeavour and a shared cause.³⁸ The Manea Fen community would appear to have been influenced by John Minter Morgan's *The Revolt of the Bees* when choosing the name for their journal. Morgan was a Christian socialist, who believed that Owen's ideas could be combined with Christianity. *The Revolt of the Bees* was an extended parable, demonstrating the advantages of co-operation. The lead articles in the early issues of the *Working Bee* bore the pseudonym Emilius, the name of a central character in Morgan's work.³⁹

Emilius was not the only one of the *Working Bee*'s writers to use a pseudonym, as the majority of the authors did likewise. The identification of individuals is thus not possible with any degree of accuracy. The periodical was the product of the community, rather than of identifiable individuals, and its articles reflected the different ideas brought by members to the community. Its views were thus formed from a number of different strands, which were not all consistently represented. That the periodical was primarily intended as propaganda also influenced the style of argument and presentation. The emphasis was on forcibly delivering basic arguments, rather than presenting a more complex and sophisticated analysis.

Although simplified to a certain extent, the arguments propounded by the *Bee* were clearly based on a wide range of sources. The membership was largely drawn from amongst the Owenite branches, where they would have been open to a range of lectures and discussions. The community library contained a number of socialist texts. This wide base was reflected in the articles in the *Bee*. While essentially Owenite, the Hodsonians discussed the work of other theorists, such as Thompson, Gray, Godwin, Spence and Paine. The influence of Spence was apparent in a strong

³⁷ *Crisis*, III. 4. 28 September 1833

³⁸ PRO FS 2/4

agrarian element which pervades the pages of the *Bee*, and which was the most significant departure from Owen's ideas. While there were other points of divergence, Owenism underpinned the mode of analysis employed, and the *Bee* used the Owenite label 'social science' to describe its views. This can be seen in the coupling of economic criticisms based on views of machinery, competition and distribution with determinist views of the formation of character and a millennial element.

Through the range of articles in the *Working Bee* it is possible to ascertain the view of community held by members of Manea Fen. Beginning in June 1840 the *Working Bee* published a series of articles, under the heading 'Social Science', that explored a range of issues the journal believed to form the essence of socialism. This series provides the clearest explanation of community in the *Working Bee*, but the arguments it employs are representative of those employed throughout the life of the journal.⁴⁰ In this series community lay at the centre of a wholesale reform of property, production and distribution, and the formation of character and morals. The articles argued that under the current social arrangements poverty and insecurity threatened all classes. Yet the series had a particular focus on the plight of the working classes, and the inequalities of their situation.

As with many critics of the condition of the working classes, the *Working Bee* employed Colquhoun's much used statistics to demonstrate the extent to which the workers were deprived of their rightful share of the nation's wealth. Actual producers formed approximately fifty per cent of the population, and yet received less than a quarter of the nation's income.⁴¹ While the majority spent their lives in unrewarded toil, the few led lives of idle luxury.⁴² Colquhoun was also used by Owen, who raised the question

³⁹ John Minter Morgan, *The Revolt of the Bees* (London, 1826)

⁴⁰ The following discussion is based primarily on the Social Science series of articles, although reference is also made to associated arguments elsewhere in the *Working Bee*.

⁴¹ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 4. 27 June 1840

⁴² *ibid.*, New Series, I. 5. 4 July 1840

of productive labour, and useful labour, in his works.⁴³ It seems, however, that the *Bee* adopted a more extreme manualist definition of productive labour than Owen. In other articles productive labour was defined largely in terms of the actual physical production of useful goods. There was no indication that manufacturers could be considered productive, as they were, although inconsistently, by Owen.⁴⁴ The journal quoted directly from John Gray's *Lecture on Human Happiness*, using the example of the lace dress to condemn the production of useless articles as non-productive labour.⁴⁵ Landowners' income from rents was condemned, as not being the result of labour.⁴⁶ While there was no explicit definition, it is clear that there was a general belief that all should work, and should produce something of use.

The *Working Bee* perceived competition, or individual interest, as one of the root causes of the country's social ills. Following Owen, the Social Science series argued that a desire for individual accumulation created inequalities of wealth, as well as engendering pernicious character traits through its focus on the individual and desire for profit.⁴⁷ As Owen wrote in the *Report to the County of Lanark*

From this principle of individual interest have arisen all the divisions of mankind, the endless errors and mischiefs of class, sect, party, and of national antipathies, creating the angry and malevolent passions, and all the crimes and misery with which the human race have been hitherto afflicted.⁴⁸

Competition also gave rise to modes of distribution and production that were themselves productive of further evils. As with many of the socialist economic theorists, the *Working Bee* perceived the arrangements for the distribution of wealth as one of the major causes of the social inequalities

⁴³ e.g. *The Report to the County of Lanark* (1821)

⁴⁴ Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium*, p. 43

⁴⁵ *Working Bee*, I. 8. 7 September 1839

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, I. 4. 10 August 1839

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 4. 27 June 1840

they sought to address.⁴⁹ Contained within the Social Science series is a rather crude, if forceful, formulation of a theory of exploitation resting on the distribution system. The solution of these problems required sweeping reforms, which for the *Working Bee* were embodied in its concept of community.

In community, all the criticisms of the current social arrangements would be met. The detrimental effects of the current modes of distribution and production would be eliminated by their wholesale reform. Production would no longer be motivated by profit, as it was under a competitive system, but by need. Goods would be produced to meet the needs of the consumer, rather than their means. The production of injurious articles, such as in gin and opium shops, would cease. Where the injustice of the current system of distribution required a minority to monopolise political and social power, within community property would be held, and wealth created, for the common good of mankind. Distribution would be reformed by the elimination of the medium of exchange. The use of money was condemned as immoral. 'The distribution of wealth by the aid of a metal or paper representative, leaves us to all the caprice, the ignorance, the selfishness, and the waste, of individual arrangements; it creates a false system of morals, economy, and politics, and gives to one body of men (capitalists) the control over the welfare and industry of their fellow men, which causes almost endless misery and confusion.'⁵⁰ Elsewhere the *Working Bee* printed correspondence from William King, the London co-operator and advocate of labour exchanges. King argued that the monetary system condemned workers to poverty as remuneration did not accord with productive labour.⁵¹ In community, each would be supplied according to his need. All would contribute, and work would no longer be considered a disgrace. Under correct circumstances, machinery would benefit the

⁴⁸ Robert Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark' (1821), in Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. I., p. 308

⁴⁹ Noel W. Thompson, *The People's Science: The Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crisis 1816-34* (Cambridge, 1984), especially chapter 4

⁵⁰ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 28. 12 December 1840

⁵¹ *ibid.*, I. 17. 9 November 1839; I. 20. 30 November 1839

working classes, whereas it was currently misapplied. For as long as machinery and labour were in competition, inequality would result.⁵² Discussion of distribution within communities reflected the influence of William Thompson, whose *Practical Directions for the Establishment of Communities* was in the community library.⁵³ This system would level upwards, providing all with a degree of comfort and education that exceeded that of the current aristocracy.

The Social Science series of articles contains the most complete statement on community within the *Working Bee*. The main elements in its critique of contemporary society are to be found repeated in many articles throughout the journal. Appeals against the unjust distribution of wealth, and the increasing poverty of the working classes in the midst of increasing national wealth and productive capacity, recur frequently. The focus on distribution as the root cause of much of the misery of the working classes underpins much of the journal's criticism. However, community itself is not as frequently referred to explicitly. This is not necessarily a surprising omission. Many of the arguments presented in the *Working Bee*, if taken to their logical conclusions, would have indicated the need for community. Community lay as the natural alternative to the social arrangements criticised by the *Working Bee*.

Furthermore, it was not necessarily unusual to find the co-operative press presenting economic and social arguments without feeling the need to argue for community. The moral and sectarian sides to communities could be conveniently downplayed, to avoid the criticism they brought down upon their advocates. Instead, the focus was on presenting community as the ideal arrangement of production and distribution. Owen himself spoke on the disadvantages of continually bringing forward a vision of community at the Sixth Co-operative Congress in 1833.

⁵² *ibid.*, New Series, I. 27. 5 December 1840

See also I. 5. 17 August 1839; I. 9. 14 September 1839; New Series, I. 1. 6 June 1840

The term community has frightened three-fourths of the population out of their senses. We have therefore no particular reason to make use of this term, since it is yet so little understood by the people, but merely say, we are going to unite to produce the best articles in the best way, and they will find out the truth of their own accord...⁵⁴

The focus of the *Working Bee* on economic arguments may also have been influenced by the re-awakened debate over the repeal of the Corn Laws and the founding of the Anti-Corn Law League shortly before Manea Fen began, coupled with the economic crisis and poor harvests of the period, which provided the background for the discussion of economics in the *Bee*. The focus of economic arguments in the *Working Bee* was on the distress of the working classes, and the means of alleviating the situation, rather than being concerned with society as a whole.

The vision of community which was dominant in the *Working Bee* was thus largely derived from Owen and other theorists such as William Thompson. It was essentially orthodox, and did not significantly diverge from Owen's own statements on community. Following Owen, the *Working Bee* presented communities as both a means of social reform and the ideal form of social arrangement. These communities, based on common ownership and equal distribution, would supersede the contemporary competitive and individual society. In changing material conditions, community would also produce a beneficial change in the physical, mental, and moral character of man. However, while the community may have differed little from Owen theoretically, it risked being perceived as unorthodox in practice through pursuing an independent path, outside of the Owenite mainstream.

⁵³ William Thompson, *Practical Directions*, pp. 3-8

⁵⁴ *Crisis*, III. 7. + 8. 19 October 1833

There was, however, a significant strand of agrarianism within the arguments contained in the *Working Bee*. Malcolm Chase argues for a greater recognition of the presence of this element within the Manea Fen community.⁵⁵ Agrarianism can be seen in the treatment of the question of land, where there was a clear influence of other elements besides Owenism. There were repeated demands in the *Working Bee* that the working classes become owners of the land, as the only method of working out their own salvation.⁵⁶ 'Let the producing millions become their own landlords, capitalists and labourers, and every political, religious, and social right will soon be secured. The working classes have always the means, whenever they have the knowledge, to work out their own redemption.'⁵⁷ This was a clear rejection of the desire for support from capitalist sources, which was present in Owen's works. Possession of land was equated with equality, or was seen as one of the preconditions for equality. The current distribution and private ownership of land was identified as one of the principal foundations of the current unjust system. This argument could be found in a number of articles, and was also presented in two of the Social Hymns that concluded issues of the *Working Bee*.

Then us claim equality,
Since that alone can make us free;
And shout with joy, with uprais'd arm,
The land's again the people's farm.⁵⁸

The second of these hymns was attributed to 'Alice, a resident of the hive'.

The land it is the people's farm,
Let no one say 'tis mine;
We've all a right its gifts to share,

⁵⁵ Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, p. 169

⁵⁶ For example, see the *Working Bee*, I. 9. 14 September 1839; I. 10. 21 September 1839; and New Series I. 1. 6 June 1840

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, I. 9. 14 September 1839

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, I. 15. 26 October 1839

By nature's law divine.

Then let man not monopolize,
What nature sends for all;
Distinctions then will ever cease,
No poor, no rise, no fall.⁵⁹

The *Working Bee* shared Owen's basic predilection for an essentially agrarian economy, and the belief that an economy rooted in the land avoids the damaging moral effects of commerce. However, the *Bee*'s position on the use of land differed from Owen. In the discussions of property, influences besides Owen were clearly present and acknowledged. The *Bee* discussed the ideas of Thomas Paine, William Godwin and John Gray in relation to the question of land. While their conclusions were rejected, their influence could be seen in the Hodsonians' assertions that the land is the common property of the people. There was no admissible right of property over the land itself.⁶⁰ The slogan, 'the land is the people's farm', which appeared in the above extracts and elsewhere in the *Bee*, was appropriated from Thomas Spence. Spence's ideas were also discussed in articles on property. While the *Bee* rejected Spencean plans for failing to recognise the need for complete reform of the social economy, for expecting change through political means, and for not preventing individual accumulation, it is clear that its attitude to the land was influenced by agrarian attitudes.

For much of its life the society was in communication with Allen Davenport, author of the *Life of Spence*, who did much to ensure that the ideas of Spence were not forgotten.⁶¹ Davenport was highly active in neo-

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, I. 1. 20 July 1839

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 12. 22 August 1840

⁶¹ Allen Davenport (1775-1846) was active in London Spencean circles. He was a member of the Spencean Philanthropists, and was probably involved in the Cato Street conspiracy. Davenport was prominent in the Spencean and radical circles centred on Finsbury. He was a class leader of the NUWC in Finsbury. His friend Charles Jennesson led him to join the First London Manufacturing Community, and he was the society's second storekeeper. He was also involved in London Chartism, and was a supporter of the Chartist Land Plan. Davenport was active in adult education, and was a prolific journalist and poet. (Malcolm Chase (ed.), *The Life and Literary Pursuits of Allen Davenport* (Aldershot, 1994), pp. 48-55)

Spencean circles in London, and was involved in the foundation of the London branch of the community.⁶² He actually applied, albeit unsuccessfully, to become a member at Manea Fen in November 1839. Davenport contributed a number of articles, including a series on the Owenite movement, in which he criticised the leadership for not having begun operations on the land at an earlier date.⁶³ The clear influence of agrarian ideas was combined, perhaps rather uneasily, with Owenite beliefs. Whereas the distribution of land was in some articles held to be the determining factor in the contemporary social system, the majority of the articles used Owenite analysis in their social criticism.

Community was also advocated as an alternative to, and means of defeating, the capitalist system. However, the demands that the working classes occupy the estates and build their own houses, ball rooms and lecture theatres implied the presence of a different interpretation of community in the *Working Bee*.⁶⁴ The *Working Bee* could be seen to have been partially re-defining community, with the possible acceptance of a looser interpretation of community as an association of the working classes based on the land, working for themselves rather than under the capitalist system. The nearby United Advancement Society of Wisbech could be seen as a practical embodiment of this approach. The focus of the *Working Bee* was on community as a means of releasing the working classes from the capitalist system. Community was not frequently defined, either as a concept or in practical terms, and this reflects the lack of emphasis on theoretical discussion. The focus of the *Working Bee* was rather on justice, based on labour, and an escape from the capitalist system on a small scale,

⁶² Davenport also expressed his support for the community in poetic form: 'May full success attend that little band/Who now are hast'ning to the promised land/And Hodson, leader of those pioneers,/Deserves our thanks - deserves our hearty cheers/...The old immoral world shrinks with dismay/The social age is come - hura! hura! [sic]'. The poem was read by J. Bendall, at the anniversary of the 16th branch of AACAN, on New Year's Eve, 1838, and later published in *Cleave's Gazette of Variety* (II. 15. 19 January 1839). Cleave published Davenport's *Life of Spence* and also the early numbers of the *Working Bee*.

⁶³ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 20. 17 October 1840; New Series, I. 26. 28 November 1840; New Series, I. 30. 26 December 1840

Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, pp. 169-170

⁶⁴ *Working Bee*, I. 10. 21 September 1839

initiated by the working classes themselves. This may indicate the manner in which the Hodsonians viewed Manea Fen itself. It can also be linked to the initial high degree of support for the colony from the Owenite branches, which may reflect shared concerns among the working classes that were not necessarily those of the Owenite leadership.

The emphasis of the *Working Bee* was on presenting the practical and economic aspects of community. Millennial elements, although strong in Owen's own writing at this time, did not feature prominently. On occasion however, despite its strong opposition to the clergy, the *Working Bee* did use religious language to describe community. Shelly wrote that co-operative communities would bring an earthly paradise, and would create beings superior to angels.⁶⁵ A later article used a quotation from Matthew to equate heaven and community.⁶⁶ Emelius wrote that community would bring a state whereby every man would sit 'under his vine and under his fig tree'. This biblical quotation was used frequently by the Owenite press, and, as Jamie Bronstein has shown, by Chartists and land reformers.⁶⁷ The quotation conjures up images of arcadian bliss, illustrating the appeal of the land within communitarianism. The same reference was used by the Leeds Redemption Society, who adapted it to their Welsh community; 'under our own vine and fig tree in the land of Glendower and Cadwallader'.⁶⁸ Millennial language was used more frequently by the Leeds society than by the Hodsonians. Indeed, the majority of the small communities covered in this work adopted a similar approach to Manea Fen, describing themselves and their aims in more strictly practical terms, perhaps reflecting the

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ 'But woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven (community) against men...' (Matthew 23. 13.) *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 28. 12 December 1840

⁶⁷ Jamie L. Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States*, pp. 64-66

The quotation is drawn from Micah, 4. 4., but see also 1 Kings, 4. 25.

⁶⁸ *Journal of Association*, I. 26. 21 June 1852

See chapter nine for the Leeds Redemption Society.

importance of the immediate and practical aspects of communities as well as their role in social reform.

5. 4. Community in practice: the purpose of Manea Fen

As has been seen, when founding Manea Fen William Hodson clearly believed that he was aiding the spread of the movement, and viewed the colony as a contribution to its success and as an incipient community. This attitude was shared, as far as can be ascertained from the community's own periodical, by the membership. While the beliefs of the members were influenced by a range of views, most notably including agrarianism, the views presented in the *Working Bee* were essentially Owenite. This was also true of the way in which the members perceived the community itself. Many of the members came from branches of the Rational Society, and regarded Manea Fen as a viable alternative to that society's own activities. It was seen as a contribution to the progress of the movement through providing practical experience and a demonstration of the viability of communal life.

Once the Rational Society began operations at Queenwood in October, 1839, the extent to which Manea Fen regarded itself as part of the same movement became readily apparent. In late October 1839 the *Working Bee* published a comparison of the two communities, and while it could not resist remarking on the advantages it believed Manea Fen to hold, it emphasised that it had no wish to harm the Queenwood community, but rather believed that the two shared the same cause.⁶⁹ Later that year Manea Fen, as the older of the two ventures, offered advice to Queenwood, concluding 'Let us then be as brothers in this good cause'.⁷⁰ An understandable rivalry did exist between the two societies, and Manea Fen's attitude towards Queenwood became defensive in reaction to the hostile reception it initially received from the mainstream Owenite movement.

⁶⁹ *Working Bee*, I. 15. 26 October 1839

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, I. 22. 14 December 1839

However, the Cambridgeshire community persisted with attempts to achieve a closer degree of co-operation, and in late 1840 it raised the possibility of a union between the two ventures. When the *Working Bee* first brought this plan forward it was presented as being potentially beneficial to both communities, and to the wider cause. It would 'rally the sinking spirits of the socialists, and send on the cause with an increasingly accelerated speed'.⁷¹ The plan was still being considered by the Rational Society when the Manea Fen community collapsed in February 1841. While Manea Fen stood to gain considerably from the union, this should not lead to too cynical an assessment of their motivation. It is clear from the relationship between the Rational Society and Manea Fen that the latter regarded itself as part of the same movement, dedicated to the same goals as the official Owenite movement.

Establishing that Manea Fen regarded itself as part of the wider Owenite movement raises the question of what precise purpose the community was intended to fulfil. How was Manea Fen to advance the cause? Manea Fen's response to news of a new community in early 1840 at Pant Glas in Wales reveals part of the answer. Unlike the Rational Society's reception of Manea Fen, the Hodsonians welcomed the Welsh community. The *Working Bee* embraced the new venture, proclaiming that the more communities there were, the better. Each community would provide a practical demonstration for the working classes, and hopefully attract more funds. This money would be better employed in communities than in going to the Chartists or being expended during strikes.⁷² This attitude stemmed naturally from the view, expressed in the *Working Bee*, that the working classes would have to help themselves. Through co-operation, institutionalised in communities, the working classes could overcome competition.⁷³ This process would not be easy. Frequent attempts would need to be made before co-operative communities could be expected to function smoothly.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 14. 5 September 1840

⁷² *ibid.*, I. 40. 18 April 1840

Co-existent with the promulgation of true principles will be the approximation to correct practices. Endeavours will be made, as they are now making, to reduce the science of society to a practical working.⁷⁴

It seems that this was how the Hodsonians regarded Manea Fen, as an experiment intended to provide the experience necessary to overcome the obstacles to community. This also accords with the community's reception of Pant Glas, for the Hodsonians believed in aiding other ventures as all could contribute to this learning process. The *Working Bee* stated that the first community should help to establish other ventures.⁷⁵ Manea Fen offered its members the opportunity of taking one step closer to the new moral world, but it was concerned with more than personal salvation. The community also clearly perceived itself as belonging to a wider movement, and as such it had a responsibility to aid others within the same cause.

5. 5. Individuals and their perception of Manea Fen

While the theoretical justification of the community was that it would aid the wider movement, individuals approached Manea Fen with a mixture of support for the cause and more selfish, individual motivation. Although the venture attracted many of its members from the Owenite branches, there were still those who misguidedly believed that they were leaving for a life of idleness and material ease, encouraged no doubt by Owen's, and then Hodson's, promises of low working hours and future plenty. Such people would not have been ideologically motivated, and were not ideal material for the community's first hard years. The community complained of people arriving looking for support, and cautioned others against appearing on its doorstep. 'Poor starving creatures leave their homes, come here, call

⁷³ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 22. 31 October 1840

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 12. 22 August 1840

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 22. 31 October 1840

themselves socialists, and expect that will be a passport to membership.'⁷⁶ However, there were clearly other members who were firm believers in Owenite ideology, and who were drawn to Manea Fen as a practical example of Owen's ideas.

During its lifetime the community had cause to expel a number of members. A comparison between individuals who were found to be unsatisfactory and those who remained committed to the community over a long period of time illustrates the differing expectations of community held by various members. Late in 1840 two men, named Hallam and Kirk, were encouraged to leave Manea Fen. Hallam was a lace-maker by trade, but he worked as an agricultural labourer at the community, a trade to which he was unsuited. The *Working Bee* complained of his 'low and vulgar habits'.⁷⁷ It would appear that Hallam, doing work to which he was unused, became dissatisfied and disruptive. He was not the only example of this. Thomas Cropper was formally dismissed in January 1840 for his laziness and lack of energy in his work. Manea Fen complained of Cropper that one could not build a community with men such as this.⁷⁸ The community accepted that it was unwise to employ men in trades in which they had no experience, and recognised that establishing a viable concern required sustained, hard labour. Men such as Hallam and Cropper, who were not prepared to work hard enough, or who had hoped for an easier life in community, were not ideal material.

The case of Kirk illustrates the range of expectations that could be held of community. Kirk, who left with Hallam in late 1840, was a gardener. He had been accepted for the community in November 1839, although he had not accepted the offer by March 1840 and it was withdrawn.⁷⁹ Despite this, Kirk did eventually appear at Manea Fen. However, his work did not prove to be of a sufficient standard and he was

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, I. 9. 14 September 1839; I. 10. 21 September 1839

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 28. 12 December 1840

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, I. 27. 18 January 1840

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, I. 17. 9 November 1839; I. 34. 7 March 1840

not permitted to fulfil the post of gardener, but instead worked in a subsidiary role. Kirk evidently regarded Manea Fen as an opportunity to live an alternative lifestyle. Soon after his arrival he applied to the president to have a cave built in the garden so that he could live as a hermit. He had apparently earlier lived with the Trapist monks at Charnwood Forest, in Leicestershire. During his time at Manea Fen he was in contact with a group of Roman Catholic priests, and upon leaving he said that he would join some Jesuit priests in France.⁸⁰ For Kirk, Manea Fen offered an escape from the world and a chance to live according to his own ideals, even if they did not accord with Owenism. It was not uncommon for communities to offer shelter to men such as Kirk. John Harrison writes that all communities had their vegetarians, teetotallers, non-smokers and fresh-air-and-cold-water fadists, and while this is perhaps more true of the American communities than those established in Britain, it to be expected that communities dedicated to providing an alternative lifestyle should attract others with their own ideas as to what that life should be.⁸¹

The cases of Kirk and Hallam contrast strongly with those of Samuel Crump and the Cutting family. The Cutting family, William, Susan, and the children Sarah, James, and Esther, were present at Manea Fen from some point in late 1839. Samuel Crump appears to have arrived later, during the first half of 1840. It is not clear whether Crump knew the Cuttings before he arrived, but the two families maintained contact after they left Manea Fen. Indeed, Crump married into the Cutting family, apparently after the collapse of the community. All remained at the Manea Fen until the bitter end in February 1841. The signatures of the adults can all be found on the agreement with Hodson which signalled the official closure of Manea Fen.⁸² After leaving the community, Samuel Crump returned to Hadlow, near Maidstone in Kent. There he maintained his interest in Owenism. His letters to William Cutting, who left Cambridgeshire for London, speak of J.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 28. 12 December 1840

⁸¹ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, p. 179

E. Smith, Lloyd Jones, and the *New Moral World*.⁸³ Crump's opinions led him into an argument with the local Baptist minister, who cornered Crump in a local shop. He reported that the minister 'commenced questioning me respecting my Infidel Opinions as he called them and we had a bit of a Controversy for above an hour'.⁸⁴ While William Cutting remained in England, moving from London to Rochester, Crump and James Cutting both left the country.

The late 1840s found Samuel Crump living in Pittsford, Monroe County, New York State. James Cutting moved to Simcoe, Ontario. Crump retained his involvement in social reform, and became a fervent abolitionist. Before and during the Civil War, Crump was involved in the Underground Railroad, and aided the passage of slaves from his farm in Pittsford to the shores of Lake Ontario, where he was met by James Cutting, coming from Simcoe.⁸⁵ Crump's beliefs were reflected in the names he gave to his two sons, Rousseau Owen Crump and Shelly Goodwin Crump. Samuel Crump was evidently firmly committed to social reform and maintained his beliefs long after leaving Manea Fen. His time at the community was not an aberration, but an expression of strongly held beliefs. It is clear from the comparison between Hallam, Kirk, and Crump, that the community attracted a range of people with diverse interests and views.

While the nature of the source material makes the collection of a statistically meaningful sample difficult, other members, besides Crump, were evidently attracted to Manea Fen through their beliefs. At least four members participated in other communities. William Storey, the brickmaker who left for Queenwood at Isaac Ironside's insistence, later

⁸² Supplemental Abstract of Title of Mr. Wm. Hodson to 10 acres of land in Manea Fen in the Isle of Ely lately belonging to a Friendly Society called the Hodsonian Community. Wisbech and Fenland Museum Papers

⁸³ Samuel Crump to William Cutting, January 1842, and 14 February 1842. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R91/46 Crump-Cutting papers

⁸⁴ Samuel Crump to William Cutting, 14 February 1842. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R91/46 Crump-Cutting papers

⁸⁵ Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R91/46 Crump-Cutting papers

returned. William Turner also came to Manea Fen from Queenwood.⁸⁶ James Flitcroft, who left Manea Fen at the time of the marriage scandal in 1839, later went to Queenwood.⁸⁷ Robert Reid, an agriculturalist, joined Manea Fen from the Pant Glas community.⁸⁸ Having left, some members returned. Collinson returned in 1840, while Horner applied to return.⁸⁹ Some of those who left remained involved with the movement. Robert Reid returned to the Liverpool Rational Society branch.⁹⁰ Benjamin Timms became secretary of the Rational Society branch in New York.⁹¹

The community's first secretary, Samuel Rowbotham, had a rather chequered career after leaving Manea Fen. Having been secretary of the Stockport branch before Manea Fen, he returned to the Rational Society. Before joining the community, Rowbotham had been considered by the Rational Society for a position as social missionary.⁹² The opportunity arose again, and in January 1840 he was accepted by the Worcester branch as a candidate for the post of missionary. The branch was to arrange his appointment as the lecture for Cheltenham and Worcester.⁹³ In the meantime, Rowbotham accepted a temporary post at Bristol, until May 1840.⁹⁴ He did not return to Worcester, as at this time he developed his own ideas and abandoned Owenism. Rowbotham began to promote his Self-Redemption Society, and opposed community and association. He rejected community as being close to slavery, saying 'You cannot move or act, but at the will or consent of another; therefore Community is objectionable and impracticable'.⁹⁵ It is intriguing to speculate whether his changed views can

⁸⁶ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 17. 26 September 1840

⁸⁷ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 244

⁸⁸ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 17. 26 September 1840

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 29. 19 December 1840

⁹¹ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 16. 19 September 1840

New Moral World, IX. 6. 8 February 1841

⁹² Association of All Classes of All Nations, Minute book of the Central Board, 22 November 1838; 17 December 1838 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

⁹³ *ibid.*, 24 January 1840

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 25 February 1840; 3 March 1840; 13 May 1840

⁹⁵ *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840

be attributed to his time at Manea Fen. Not surprisingly, complaints were made to the Board about his appointment as social missionary.⁹⁶

5. 6. Conclusion

During and after the lifetime of the Manea Fen community its founder, William Hodson, suffered much criticism. The scandal which erupted over marital relations within the community in April 1839 led to his motives being questioned. At the time of the community's collapse Hodson was accused of directing investment to his own ends by one of the group of members who fought Hodson's enforced closure of Manea Fen. Yet, when considering Hodson's local reputation and background in radical politics, it would seem that Hodson's motivation, or at least his dominant motivation, was not as cynical as his critics suggested.

William Hodson's conversion to Owenism was undoubtedly rapid. The Manea Fen community was announced only a few weeks after Hodson first heard Owen speak. However, he did not rush immediately into operations, and it was six months before the community officially opened. Furthermore, the attraction that Owen clearly exercised over Hodson cannot be viewed as a conversion. Owenism was far from being incompatible with Hodson's views before his encounter with Owen. He had a background in radical politics, which had earned him a reputation locally as a difficult, politically vocal man. Hodson also demonstrated a concern with the condition of the working classes and the unequal distribution of wealth in the nation. In Owenism, he clearly found an outlook and a practical agenda that would permit him to address his concerns.

Furthermore, Hodson invested significant sums in the venture. In the event, he probably did not lose much, if anything, as the improved value of the land outweighed his lost loans to the colonists. However, had Hodson wished merely to materially improve his estate, founding a socialist

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement)

colony is a remarkably and unnecessarily complex way to do so. His own labourers were diverted to work the estate, and it would clearly have been simpler to have used his labourers without first establishing a community. He also made personal sacrifices for the good of the community. According to his own claims, he gave up a job worth £1,000 a year to work for the community. He paid rent for his home at Manea Fen, and paid for his food there. Hodson also expended several hundred pounds on the tours that he conducted to publicise the venture and on entertaining visitors to the estate.⁹⁷ Hodson did eventually force the closure of the community, but this should not question his initial enthusiasm for the socialist cause.

Hodson appears to have been a committed Owenite, and to have regarded the community that he founded as part of the wider socialist movement. Throughout the life of Manea Fen he struggled to win recognition from the Rational Society and the Owenite leadership. While he did also seek support that would have benefited Manea Fen, the indignation at his treatment by the Rational Society that is clearly present in the pages of the *Working Bee* appears to be a genuine reaction, rooted in his belief that he was aiding the movement. He regarded Manea Fen as an attempt to found an incipient community.

Hodson's view of Manea Fen was also shared by many of the members. When considering the attitudes of the membership the difficulty of gauging the views of individuals must be borne in mind. It is clear that the members encompassed a range of views. Men such as Kirk obviously had their own agendas, and saw Manea Fen as an opportunity to escape from social norms and live according to their own views. There were others who viewed the community as a refuge, and the chance of an easier life. However, there were also those who were committed socialists, who viewed Manea Fen as an opportunity to struggle towards an improved society. If one accepts the *Working Bee* as an indication of the views of the membership, it becomes apparent that Hodson's view of Manea Fen was

⁹⁷ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 20. 17 October 1840

largely shared by those who responded to his founding of the community. Like Hodson, the *Working Bee* expressed a mixture of disappointment and anger at the unwelcoming attitude of the Owenite leadership. Manea Fen was regarded as a genuine attempt to found an Owenite community, and the members, many of whom came from within the Rational Society, hoped to see their community recognised as part of the same movement, as an assistant rather than a rival. The members saw their colony as an incipient community, an attempt to advance the cause.

CHAPTER 6. RHETORIC AND REALITY: EQUALITY IN THE MANEA FEN COMMUNITY

6. Introduction

'None will spoil his hat in bowing to their superiors, all will be equal'. So wrote William Hodson when announcing Manea Fen.¹ This emphasis on equality remained throughout the community's lifetime. Hodson insisted that democratic self-government was the form best suited to communities, a belief that hindered negotiations with the Rational Society over the union of Manea Fen and Queenwood. The propaganda of the *Working Bee* supported Hodson's egalitarian stance. Emilius wrote in the first issue that 'No mine or thine is held in our community', and a high degree of communism was advocated elsewhere in the *Working Bee*.² Manea Fen also had a reputation for supporting female emancipation. Under the pseudonym 'A Friend to Women', a correspondent wrote that he had heard that Manea Fen was attempting to raise women to equality with men.³ Many other articles stressed the need for female equality, following arguments employed by Owen and William Thompson. This rhetoric, however, was not fully translated into practice. Hodson himself, due to his pre-eminent position in the community and financial support, was one of the most significant factors compromising truly democratic government. Democracy was also hindered by the community's failure to achieve a high degree of sexual equality, rooted, as Carol Kolmerten argues for the American Owenite communities, in the retention of patriarchal attitudes from wider society.⁴

6. 1. The government of Manea Fen

The form of government at Manea Fen was essentially democratic. The community was managed by a President and six Directors, who together

¹ *New Moral World*, IV. 200. 25 August 1838

² *Working Bee*, I. 1. 20 July 1839

³ *ibid.*, I. 2. 27 July 1839

formed the Board. Responsibility for the colony's various activities rested with the heads of each department. All of the community's activities, domestic, agricultural, and industrial, were managed in this way. Beneath this administration came the members, who were divided into full members and candidates. Candidates enjoyed most of the privileges open to members, but were not entitled to a vote in community matters. Of the six directors, three retired at the end of each year, although they could continue if re-elected. Under the final form of government, all six directors, and the President, were to be elected by the membership. However, for an initial five year period, from August 1840, Hodson was to be President and appoint two of the six directors, with the others elected by the members. Each year, one of Hodson's choices and two of the members' would retire. The Board was empowered to execute the aims of the community as defined in the preamble to the rules of the community. In general, the Board seems to have managed the community's daily activities, and to have planned future expansion. The Board held a significant amount of power. Only orders issuing from the Board had any authority, and members' performance was monitored through the use of weekly reports. In return, the Board made an annual report on the state of the community to the members. The Board also made decisions concerning the construction of new buildings, the purchase of equipment, and the issuing of advertisements for new members.

Although the Board exercised significant authority over the community, the members retained a high degree of control. This was most apparent in the regulations concerning the election, and expulsion, of members. The rules of Manea Fen permitted members to be expelled for not contributing 'to the happiness and well-being of the community'.⁵ The potential for abuse contained in this vague formulation was constrained by the democratic machinery of expulsion. The Board could order a meeting of all members to be called, and it was this meeting that decided whether to expel one of their number. Expulsion required the approval of three

⁴ Carol Kolmerten, *Women in Utopia*, pp. 2-12

⁵ *Rules of the Hodsonian Community Society* (1839), p.12. ROCC ROSC/HOD 2 49

quarters of the membership, and the Board's consent. Directors could also be removed in this manner. This machinery was employed when Thomas Doughty complained of the 'brutal and disgraceful treatment he had that Morning received from Mr. Green'. At Doughty's request a meeting of the Board was held, and a public meeting later called. John Green's resignation removed the need to vote on his expulsion.⁶

In the case of candidate members, it seems that the consent of the membership was not needed, and Williams was dismissed for 'drunkenness, and his abusive and obscene language' by the trustees alone. Thomas Cropper, another candidate, was also simply removed from the list of candidates.⁷ The consent of members was needed, however, before candidates could become members. Candidates were examined on their knowledge of Owenite principles before a public meeting. A similar process was followed before people could become candidates. This was the case for a man from Bradford who came to visit Manea Fen in June 1840, and then asked to join.⁸ The members thus retained control over the composition of their number. Public meetings also decided certain other issues. The adoption of a community costume was made by the membership as a whole.⁹ A general meeting was also called to discuss whether to give Messrs. Hodges and Green, two candidates, houses.¹⁰

In theory the government of Manea Fen was highly democratic, and it appears that in practice the members were not without influence. However, Hodson's position, as the community's founder and financial supporter, threatened to undermine this situation, and Hodson maintained a significant degree of control. When presenting his proposal for union between Manea Fen and the Rational Society at the Congress of 1840 Hodson was eager to refute the impression that he occupied a dictatorial

⁶ *Working Bee*, I. 19. 23 November 1839

⁷ *ibid.*, I. 10. 21 September 1839; I. 27. 18 January 1840

⁸ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 1. 6 June 1840

⁹ See chapter 7 for a discussion of the community uniform.

¹⁰ *Working Bee*, I. 39. 11 April 1840

position. As Hodson's suggestions for union challenged the Rational Society in attaching great importance to the need for communities to elect their own governors, in contrast to the Rational Society's own operations at Queenwood, the Congress was quick to question Hodson on the arrangements at Manea Fen. Hodson defended his position by claiming that the community could not, at first, have governed itself, a situation that had now changed. He claimed that he was now prepared to step down as governor. Furthermore, whereas he had originally controlled the expenditure of his loans, this had now passed to the Council.

Hodson also attached little significance to his authority to appoint two Board members, saying that he tended to appoint those who would otherwise have been elected by the members. According to the *Working Bee*, this was the case in the November 1839 elections, when Hodson chose as his directors those with the next highest number of votes after the members' first four choices.¹¹ Furthermore, he claimed that he could, according to the society's rules, be dismissed at any time. Fleming, editor of the *New Moral World*, questioned the accuracy of this, quoting the second rule which appointed Hodson for five years, and he would seem to have been accurate in this objection.¹²

When the rules had been enrolled officially in November 1839 Hodson claimed that he no longer had direct control of the society. The rules could only be altered by the members. Under the community's official framework, Hodson was clearly correct. The rules curtailed his authority. Whereas a version of the rules, as yet non-official, printed in the *Social Pioneer* in March 1839 authorised Hodson to dismiss any member within the first twelve months, this was not present in the final version. The members were also free to reject Hodson's proposals for the running of the

¹¹ *ibid.*, I. 18. 16 November 1839

¹² *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement)

For G. A. Fleming see p. 109, n. 140.

community, as illustrated by the 1840 annual meeting, discussed below.¹³ However, as Fleming remarked at the Congress, Hodson effectively appointed three of the seven directors which must have conferred a greater degree of influence than Hodson was prepared to admit to publicly. As Thomas Hunt remarked, the society thus only had a majority of one. 'If the personal influence of the president be worth anything, would the bringing over of a single vote be a matter of much difficulty?'¹⁴ Furthermore, although Hodson denied his influence and Manea Fen's dependence on him, this was clearly not the case. For as long as he was the main source of financial support, Hodson could not possibly be without influence.

Despite the members' and Hodson's protestations, Manea Fen was effectively dependent on Hodson's continued support. Although the colonists claimed to have two hundred acres, only ten acres were actually held by the society. The ten acres were conveyed to the society's trustees in July 1839.¹⁵ The remaining land was held on a twenty-one year lease. Within this period the members had the right to buy the land, and paid rent until this was done. However, according to the lease, Hodson was bound to convey the land during the term of lease, and if he failed to do so he would have to pay the members £1,000. The security of the society's tenure of the land was a major issue in the debates over union late in 1840. William Pare argued that the land's value was being raised by the members, as Hodson himself claimed, and by more than the £1,000 Hodson would forfeit.¹⁶ The incentive was thus present for Hodson to break the terms of the lease. Manea Fen protested its faith in Hodson, and claimed that the land could be conveyed at any time, but that they did not consider the matter urgent.¹⁷ While the society's collapse prevented the resolution of this issue, the future of the society clearly rested with Hodson. Even without considering the

¹³ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 11. 15 August 1840

¹⁴ *New Moral World*, VIII. 16. 17 October 1840

¹⁵ Supplemental Abstract of Title of Mr. Wm. Hodson to 10 acres of land in Manea Fen in the Isle of Ely lately belonging to a Friendly Society called the Hodsonian Community. Wisbech and Fenland Museum papers

See appendix B, p. 360 for a plan of the Manea Fen estate.

¹⁶ *New Moral World*, VIII. 16. 17 October 1840

land's increase in value, it remained that Hodson could legally end the community simply by paying the £1,000. The colonists' ten acres, even though they contained the cottages and other buildings, would have served little useful purpose.

Manea Fen was furthermore just as dependent on Hodson for income as for land. Although Hodson stated in November 1839 that the society had repaid him £600, at this time the total debt stood at £5,000. Hodson claimed at the time that the society would have paid in full within three years, but his forecast proved optimistic.¹⁸ After the society's collapse in 1841 the debt remained at approximately £5,000.¹⁹ Despite income from various crops and the brick yard, the community was unable to generate sufficient income to free itself from debt, and remained reliant on Hodson for financial support. Hodson's forcible closure of Manea Fen in February 1841 demonstrated the community's inability to continue without his support. Despite the efforts of a group of members to continue, Hodson's firm opposition ensured that the community was finally dissolved.²⁰ The financial situation of the colony effectively undermined its democratic rhetoric.

While the community's funding sat uneasily with its egalitarian rhetoric, this did not prevent a high degree of communism being attained at Manea Fen. The metaphor of the hive, in which all shared equally in production and consumption, may not have been far removed from the situation within the community. It is, however, necessary to differentiate between the differing classes of people resident at Manea Fen. The candidates were effectively on the same financial basis as the hired labourers, in that they were paid, at least in theory, a wage for their work. Crawford's complaint, discussed below, showed that this may not always have been the case. As candidates, however, they had been accepted by the

¹⁷ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 21. 24 October 1840

¹⁸ *ibid.*, I. 20. 30 November 1839

¹⁹ Supplemental Abstract of Title of Mr. Wm. Hodson to 10 acres of land in Manea Fen in the Isle of Ely lately belonging to a Friendly Society called the Hodsonian Community. Wisbech and Fenland Museum papers

society and could participate in community life. Amongst the full members a different system operated. There was no wage, but rather equal distribution of the profits of the community. The rules provided for 'an equality of benefits' among the members, as far as was possible. Where it was not, those who had worked the most hours would be favoured.²¹ Benefits were not intended to follow the amount of work done. Rather than inequality of reward, the rules permitted the number of hours worked to be reduced in accordance with the extent to which each member had contributed to the wealth of the society.²² Manea Fen was highly unusual in this, and provides a rare exception to Harrison's statement that no community practised equality of remuneration.²³

Hodson attempted to alter this system in August 1840. At the annual meeting he suggested that the number of hours of work necessary to support a member be calculated, and that members receive payment for any hours over this. This method would permit differentiation between those who merely earned their bare subsistence and those who contributed to the surplus wealth of the society. It would also give members a disposable income. The members rejected this arrangement because it would lead to inequalities of wealth among their number.²⁴ It seems that the society followed a firm policy of material equality. If members brought property into the community on their arrival, this was valued and the sum considered a loan to the society. Alternatively, property could simply be given to the society. In surrendering their property, individuals would have had their sense of belonging to the community reinforced.

The system of distributing benefits clearly necessitated some form of time keeping. All members recorded the hours they worked, and these books were submitted to the heads of each department, and thence to the

²⁰ See chapter 8 for a discussion of the closure of Manea Fen.

²¹ *Rules of the Hodsonian Community Society*, p.12

²² *ibid.*

²³ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, pp. 181-182

²⁴ *Working Bee*, I. 11. 28 September 1839

Board. While the rules permitted the Board to set the required hours of work for different trades, it is unclear whether this implied differing valuations of the work performed. Reductions in the number of hours required seem to have been made on a practical basis.²⁵ This system served a dual purpose, for the record of work could be used not only in the distribution of wealth, but also permitted the Board to check the amount of work each member performed. When the books were introduced in the spring of 1840, the *Working Bee* wrote that while no member was to work more than sixty hours a week, this system would ensure that this work was done, implying that the society encountered difficulties ensuring that work was performed.²⁶ Hodson said at the 1840 Congress that 'little groups were found together in the working hours, discussing.'²⁷

That an incentive was required may also be indicated by the system of reducing hours in accordance with the extent to which members contributed to the surplus. It may be that the need to provide an incentive was also behind Hodson's suggestions for a scale of payment. Hodson, whose money supported the community, was almost certainly running into debt for as long as Manea Fen failed to support itself. His concern for Manea Fen's profitability may have led him to propose this scheme as a way of ensuring each member contributed to the community's income. E. T. Craig, the community's teacher, wrote to Owen after he had left the community claiming that work at the community was mis-managed to the extent that the leadership had resorted to force.²⁸ This, however, was early in the community's life. By mid-1840, as has been seen, the members defended the egalitarian distribution system. It would seem that Manea Fen may have effectively countered the criticisms of opponents of socialism, and demonstrated that individual reward was not the sole motivation to work.

²⁵ *Rules of the Hodsonian Community Society*, p.12

²⁶ *Working Bee*, I. 40. 18 April 1840

²⁷ *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement)

²⁸ E. T. Craig to Robert Owen, 28 July 1839. ROCC 1132
For E. T. Craig see p. 90, n. 58.

6. 2. Female emancipation

A significant element in the Hodsonians' egalitarian views was the promise of female emancipation. The *Working Bee* discussed this issue frequently. Such discussions owed a clear debt to the views of Owen and William Thompson. The views of the *Working Bee* on the condition of women in society were naturally linked to their views on marriage. Marriage was believed to enslave women, and to make women the property of men. Women are now the 'property of ignorant selfish men, constrained legally to prostitute their persons' wrote Hodson.²⁹ He called for an end to the 'cursed marriage laws' and wrote, 'Both men and women must become independent of each other, so that when they form sexual unions, they shall be of the purest disinterested character.'³⁰ This argument may well be indebted to Thompson, whose *Appeal of One-half the Human Race* was in Manea Fen's library.

In a discussion of the condition of women in a co-operative society, Thompson argued that women would be freed from any dependence on men. Common property and child care would remove financial dependence, and women would no longer have to remain married to care for children. All means of persecution would be denied to men, and women would not be forced to submit to persecution. 'All motives are here taken away from men to practise injustice; all motives are taken away from women to submit to injustice.'³¹ Thompson may have been the source for further articles in the *Working Bee*. Man 'makes the mind of his victim [i.e. woman] ... feeble ... by excluding from her, and reserving to himself, all sources of knowledge and skill', wrote Thompson in the *Appeal*.³² Likewise, an article published under the name Cincinatus vigorously condemned women's position in society. Women were oppressed, while man's virtues were praised. Men were also given access to a far wider range of knowledge, whereas women's

²⁹ *Working Bee*, I. 2. 27 July 1839

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ William Thompson, *Appeal of one Half the Human Race*, pp. 202-203

³² *ibid.*, p. 65

mental and physical development was inhibited by the irrational circumstances in which they were placed. However, Cincinnatus held an optimistic view of the future, claiming that man's despotism was nearing its end, and that women were progressing and would soon proclaim equality.³³

Thompson was not the sole figure to advance such views, which would have been common property among the Owenite movement. Catherine Watkins, a frequent contributor to the *New Moral World* under the name Kate, argued that lack of education weakened the female character.³⁴ Another article, of 1839, stated that women were slaves, excluded from equal education, rights and privileges. This article can be seen to have been directly influenced by Thompson, to the extent that it is essentially paraphrasing parts of the *Appeal*.³⁵ The Owenite doctrine of the formation of character underpinned these arguments. In one instance, the concept of the perfectibility of man was applied exclusively to women. Shelly wrote of a world 'inhabited by intelligent females, whose superior mental and moral training, would elevate them beyond the fabled angels'.³⁶ The use of this imagery was probably suggested by the article's wider argument, which was to reject the idea of heaven for the enjoyment of this earth. It is possible that this approach was influenced by concepts of female specialness, of women having a specific moral mission. The emphasis on woman elevated through education could be seen as a rejection of anti-feminist representations of women as 'the Angel in the house'.³⁷ Significantly, this article made a direct connection between paradise on earth and the liberation and education of women. In linking the progress of society to the position of women within it, Shelly was here drawing on a frequently employed argument for improving women's status. Women's position in a society indicated its level of development.³⁸ The argument had been used from the eighteenth century, but its use in Owenite circles was

³³ *Working Bee*, I. 7. 31 August 1839

³⁴ *New Moral World*, I. 33. 13 June 1835

³⁵ *ibid.*, V. 12. 12 January 1839

See William Thompson, *Appeal of one Half the Human Race*, p. 65

³⁶ *New Moral World*, I. 5. 29 November 1834

³⁷ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 30-31

also due to the influence of Charles Fourier.³⁹ For Fourier, human progress was dependent on the degree of freedom enjoyed by women. Changes in the status of women produced changes in society as a whole.⁴⁰

The position of women at Manea Fen would not seem to have borne out this egalitarian approach. As at Queenwood, most of the women at Manea Fen were married.⁴¹ It is probable that, as at the American communities, they found themselves at the colony through having followed their husbands there, rather than having chosen it for themselves. This is supported by the fact that only one woman was ever recorded as having been elected a member. Men, however, were more frequently elected, and married women may have become members through the election of their husbands. For a supposedly democratic community to perpetuate the contemporary practice of having a married woman's interests represented by her husband was a striking indication of the persistence of patriarchal attitudes. Once there, the women would have found that the community offered them fewer opportunities than suggested by socialist rhetoric. In some respects, it would have been a harder life than outside, and for those not committed to the venture's ideology, there would have been less of a sense of compensation through the possibilities of a new lifestyle. Carol Kolmerten's view of the American Owenite communities, that patriarchal assumptions were not challenged by the practices of the communitarians, would seem to be applicable to Manea Fen.⁴²

Despite the emphasis placed on democratic government at Manea Fen, women are noticeable through their absence from the record of the community's official activities. Unfortunately, there are no detailed records of the public meetings. According to the rules of the community, women

³⁸ For example, see the *New Moral World*, I. 33. 13 June 1835; V. 12. 12 January 1839

³⁹ Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860* (Basingstoke, 1985), pp. 21-32

Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 28-29

⁴⁰ Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1984), pp. 92-93

⁴¹ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 146

⁴² Carol Kolmerten, *Women in Utopia*, pp. 2-12

held equal rights with men and were thus entitled to vote. Whether or not this right was exercised cannot be determined. At New Harmony in Indiana, even when women had the right to vote, they did not commonly do so.⁴³ As has been seen above, a number of issues were resolved by general meetings of the whole membership which provided the opportunity for women to influence community policies. Women did participate in the general meeting on November 4, 1839 at which the first Board was elected.⁴⁴

While women did, at least on occasion, participate in public meetings, they played no part in the government of the community beyond this. The six directors and four trustees were all men. Furthermore, the committees formed to arrange educational classes were all occupied by men. That women held no posts at Manea Fen was partly attributable to the domination of these posts by a small group of men. Women were not alone in being excluded from a role in government, for significant numbers of men also played no part. This is the result of a constantly shifting membership, with only a small core of long-term residents. It was men from this group who monopolised the majority of posts, which at least guaranteed a degree of continuity in the government of Manea Fen.

However, this is clearly not an adequate explanation for the non-participation of women. Despite the importance attached to female equality, both at Manea Fen and within the wider Owenite movement, there was a clear reluctance among the membership, both male and female, to elect women to executive positions.⁴⁵ Taylor remarks that women held positions as presidents and secretaries of local branches, although this was not common.⁴⁶ Indeed, it was highly unusual. Mary Wiley was the only female delegate elected to Congress, in 1843, and Mary Jenneson was a branch

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 83

⁴⁴ *Working Bee*, I. 18. 16 November 1839

⁴⁵ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 218-219

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

secretary.⁴⁷ Both came from Branch 16, where Benjamin Warden, sometime branch president, was a firm advocate of female equality.⁴⁸ In the minutes of the Association of All Classes of All Nations, women occasionally figured prominently in the granting of charters to new branches.⁴⁹ Manea Fen may just have been reflecting this wider trend.

The only positions women held were as heads of the various domestic departments. Although this would have provided women with a degree of control over the community's activities, it should rather be seen as reinforcing the gender division of labour at Manea Fen. Attempts to use people in tasks for which they were unsuited proved unsuccessful, and Hodson wrote of the difficulties in employing weavers as labourers in the brick yard.⁵⁰ The lessons learnt in the early days of the community resulted in the recruitment of members to fill specific roles, and advertisements were issued for gardeners, joiners and so forth as required. This division of labour was followed when it came to employing women. All women were employed in the domestic departments. However, this was more than the result of practical concerns. It would not appear that any challenge was posed to the gender division of labour, carried over from the old world. Women do not seem to have been employed at any tasks which they would not have performed outside the community, unlike the men. Hodson explicitly stated that domestic labour was the preserve of women.⁵¹ The only occasion on which women do seem to have been employed at work outside the accepted domestic tasks was the harvest, and this would have been normal practice for the rural population. Instead, the women in the community cleaned the public areas, worked in the kitchen, cared for the children and worked in the seamstress' department. A similar situation

⁴⁷ *New Moral World*, XI. 47. 20 May 1843; XIII. 24. 6 December 1844

Jenneson may have been the wife of Charles Jenneson, the prominent London Owenite and branch member.

⁴⁸ See John and James Powell, *Proceedings of the Second Co-operative Congress*, p. 17 *Social Pioneer*, I. 5. 6 April 1839

For Benjamin Warden see p. 47, n. 65.

⁴⁹ For example, see Association of All Classes of All Nations, Minute book of Directors, 14 August 1838 in *Minute Books of the Owenite Societies*

⁵⁰ *Working Bee*, I. 15. 26 October 1839

prevailed at Queenwood, where the majority of women worked in domestic roles, which required them to work longer hours than the men at the community.⁵²

6.3. The 'woman problem' at Manea Fen

Kolmerten argues that, in American communities, the conflict between Owenite egalitarian rhetoric and the retention of patriarchal attitudes deprived women of the influence they wielded in wider society without providing any compensatory sphere of influence. Thus some women, especially those who were married, became rapidly dissatisfied with community life and exerted a destabilising and disruptive influence, producing a 'woman problem'.⁵³ Many of the elements that Kolmerten believes contributed to this were present at Manea Fen. Women were confined to domestic labour, and were denied individual control over households. The tasks they performed were for the community as a whole. Children were cared for communally. They slept and were educated together. Women, other than their mothers, were appointed to wash and clothe them. Families were thus broken down, their responsibilities transferred outwards, onto the community as a whole. This reflects Owen's desire to expand the individual family, which he perceived as a significant force in the creation of a fragmented society and a selfish desire for individual advancement. Women were thus deprived of the power and influence they would have exercised over their own families. As the government of the community was male-dominated, women were not offered an alternative sphere of influence.

There is some evidence that there was a 'woman problem' at the community. Hodson evidently regarded women as less reliable members. At the Rational Society's 1840 Congress, Hodson argued that candidates should serve twelve months before becoming eligible for election to

⁵¹ *ibid.*, I. 2. 27 July 1839

⁵² Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 147

membership. This he regarded as especially useful in the case of married members, as 'it sometimes happened that however good a member the husband might be, the wife was most unsuitable from some cause of other.'⁵⁴ This would seem to have been the case with the Crawfords. Of Mrs Crawford, the *Working Bee* wrote, 'those who have seen his wife, and know her, would justify us in expelling her.'⁵⁵ On this occasion the community found it convenient to support the sanctity of marriage, and demanded that Charles Crawford also leave, despite his pleas to stay.

In the *Working Bee*, Hodson wrote that he had spoken with women who had left community. These women complained that they had been made to work much harder in community than normally, and that their husbands could support them in greater ease in the wider world.⁵⁶ Hodson wrote this to prepare future members for the hard work needed to build a community. In these statements Hodson has identified women as being less likely to prove dependable members. Edmund Wastney supported Hodson's view when he wrote to a friend, complaining of the early members, that 'several of the women came at last to the final conclusion that they would not do any thing [*sic*] at all for any person but their own husbands'.⁵⁷ In this Manea Fen was similar to Queenwood. John Finch wrote that many arrived there with 'very erroneous notions of what Community life is', and that the women especially were initially dissatisfied.⁵⁸ William Pare stated that women at Queenwood were 'inattentive to orders'.⁵⁹

These statements support the suggestion made above that some of the women present at Manea Fen would have followed their husbands there, rather than have chosen to go themselves, which clearly raises doubts as to their commitment. There is also some evidence that women argued among

⁵³ Carol Kolmerten, *Women in Utopia*, pp. 90-91

⁵⁴ *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement)

⁵⁵ *Working Bee*, I. 1. 20 July 1839

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 5. 4 July 1840

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

⁵⁸ For John Finch see p. 88, n. 51.

themselves. Kolmerten has claimed that arguments over apparently immaterial issues, such as the colour of trousers at the Blue Springs community, should be seen as a reaction on the part of women to their powerlessness within the community structure.⁶⁰ At Manea Fen the Board had some difficulty in allocating the kitchen positions amongst the women. This may have reflected the struggle of the women at the community to maintain some degree of control, in a situation where all other aspects of their lives were determined by the male-dominated community as a whole. The situation of women at Manea Fen demonstrated the tension between egalitarian rhetoric and a failure to challenge, or perhaps even to recognise, the paternalist assumptions underlying the roles allocated to women. As Kolmerten has argued, equality came to mean shared tasks, but these tasks remained divided by gender.

However, while this situation would seem to have led to discontent for some women, this was not a universal response. Elizabeth Green remained at Manea Fen, with her son, after her husband was forced to leave the community. E. T. Craig wrote that Lucy Wastney, there with her husband Edmund, was a committed socialist.⁶¹ For these women Manea Fen clearly offered something that could not be found in the outside world. Elizabeth Green may have stayed to ensure that her son continued to benefit from the education offered at Manea Fen, which would probably have been superior to that readily available elsewhere. This would also have been true for the adult members. The opportunities for female participation in education and in social activities were part of the attraction of the Rational Society branches, and the same would have been true of community life.⁶² The pages of the *Working Bee* also offered women a political platform which would have been denied them elsewhere. Lucy and Alice both wrote

⁵⁹ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 148

⁶⁰ Carol Kolmerten, *Women in Utopia*, p. 99

⁶¹ E. T. Craig to Robert Owen, 28 July 1839. ROCC 1132

⁶² See Eileen Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture' in Sidney Pollard and John Salt (eds.), *Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor* (London, 1971), pp. 96-97
Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 230-232

frequent articles for the *Working Bee*, in which they discussed issues relating to women's position in society.

6. 4. Marriage and scandal

'The marriage question has been a subject on which our opponents have either misunderstood, or wilfully mis-represented me', wrote William Hodson in July 1839.⁶³ Manea Fen was greatly criticised for its attitudes towards marriage, especially following the rumours of licentious behaviour which emerged in April 1839. Marriage was one of the most controversial areas of Owenite ideology, and one which aroused many opponents. During a journey in February 1840 Hodson fell into conversation with a man in the Commercial Travellers' Room at Long Sutton. This man had heard of the community, and proceeded to tell Hodson, who did not reveal his identity, what he had heard. According to this stranger, the President of the community had twenty-five illegitimate children, and that all the women were part of his harem. The other members were the same, and they all changed wives weekly.⁶⁴ Such beliefs may not have been uncommon, and Manea Fen was attacked on other occasions for its 'lax notions' of marriage.⁶⁵ The *Working Bee*, in common with Owen himself and the *New Moral World*, was anxious to dispel this perception of their views on marriage as encouraging licentious behaviour. That the Hodsonians were condemned for their views does not distance them from the wider Owenite movement.

Criticism of marriage in the *Working Bee* rested on Owenite views on character formation, and the belief that feelings and opinions are shaped by external forces. Marriage was condemned as unnatural. As Alice wrote, 'If we cannot love as we like, why attempt to bind persons together who do not mutually love?' Emotions were beyond human control, and thus, 'why

⁶³ *Working Bee*, I. 2. 27 July 1839

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, I. 31. 15 February 1840

⁶⁵ For example, *ibid.*, I. 6. 24 August 1839

should sexual connections be more fettered than hunger or thirst?'⁶⁶ This argument can be found in many Owenite criticisms of marriage.

Owen's principal condemnation of the marriage system, *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World*, stated that marriages were 'blasphemy ... against the laws of their nature, for man or woman to make any promises or engagements relative to their future feelings ... for each other.'⁶⁷ Manea Fen would have had access to the *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World* as they were printed in the first volume of the *New Moral World*, held in the community library. Arguing from this basis, marriage was held to adversely effect human nature. The artificial constraints it placed on behaviour trained couples in deception and infidelity.⁶⁸

Motives for marriage were also condemned. The upper classes were claimed to arrange marriages to maintain their family status, or in pursuit of titles and wealth. Motives among other classes were equally mercenary.⁶⁹ The *Working Bee* was here again advocating orthodox Owenite arguments. These points can be found in articles and reports of lectures in the *New Moral World*, as well as in the *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World*.⁷⁰ In contrast to these motivations, the *Working Bee* argued that marriage should be based solely on affection. Hodson wrote of 'unions of affection purely', and another article described marriage as being ideally a 'union of the sexes with mutual sympathy of feeling, sentiment and affection'.⁷¹

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, I. 9. 14 September 1839

⁶⁷ Robert Owen, 'Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World' (1835) in Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. II., p. 271

⁶⁸ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 19. 10 October 1840

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Robert Owen, 'Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World' (1835) in Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. II., p. 267; see also, for example, the *New Moral World*, I. 39. 25 July 1835; VI. 57. 23 November 1839

⁷¹ *Working Bee*, I. 2. 27 July 1839; New Series, I. 19. 10 October 1840

Opponents frequently claimed that such marriages would merely increase prostitution. In their defence the Owenites appropriated the language of their critics, and claimed that any marriage not based on affection was itself prostitution.⁷² Owen wrote that contemporary marriage was itself one of the main causes of prostitution, and that it inevitably followed a marriage, without affection, enforced by laws and customs.⁷³ The *Working Bee* followed this argument in response to 'Precious Twaddle from the Morning Post', which had featured an account of a woman deserted by her husband after having been married by Owen. The *Working Bee* denied the basis of the story, but argued that even if it had any validity, it still failed to provide a well-founded criticism of Owen's views. As married men were prostitution's main supporters, argued the *Working Bee*, how could it possibly increase under Owen's scheme?⁷⁴

Marriage was at the centre of the scandal which erupted in April 1839. This crisis cost the experiment several members, and served to confirm the opinions of its critics. In their attacks critics hinted at licentious behaviour and implied that the community had adopted some form of free love. The accuracy of these attacks is questionable. Marriage was a sensitive subject, even among committed Owenites. Furthermore, the community's main opponents all had additional reasons for wishing to discredit the colony. The community's behaviour appears to have been far more mundane than alleged by its critics. While the community did attack marriage as it then stood, this did not lead to an advocacy of free love. Rather, the community adopted Owen's position and argued for marriage to be reformed and for the introduction of a system of divorce. The issue of marriage was raised as part of an attempt to ensure a shared and common understanding of the community's ideological basis among its members. It was this attempt, and the misunderstanding which flowed from it, which initiated the scandal. The community's position on marriage, although

⁷² *ibid.*, New Series, I. 19. 10 October 1840

⁷³ Robert Owen, 'Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World' (1835) in Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. II., p. 293

⁷⁴ *Working Bee*, I. 18. 16 November 1839

within the bounds of orthodox Owenism, was still sufficient to have fuelled the scandal.

The scandal was precipitated by two resolutions passed at the community in late March or early April. The resolutions provoked some members to leave, and it was their accounts of the resolutions which produced the scandal. The trouble seems to have begun with the first resolution, which stated that the community was to carry out Owen's ideas as soon as possible.⁷⁵ Discussion of the resolution had evidently included the issue of marriage. Owen himself was aware of the difficulty of discussing marriage, as it was a contentious area even for Owenites, as was shown by the crisis at Manea Fen.⁷⁶ The scandal was reported primarily by the Manchester committee. Among those who left were three members, Flitcroft, Fletcher, and Crawford, who were later interviewed by the Manchester committee. On the basis of this meeting, as well as a letter from another member, Woofenden, the committee decided that the rumours of licentious behaviour were justified and broke their connection with Manea Fen.

The committee claimed that Woofenden wrote that Hodson and Rowbotham said that a union of affection was an evil, and that 'indiscriminate connexion of the sexes' was the true principle. This was to be implemented as soon as possible, and that all of those who were not prepared to do so were to leave. Consequently all the married members were leaving.⁷⁷ A theatrical performance, in which Hodson had featured, was also mentioned, but no details were given, through delicacy.⁷⁸ However, the East London Branch 1 had also spoken to Woofenden, and they had merely regarded the scandal as a difference of opinion.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the three members interviewed by the Manchester committee

⁷⁵ *Social Pioneer*, I. 7. 20 April 1839

⁷⁶ Robert Owen, 'Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World' (1835) in Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. II., p. 263

⁷⁷ *Social Pioneer*, I. 8. 27 April 1839

⁷⁸ How much substance there was to this rumour is uncertain, although Hodson did make a gift of theatrical equipment to the community. (*Working Bee*, I. 12. 5 October 1839)

may all have had their own reasons for leaving the community. Crawford apparently left through a dispute over wages.⁸⁰ Flitcroft had a wife, pregnant with his second child, and a young daughter at home in Bolton, and may thus have been particularly sensitive to Owenite discussions of marriage. Fletcher may have been his wife's brother or father.⁸¹

The Manchester committee itself also had additional reasons for turning against Hodson, stemming from their anger at his failure to comply with what they understood as the terms of their relationship. It had been established to aid Manea Fen by raising funds, vetting members and organising local branches. Although Hodson urged the committee to raise funds, he refused to discuss his plans or resources. Hodson's dealings with a Mrs. M-n also angered the committee. They had understood that they were to vet all members, and yet Hodson had written to Mrs. M-n saying that she and her friend, a Miss D, could come to the community without going through the committee. This behaviour was condemned by the committee as treachery.⁸² Clearly, the scandal was not the sole reason for the committee's decision to abandon Manea Fen.

The committee's anger at its dealings with Hodson led them to condemn the community before they had interviewed the three members. In first breaking the news of the scandal the committee said merely that it had become aware of certain rumours. If the rumours proved to be true, the committee would sever all connection with Manea Fen.⁸³ However, despite this impression of considered restraint, members of the committee had already written to the *Star in the East*, a local radical paper largely hostile to

⁷⁹ *Social Pioneer*, I. 6. 13 April 1839

⁸⁰ *New Moral World*, V. 33. 8 June 1839

⁸¹ Marriage Certificate, James Flitcroft and Jane France, 31 January 1838 at Bolton-le-Moors, Lancashire: certified copy obtained from Family Records Centre, London Family Records Centre, London, Registrar General's Index of Births, Alice Flitcroft, June quarter 1838, Bolton District, vol. XXI, p. 91; Joseph Flitcroft, September quarter 1839, Bolton District, vol. XXI, p. 85

My thanks to Edward Royle for providing me with these references.

Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 146

⁸² *Social Pioneer*, I. 8. 27 April 1839

⁸³ *ibid.*, I. 6. 13 April 1839

Manea Fen, attacking Hodson for attempting to implement 'principles repudiated and strongly condemned by ourselves and our fellow Socialists'.⁸⁴ While the Manchester committee may only recently have become aware of the rumours, the *Star in the East* claimed to have received letters on the subject, but as private correspondence, which the paper had felt unable to publish. It now offered to find work for any members of Manea Fen who wished to leave, but were trapped there through lack of funds.⁸⁵ The paper was presumably pleased to have its opinion of Hodson's venture confirmed. It had previously referred to the colony as the 'Manea (alias maniac) scheme', and now labelled it an 'absurd and mischievous piece of Tom-Foolery'.⁸⁶

The community defended itself against these allegations by claiming that it supported nothing not advocated by Owen himself. They argued that the scandal had arisen because some members were not aware the full extent of Owen's beliefs, and had been shocked to discover that he argued that marriage should be reformed. Samuel Rowbotham, the community's secretary, wrote asking Owen to investigate both sides of the issue. 'As you are perhaps aware we have had a little confusion in our Society owing to the principles which have been advocated therein, and owing to parties not knowing that there is something more in your system than merely an improved mode of producing and distributing wealth.'⁸⁷

The community was not alone in asserting that the principles it advocated were orthodox Owenism, and that a mere misunderstanding lay at the bottom of the crisis. As mentioned above, the East London Branch 1 spoke to Woofenden. Woofenden said that while he agreed with the colonists' aims, he opposed the means employed. According to his report, the colonists aimed at ending all matrimonial engagements. Faced with this evidence, the branch merely stated that it regretted the differences of

⁸⁴ *Star in the East*, III. 135. 13 April 1839

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, III. 125. 2 February 1839; III. 135. 13 April 1839

⁸⁷ Samuel Rowbotham to Robert Owen, 20 April 1839. ROCC 1094

opinion at the colony, and that to prevent future recurrences all members should belong to the Rational Society (later changed to members of the Hodsonian Society).⁸⁸ Clearly the meeting found little cause for alarm. Another figure who was little perturbed by the crisis was E. T. Craig. Craig had the advantage over other observers of actually having visited the community after the scandal was first announced. Indeed, Craig joined the community, with his wife, at about the time of the scandal, an indication of how little he was concerned by the crisis. He reported that the resolutions were in accordance with Owen, although the members may have misinterpreted Owen's views to a certain extent. The response was, he judged, out of proportion with what had actually been done.⁸⁹

The community's claim that their views were more moderate than their opponents claimed appears largely accurate. It seems likely that Hodson wished to see Owen's condemnations of religious marriages translated into practice. This may have meant a denial of the necessity for marriage, and an advocacy of free, unconstrained relationships in this sense, rather than 'indiscriminate connexion of the sexes'. Such a policy would have been sufficient to have generated the outrage that many members clearly felt. Although the *Working Bee* strongly attacked church marriages, as shown above, this should not be equated with an advocacy of anything other than monogamy. In the preamble to the society's rules, church marriages were condemned, but were to be replaced by a system of 'regulated Marriage and Divorce'.⁹⁰ The rules referred to Harriet Martineau's *Society in America*, where Martineau advocates easy divorce, arguing that it would lead to more stable marriages. There is no advocacy of any other form of relationship in the *Working Bee*.⁹¹

The allegations of debauched behaviour would seem to be unfounded. Manea Fen does seem, however, to have accepted unmarried

⁸⁸ *Social Pioneer*, I. 6. 13 April 1839

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, I. 7. 20 April 1839

⁹⁰ *Rules of the Hodsonian Community Society*, pp. v-vi

⁹¹ Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (3 vols., New York, 1837)

couples. Hodson himself was living, unmarried, with the sister of his deceased wife.⁹² Unfortunately, Hodson provides the sole certain example. Barbara Taylor has identified a further woman, Alice, who would seem to have been 'living with the consequences of a liberated lifestyle'.⁹³ However, there were few single women living in the community who were named in the pages of the *Working Bee*. While a lack of detailed records prohibits definite statements, it seems as if the vast majority of members after April 1839 were either single men or married couples. This was due to the recruitment policy of only accepting those who had a skill that could be utilised by the community, which in practice meant single men. Families were supported where possible. The community also supported Elizabeth Green and her child after John Green, her husband, was expelled, indicating a tolerant attitude on the part of the membership.⁹⁴ A reputation for licentiousness would thus not seem to be borne out by patterns of recruitment.

Any fears that those who fled the colony in April 1839 had as to the compulsory enforcement of Hodson's supposed views on marriage would appear to have been unfounded. A few months after his resignation of membership, the former trustee David Jones married Sarah Cleaver, a local from the nearby village of Welney, in October 1840. Some members attended the wedding.⁹⁵ Marriage clearly remained acceptable, as Hodson had written in the letter published by the *Social Pioneer*. Despite allegations of libertine behaviour, Hodson seems to have aimed at no more than an implementation of Owen's views on marriage, for those who wished it. This alone would have been sufficient to generate the scandal and outrage the community attracted.

This moderate interpretation of the scandal is borne out by the context in which the resolutions were passed. During the spring of 1839

⁹² *Working Bee*, I. 31. 15 February 1840

⁹³ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 257

⁹⁴ *Working Bee*, I. 19. 23 November 1839

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 22. 14 December 1839

large numbers of members left Manea Fen. An examination of the context for these departures suggests that the resolutions which provoked the scandal may have been intended to ensure an ideologically committed membership at a time when the community encountered difficulties stemming from a disunited body of members unsure of the community's principles. It also indicates the relative importance of the scandal, which appears as one small, if highly publicised, episode which bears more significance in terms of perceptions of the community than of indicating behaviour within it. The scandal does, however, reflect the difficulties involved in recruiting and maintaining members in an ideologically motivated venture, and the great need for unity in a small-scale community divorced from wider society.

Barbara Taylor rejects the community's explanation of the crisis and emphasises the importance of the community's views on marriage to the scandal and the departure of the members.⁹⁶ While it is certain that marriage was at the centre of the scandal, to attribute the departure of all those who left to the scandal is an oversimplification. Some undoubtedly left because of the scandal, but many others left for more mundane reasons. In rejecting a Leeds applicant in July 1839, the *Working Bee* wrote that a nucleus of members was now formed and that 'In its formation we have experienced great pain, in being compelled to dispense with the services of many, who we are afraid are for ever spoiled by a vicious system of training.'⁹⁷ The *Working Bee* was here referring to a large-scale reorganisation of the membership, which would appear to have occurred shortly after the scandal.

Between April and July 1839 a large number of members left Manea Fen. In part, this was due to the marriage scandal. However, it also seems that a significant number left or were expelled after this time. The need for a reorganisation of the membership was indicated by Edmund Wastney, one of the first directors, when he wrote to a friend describing the condition of

⁹⁶ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, pp. 253-258

⁹⁷ *Working Bee*, I. 1. 20 July 1839

the community. Wastney arrived at Manea Fen in late March or early April, shortly before the scandal broke in the socialist press. At the time of his arrival he found the community to be in a very poor state. He wrote of these early members

They did not as practical men commence to improve the circumstances in which they were placed ... They commenced finding fault one with another, and with every thing around them.⁹⁸

The members as a whole were unsuited to the hard labour needed to establish a functioning community, and held unrealistic notions of the life they would lead there. Wastney found that the community, consisting at this time of thirty members, was being cared for by seven women and four men in the household department, and he scathingly criticised the community's inefficiency.

...washing the linen was a thing they never thought about, this was an occupation by which their delicate hands would have been for ever degraded; this, forsooth, must be put out to be done by other parties who had never heard of communities.⁹⁹

At Queenwood too non-members were employed in the laundry as 'many females were over-nice about doing the laundry-work', indicating a reluctance on the part of women to adapt to the practical demands of the community and reflecting a lack of commitment.¹⁰⁰ Communal spirit was lacking, and Wastney complained that members argued amongst themselves, and had split into two hostile camps. The men spent their time in local brothels, even paying with community funds, which may have

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 148

contributed to the community's reputation as a harem.¹⁰¹ His complaints were supported by an anonymous social missionary from Manchester, who wrote that the community's first secretary, Samuel Rowbotham, had been unwise when choosing members, and that some were known drunkards.¹⁰² The community expelled a number of members during the first months for failing to contribute fully to the community. Manea Fen had difficulties in building up a membership of committed socialists, rather than men and women seeking a life of reduced labour. As shown in the previous chapter, the community attracted people with unrealistic expectations of the work required. Given this situation, it appears likely that the resolutions which provoked the scandal of April 1839 may have been intended to reinforce the community's socialist ideals, and to ensure that its members accepted its ideological basis.

While it is possible that these explanations were intended to conceal the extent of opposition to its views on marriage, Wastney's explanation need not be discounted. Many of those who signed a letter to the *Social Pioneer* in April defending Manea Fen against the charges of licentiousness had almost certainly left themselves by July 1839. Clearly, these members would not have left as a result of the scandal. Charles Crawford, who was interviewed by the Manchester committee, provided a less salacious reason for members leaving the colony. In a letter to the *New Moral World* in June, Crawford warned those thinking of joining Manea Fen against the colony, claiming that members had left owing to Hodson's failure to pay them the agreed wages.¹⁰³ That Crawford expected wages shows him to have been a candidate, rather than a full member, as the latter received no wages (neither in theory nor in practice).

¹⁰¹ *Working Bee*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

Holyoake, writing in 1906, was to remember Manea Fen as a harem, although Holyoake opposed the Manea Fen experiment as he believed that it hindered operations at Queenwood. He wrote of Manea Fen, 'The projector, Mr. Hodgson [*sic*], was a handsome and lusty farmer, who heard from clerical adversaries that a community might serve harem as well as public purposes'. (G. J. Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation*, vol. I., p. 182)

¹⁰² *Working Bee*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

¹⁰³ *New Moral World*, V. 33. 8 June 1839

Another member who left at the time of the scandal, but for reasons in no way associated with it, was E. T. Craig, the community's teacher. Craig joined Manea Fen at about the time of the scandal, with his wife, and clearly was not dissuaded by the community's views. Within a few months, however, he and his wife had left. In a letter to Robert Owen, Craig explained that he had been forced into leaving by the continual mismanagement of the community and the ill feeling that this generated among the members. After leaving, Craig went to Wisbech, from where he reported that two days after his departure a further four members also left.¹⁰⁴ Craig's explanation supports Wastney by indicating that the community was facing difficulties in establishing a true communal spirit and efficient organisation. Furthermore, Craig also shows that a number of members left more than three months after the scandal first broke. It would seem that the scandal was not the sole, or even the major, reason for parties having left Manea Fen in this period.

Thus, although a significant number of members did leave the colony soon after the scandal, only a few departures can definitely be attributed to it. For the remainder, there would seem to be little evidence to lead one to doubt the community's own explanations. Once it is clear that there was not simply one exodus, then Taylor's assumption that a second draft of members arrived, prepared to live according to Hodson's supposed views, would seem to be less compelling.¹⁰⁵ That a significant number of members left for reasons disassociated from the crisis reduces its relative importance. Furthermore, allegations of libertine behaviour were not made by the social body after April 1839, and the Rational Society came to discuss the possibility of union between the two communities of Manea Fen and Queenwood. This would have been unthinkable if Manea Fen had continued to be perceived as a den of licentious behaviour.

¹⁰⁴ E. T. Craig to Robert Owen, 28 July 1839. ROCC 1132

¹⁰⁵ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, p. 255

6. 5. Conclusion

Manea Fen's claims to equality were an important part of both its theoretical basis and its attraction. In contrast to its larger contemporary, the Queenwood community, Manea Fen offered a higher degree of autonomy and democracy to its membership. This was a significant element in its attraction, as can be seen in the name 'Democratic Socialists', chosen by a group in Bolton who wished to form a local Hodsonian branch in 1839.¹⁰⁶ The opportunities the community offered for sexual equality were also seized upon by outside observers. For Benjamin Warden, a member of the Hodsonian East London Branch 1, this was an important part of Manea Fen's activities.¹⁰⁷ In meeting these expectations the community faced a number of obstacles. The extent to which the community could achieve a high degree of democracy was handicapped by the position and influence Hodson, despite his protestations, clearly retained. In offering sexual equality the community faced the practical constraints imposed by the need to achieve financial self-sufficiency, and more importantly, the persistence of patriarchal attitudes.

Hodson's offer of land, while eagerly accepted by many within the communitarian movement, could not but bring certain compromises in its train. The constitution ensured his initial influence, while the money that he poured into the venture sealed the dependence of the community upon his continued support. Under the terms of the constitution, Hodson held the position of president for the first five years. This, coupled with his authority to appoint two of the six directors, clearly ensured that he wielded a high degree of influence. How far he chose to do so against the wishes of the members is unclear. There is, however, no indication within the pages of the *Working Bee* that Hodson acted in opposition to the membership. The meeting of 1840 which discussed the reform of distribution within the community, and at which Hodson withdrew his proposals in the face of the

¹⁰⁶ *Social Pioneer*, I. 4. 30 March 1839

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, I. 5. 6 April 1839

resistance of the members, indicates that the members did have a degree of autonomy. Many other issues were decided by the membership as a whole, from the adoption of a uniform to the admission of new members.

While the constitution did provide for a high degree of democracy, it rested on rather precarious foundations. The issue of Hodson's influence within the terms of the constitution was far outweighed by his importance as the community's financial supporter. The community's complete financial dependence on Hodson gave him a degree of influence that far exceeded any influence that he may have derived from his constitutional position. This became clear in February 1841 when Hodson forced the closure of the colony. The fears of Manea Fen's doubters were borne out. This should not question Hodson's initial enthusiasm, but as the community failed to become financially self-sufficient Hodson clearly despaired of ever reaching the day when he would no longer have to subsidise its activities. Not only was Hodson funding the venture, but he was running into increasing debt as he did so.¹⁰⁸ Despite the opposition of the members, Hodson was still able to close the community. The members did not go willingly, but without Hodson's continued support there was little that could be done. This is the only certain example of Hodson forcing his will through against the resistance of the members. While Hodson's position may have ultimately compromised the democratic constitution of the community, it would appear that the members still exercised, and enjoyed, a high degree of democracy.

While in theory the community offered women complete equality with men, in reality this too was compromised. Women did participate in the election of the directors, and may have voted at other group meetings, but they held none of the positions of authority within the community. The community also maintained a strict gender division of labour, and women were almost exclusively employed in domestic tasks. To a certain extent, this was the result of the practical demands operating upon the community. Manea Fen had discovered early that it was unwise to employ people in jobs

¹⁰⁸ See chapter eight for a discussion of Manea Fen's financial situation.

for which they had no experience, and this applied to men as well as women. This is not a complete explanation, and it is clear that there was also a retention of more patriarchal attitudes from wider society. It would not appear that there was any attempt to challenge the perceived roles of women within the community.

However, it is also apparent that the community offered a number of opportunities for women that were not available in society as a whole. The educational programme is an example of this, as is the opportunity offered by the *Working Bee* for the expression of women's views. The community's child care policy, in which children were cared for communally, mounted a significant challenge on the conventional family structure, and would have freed women for other tasks. For women such as Elizabeth Green, who remained in the community when her husband was expelled, Manea Fen clearly offered opportunities that could not be found outside community. The position of women in Manea Fen essentially reflected that of women in the wider socialist movement, and was similar to that at the contemporary Queenwood community. The promise of sexual equality was only partially borne out, but still attained a level not to be found in wider society at this time.

CHAPTER 7. LIFE IN THE MANEA FEN COMMUNITY

7. Introduction

Any attempt to create a functioning society must face a range of problems, especially where that society is to be based on a very different set of ideals to those of the surrounding population. In 1839, as has been seen in the previous chapter, Manea Fen suffered from the presence of members who were not fully committed to the community, or who were labouring under a misapprehension of its ideals and aims. In common with other communal experiments of the same period, Manea Fen employed a range of mechanisms, both intentional and implicit, in an attempt to inculcate the membership with a sense of belonging and of shared values.

Life within the community was structured by the beliefs of the members. The deliberate rejection of wider society which had led the members to join the colony necessitated the development of an alternative way of life, and a new calendar emerged, shaped by socialist ideals. While the marking of particular rites aided the creation of a socialist identity, this process was aided by a range of other factors. Analysis of the American communities of the nineteenth century has demonstrated the importance of elements such as architecture and clothing. At Manea Fen the very layout of the community embodied a concept of community, and would have served to reinforce awareness of living in community. The uniform clothing adopted by the members functioned in a similar way. Such factors will be considered here, along with the attitudes they embodied and served to enforce. Finally, the raising of the children of the community will be considered. Within the educational programme offered by the community there is an evident tension between the demands of the society which the members sought to leave behind, and the beliefs and ideals that underlay the venture.

7. 1. Patterns of membership

The need for the variety of forces employed to create a sense of community becomes readily apparent when the origins of Manea Fen's membership are considered. While most members were drawn from the Owenite branches, and would thus have had a certain degree of shared background, they came from different parts of the country, and had performed different trades. Manea Fen attracted a range of different people, and to ensure that only suitable persons were accepted the community insisted that all wishing to join apply in writing.¹ They would then have to serve a period as a candidate, before becoming a full member. In this way Manea Fen hoped to avoid the membership problems that had plagued New Harmony in Indiana. Owen's community had suffered greatly from an influx of unqualified members of doubtful commitment, without being able simply to turn them away. However, as was seen in the previous chapter, Manea Fen clearly encountered its own difficulties in establishing a suitable membership.

The problems facing any attempt to instil a sense of belonging and membership were compounded by the patterns of membership at Manea Fen. Although no more than fifty persons, not including labourers, seem to have resided at the community at any one time, significantly more people than this passed through Manea Fen over its lifetime. Through the pages of the *Working Bee* glimpses are offered of an ever changing membership. A constant element was provided by a stable core of members. These members also filled most of the significant posts, serving on the Board or as trustees. The Cutting and Wastney families, Joseph Davidge, Thomas Doughty, Elizabeth Green, George and Ann Dunn, and Thomas and Harriott [sic] Hodges were all resident for almost two years. Of these, William Cutting, Edmund Wastney, Joseph Davidge, Thomas Doughty, George Dunn, and Thomas Hodges all served, at one time or another, as members of

¹ This requirement would have limited the numbers of potential applicants, as at this time significant numbers of the working classes were illiterate. The community either assumed that this would not prove a problem for those interested in Manea Fen, or decided that the

the board or as trustees, or as both.² Around this core a far larger number of people came and went. As there are no detailed membership lists, it is difficult to determine how long members stayed at the community. Many members were only mentioned once, and it is probable that a significant number were never mentioned at all. It is clear, however, that many would have lived at Manea Fen for only a few months. Robert Slingsby and his wife were resident for four months in 1840, while Thomas Cropper lasted only two months before he was expelled in the same year.

7. 2. The creation of a socialist identity

With this shifting membership, the community clearly needed to structure the life of its members in such a way as to reflect and reinforce its socialist ideals. In her analysis of the social life of the local Owenite branches, Eileen Yeo divided branch life into weekly, annual, and life cycles.³ This approach will be adopted here, as it permits an examination of the way in which the structure of the life of the community was shaped around the particular needs and beliefs of the community.

Manea Fen's weekly cycle was largely shaped by the community's educational programme. Education occupied a central position within the Owenite movement. Owen stressed the importance of education in his early works. *A New View of Society* held inadequate education to be the cause of the world's miseries and evils. Education was essential for social reform. The centrality of education in the Owenite movement was reflected in the

need to approve members in advance outweighed the risk of excluding potential applicants. At least one member of Manea Fen, Susan Cutting, was unable to sign her name.

² Little is known about the individual members of Manea Fen. The Cutting family came to Manea Fen from Penzance, where William Cutting was a smith and farrier. His membership certificate is included in appendix B, pp. 361-362. After leaving the community he went to London, and then to Rochester. James Cutting later emigrated to Ontario. Edmund Wastney was a former secretary of the Warrington branch of the Rational Society, and was present with his wife Lucy and two children. Joseph Davidge was a London tailor, and secretary of the Finsbury branch. Elizabeth Green was the wife of John Green, social missionary, who was forced to leave the community. George and Ann Dunn came from Warrington. The Hodges came from Leicester, where Thomas was a framework knitter.

³ Eileen Yeo, 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', pp. 95-106

provision of classes at Owenite local branches. At Manea Fen education was the principal organised activity for the colonists, outside the work of the community. The members had a twofold purpose here: to provide a basic education; and also to produce people fit for the new moral world, well versed in socialist values.

Classes were offered six evenings a week. The week began with 'Ethics and Metaphysics' on Monday, which seems to have been one of the less popular choices. 'Branches of Natural Philosophy' followed on Tuesday, with 'Grammar and Elocution' on Thursday. Friday evening was taken up with music and dancing. Saturday featured a mutual instruction class, and a lecture was offered on Sunday.⁴ The above seems to have been the final form of the classes, but some form of class or lecture ran for most of the period from late 1839 to the community's collapse. Such classes clearly served a number of purposes. A desire for basic education was present, and the *Working Bee* proudly related that a number of local farm labourers, who had begun the classes illiterate, were now able to read and write.⁵ The music and dancing classes would also have provided a no doubt welcome source of entertainment in the isolated community. However, in providing an opportunity for discussion and debate, and through bringing the members together outside their work, the classes would also have helped create a community spirit. Implicit within the provision of an educational programme that occupied so much of the week may have been a desire to bring the community together.

The different values of the members were clearly demonstrated by the culmination of the week in an educational lecture, rather than in the observance of the Sabbath. It was the habitual practice of the members to dedicate Sunday to the 'acquisition of useful knowledge', rather than to observe the holiday. Yet this Sunday meeting was organised almost as if it was a church service. The lecture was preceded and followed by a rendition

⁴ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 17. 26 September 1840

⁵ *ibid.*, I. 40. 18 April 1840

of a Social Hymn, suggesting that the lecture thus appeared in place of a sermon.⁶ There is no indication that members attended the local churches regularly, or held religious services themselves. That the community retained this particular form raises a number of questions. It may be that the lecture was intended as a weekly parody, to be enjoyed by the rationally educated communitarians. Alternatively, the Sunday gatherings could have been addressing an emotional need that would have otherwise been unsatisfied. Irrespective of the community's stance, such a form of gathering clearly had significant benefits for the creation of a sense of group identity. Rosabeth Kanter has stressed the importance of group ritual. Collective participation in recurring events of symbolic importance is held to enhance what Kanter terms 'communion'. This is a sense of belonging or 'we-feeling', an important element in an enduring community. Music, here supplied by the singing of the Social Hymn, serves an important ritual function on such occasions.⁷ These Sunday meetings would thus have served a significant ritual purpose.

This creation of a specific social pattern was also apparent in the annual and life cycles of the community. The community recognised a different set of holidays. Owen's birthday was celebrated by the members in 1840 with a half day's holiday and a dance.⁸ No mention, on the contrary, was made of Christmas. Dates of significance to the Christian world were replaced by those with resonance for the communitarians. The marking of the rites of passage also gave the community an opportunity to reinforce its ideals. A clear demonstration of this was the burial of Hodson's daughter in a vault on community land in January 1840. At the funeral the pall bearers wore the community costume. The children were shown the body, to teach them that death was the end, and that the body was

⁶ *ibid.*, I. 21. 7 December 1839; New Series, I. 6. 11 July 1840

⁷ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, pp. 98-102

⁸ *Working Bee*, I. 45. 23 May 1840

'a mere collection of simple elements'.⁹ The funeral of another child was held at the community in June of that year.¹⁰

For a funeral to be conducted in this manner represents a significant break with accepted practice. The use of the funeral as an educational exercise seems almost stereotypically Owenite, but the wearing of costume and the decision to bury the child on community land were extreme statements of Hodson's opposition to the established Church. When James Melson died at the Queenwood community he was buried in the local churchyard, and the *New Moral World* bore witness to the struggles of socialists to have their friends or relatives buried in graveyards.¹¹ The refusal to recognise religious teachings was clearly far more than a theoretical exercise for the colonists. The one marriage to be conducted during the life of the community, that of David Jones to Sarah Cleaver, provides an exception to this, but Cleaver was not a community member. Overall, the rituals employed by the community to mark significant days or events were clearly imbued with socialist ideology. Such rituals would have served to reinforce both the ideological position of the society, and also, through emphasising the distinction between the colony and wider society, its sense of identity and of community.

7. 3. Architecture and clothing: forces for unity

Communal spirit, fostered by the arrangement of the community's social life outlined above, was also supported by other elements. The demands of communal life can be seen in both the layout of Manea Fen and in the design of the members' clothing. Both served to reinforce the communal lifestyle, and to inspire a sense of belonging. The very appearance of the colony, and owing to the adoption of a costume, of the members themselves, implied a notion of community.

⁹ *ibid.*, I. 28. 25 January 1840

¹⁰ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 8. 25 July 1840

¹¹ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 140
For example, see the *New Moral World*, IV. 202. 8 September 1838

A costume was officially adopted in June 1840. The decision was made by the membership as a whole, at a Special General Meeting.¹² Hodson himself had appeared in some form of community costume to speak to members of the Rational Society in late 1839.¹³ Men wore green trousers and tunics, with a cap, while women also wore trousers. A visitor described the men as 'somewhat like the representation of Robin Hood and his foresters'.¹⁴ The children also seem to have worn a costume. In designing their attire the *Working Bee* reported that they were anxious to ensure that it would not '...offend the eye, nor make the wearer an object of curiosity to every bystander', a rather optimistic aim that perhaps reflected the adults' experience of appearing in costume.¹⁵ At least one visitor held strange notions of the effects of the costume, and reported that it was said that the members could, "after being equipped with 'green frock coats, belts and buckles ... run up the sides and tops of the houses like monkeys [*sic*].'"¹⁶ The costume was also ideologically motivated, following Owen's advocacy of uniform clothing in the *Report to the County of Lanark*. The waste of changing fashions would be avoided, and health improved, through the adoption of such clothing.

The adoption of a uniform is significant for a number of reasons. The community, in the sense of a united membership, was given a visual identity. Their clothing now served to instantly demarcate them from those who did not belong to Manea Fen. By reinforcing this division visually, a uniform would have aided a member's identification of himself as part of the group, and aided the adoption of a new identity as a community member, a process labelled 'renunciation' by Rosabeth Kanter.¹⁷ The same is true of the membership certificates which, while necessary for administrative purposes, would also have instilled a sense of belonging. For

¹² *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 2. 13 June 1840

¹³ *ibid.*, I. 14. 19 October 1839

¹⁴ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 26. 28 November 1840

¹⁵ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 4. 27 June 1840

¹⁶ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 6. 11 July 1840

¹⁷ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, pp. 83-85

those entering community the signing of the certificate would have symbolised their deliberate rejection of the outside world and their entrance into a new society.¹⁸ John Harrison argues that a uniform could also be seen as a measure of social control, through its fostering of such bonds.¹⁹ Uniform is thus a significant aid to commitment. A uniform could also be seen to indicate the values of community, with the emphasis on order and cohesion, as opposed to the chaotic and individualised outside.

A concept of community was also embodied in the physical appearance of Manea Fen. When the first members arrived at the site on the banks of the Old Bedford nothing stood there but a single cottage. Within eighteen months, the *Working Bee* commented that the pace of building at the colony was such that it would soon have the appearance of a town.²⁰ The Hodsonians pursued an active building programme, adding living accommodation and areas for industrial activity to the original cottage. Perhaps influenced by William Thompson's *Practical Directions for the Establishment of Communities*, the colonists first erected a number of temporary buildings to meet immediate needs, including the kitchen, an oven, a communal dining room, a smithy and wash house.²¹ Some of these buildings provided living quarters, as did the original cottage. Through this use of temporary structures, the colonists were able to begin the construction of the community in its intended final form without having to alter it constantly as the needs of the membership changed.

Other functional additions were made to the colony, and by the end of 1840 the comparison with a town, while clearly enthusiastic, would not have seemed too ridiculous. A windmill, named Tidd Pratt after the registrar for Friendly Societies who enrolled the community's laws, was built in late 1839 to supply power for pumping the clay pit. It also drove a

¹⁸ For an example of a membership certificate, see appendix B, pp. 361-362

¹⁹ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, p. 186

²⁰ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 4. 27 June 1840

²¹ *ibid.*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

William Thompson, *Practical Directions*, p. 54

circular saw and other machinery, including circular brushes for the cleaning of shoes and cutlery.²² This rare display of extravagance was matched by the construction of a large observatory, sixty feet high, which held two platforms where up to fifty-six people could take tea.²³ A large number of out-houses and pig-sties sprang up around the housing, and a school was built. The brick yard expanded to include at least one shed for drying tiles and a kiln. A railway seems to have been built to run through the brick yard to the Bedford river, from where orders could be transported to local towns or to railway and sea connections. In a rare admission of the harsh weather faced by the colonists, the *Working Bee* wrote that a wall running perpendicularly to the river proved a useful wind-break.²⁴ In the flat, windswept fenland it is not surprising that such a feature was welcomed. During the winter months the community must have on occasions seemed a desolate place.²⁵

While many of these buildings were not part of the envisaged final form of the community, the housing was constructed according to a longer term plan. Following Owen's descriptions of the ideal community, the members were to be housed in a parallelogram. Although Thompson also advocated this form, the Hodsonians seemed to adhere more closely to Owen's descriptions as in outlining the future growth of the community the *Working Bee* wrote that further squares would be added to the original, and members could then be classified by time of membership, their knowledge of Owenite principles, their congeniality and so forth.²⁶ In the *Development of the Plan for the Relief of the Poor* Owen drew up a range of complex tables, outlining the possible combinations of members according to class, and political and religious views.²⁷

²² *Working Bee*, I. 20. 30 November 1839

²³ *ibid.*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

²⁴ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 26. 28 November 1840

²⁵ A contemporary illustration of the colony is included in appendix B, p. 355, where it can be compared with an illustration of Owen's ideal community.

²⁶ *ibid.*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

²⁷ Robert Owen, 'Peace on Earth - Good Will towards Men! Development of the Plan for the Relief of the Poor' (1817) in Gregory Claeys, *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. I., pp. 221-227

While Owen may have been the influence for the community, he himself would probably have failed to recognise his vision of a parallelogram housing many hundred inhabitants in the rows of small cottages built at Manea Fen. Unlike at Orbiston, the Hodsonians adapted the concept of the parallelogram to their means and needs. The first square was to be composed of three sides, each formed of twenty-four cottages. The fourth side was left open, and was bounded by the river only a few yards distant. As the community grew, further squares could be added. By the time of the collapse it seems that only the first two sides had been built, and they may well not have contained the full complement of cottages.²⁸ Although the concept of the parallelogram was adapted to the scale of the members' means, Hodson did at one point request information on heating by flues, perhaps influenced by Owen's advocacy of this method in the *Report to the County of Lanark*.²⁹

For those living at Manea Fen, the form and arrangement of the buildings would have reinforced the fact that they were living in community. Many would have lived in shared dormitories, especially single hired labourers and candidate members. Before the accommodation blocks were built, the whole membership was housed in this fashion, in segregated dormitories. Once individual housing became available, life at the community would have remained intimate and shared. The cottages were intended for little more than sleeping, and the activities of the community left little time for private rest. All facilities were communal. Meals were prepared in the community's kitchen, and were eaten in the shared dining

²⁸ A brief history of the community, dating from 1914, stated that there were originally twenty houses, although only seven remained at the time of writing (*A Past Effort at Socialism: History of Manea Colony* (1914). Wisbech and Fenland Museum Papers). The *Working Bee* claimed to have finished one row of twenty-four, and to have started at least fourteen of the second side. Holyoake reported that the cottages were all of one room, and were built back to back in rows of twelve (G. J. Holyoake, *History of Co-operation*, vol. I., p. 183).

²⁹ Robert Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark' (1821) in Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. I., p. 314

room. Entertainments took place in the public areas, such as the library, and one building was being converted into a theatre in October 1839. The communal focus of Manea Fen's design becomes clear when the disposition of the buildings is considered, and not just their specific functions. The parallelogram ensured that the buildings were seen as part of a whole, and not simply as disparate elements.

Some features of Manea Fen can be seen to be common to other communal ventures, where they served specific functions. Dolores Hayden has shown that vantage points can be found in many communities, such as the towers of the Oneidans or the windmill used as a viewing platform at Amana, both American religious communities. At Manea Fen there was the two-storey observatory. Such buildings allowed members to survey their terrain, to observe the boundaries of their land, and to aid a sense of geographical unity.³⁰ On the other hand, one could also see the tower as a means of control. As with the uniforms, this reflects the close, and perhaps necessary, relationship between fostering a sense of belonging and ensuring conformity. The building of such an elaborate and seemingly unnecessary structure could also have provided a sense of pride and focus for the members. The very building process could also have helped to bring the members together, their unity aided by communal labour.

Hayden, and Ernest Green, have also remarked on the importance of paths and walkways around the community. At Manea Fen pleasure gardens were planned by January 1840, and would seem to have been laid out later that year. Such areas gave members opportunities for casual socialising outside of events organised for the whole community, and also for a degree of personal relaxation.³¹ In larger American communities, spaces were created suitable for a range of activities, from larger communal

At the Institute for the Formation of Character at New Lanark heating was provided by hot air piped through vents and hollow pillars from the ground floor.

³⁰ Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias*, p. 42

³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 45-46

See also Ernest J. Green, 'The Social Functions of Utopian Architecture', in *Utopian Studies* 4 (1993), pp. 6-9

events, through to spaces for smaller groups, and areas where individuals could have some time to themselves. When completed, the gardens with their many fruit trees would have become a representation of the earthly paradise promised by communitarians. This attempt to provide an Eden in the fens was implicit in the members' statements, if not explicitly intended. One member wrote of being able to wander through the gardens, plucking fruit whenever it was wanted.³² Community, as a concept, was implicit within the very layout of the colony. For an individual, the focus of life at the community was directed outwards. The construction of the buildings ensured that to reside at the colony was to participate.

7. 4. Raising the next generation

The emphasis given to infant education was one of the central features of the co-operative movement. From the earliest community plans, such as that of the Spa Fields community of 1821, education was perceived as one of the benefits of community arrangements.³³ The Spa Fields plans reveal an inherent tension within co-operative views of education. The London printers involved at Spa Fields stressed the practical benefits of education, whereas for Owen education had a far broader purpose, to train future generations as rational beings. Education would underpin the egalitarian society of the promised communities, and both men and women would be enabled to fulfil their roles in this new society. This tension was clearly present in the educational plans of Manea Fen. Many of the community's theoretical statements on education reveal the influence of this broad definition, as expressed by Owen in works such as the *New View of Society*. Yet the day to day running of the school had more limited aims, to provide the children with practical knowledge suited to their position in society. The community faced a dilemma, and the practical demands of wider society undermined the ability of Manea Fen to realise its egalitarian aims.

³² *Working Bee*, I. 36. 21 March 1840

The community's periodical, the *Working Bee*, following Owen, stressed the significance of education, seeing it in broad terms as

...the whole business of life, the whole of the influences of existing society, in exercising or directing the physical energies and mental powers of the rising generation.³⁴

The influence of Owen's views on education was explicitly acknowledged in the *Working Bee*, which seconded his placing of an understanding of man's nature at the centre of his approach to education. The *Working Bee* condemned all methods not based on an accurate and scientific knowledge of man's own nature. Failure to recognize this as the essential foundation for any educational system would reduce man to mental darkness. Once accepted, however, man was 'destined to advance in virtue and happiness' to a perfect society.³⁵ The society was also aware of the ideas of the Swiss educator Philippe de Fellenberg, whose school at Hofwyl attracted international interest.³⁶ Owen's ideas were, however, the only ones to be discussed in any detail. The *Working Bee* strayed from Owen in using his ideas to attack the aristocracy for its opposition to wider education. It was claimed that an aristocratic or monarchical government needed ignorance to maintain its support.³⁷ Manea Fen also adopted Owen's views on the techniques of education. Teaching which was not systematic, or based on a false system such as theology, was rejected. The *Working Bee* stressed the need to proceed at a pace and in a fashion suited to the needs of the child.³⁸ The impact of these various influences is clear in the methods adopted by the school at Manea Fen.

Despite an early determination to establish a school, the members had to wait until the spring of 1839 for the arrival of an experienced teacher.

³³ *Report of the Committee Appointed at a Meeting of Journeymen, Chiefly Printers, to take into Consideration Certain Propositions, Submitted to them by Mr. George Mudie*

³⁴ *Working Bee*, I. 1. 20 July 1839

³⁵ *ibid.*, I. 24. 28 December 1839

³⁶ *ibid.*, I. 1. 20 July 1839

³⁷ *ibid.*, I. 17. 9 November 1839

E. T. Craig arrived in April to take charge of the children's education. By July, the *Working Bee* was able to report that the school was running, temporarily situated in the community library, under Craig's supervision.³⁹ Craig would appear to have been an ideal choice for the young community. He was both a committed co-operator and an experienced teacher.⁴⁰ In the early 1830s he had been president of the Owenian Co-operative Society in Manchester, and had been instrumental in establishing the Salford Infant School. Craig had also previously experienced community life at Ralahine, the community founded by Vandeleur on his estate in Ireland in 1831. With the collapse of this venture, Craig had returned to England. He became involved with Lady Byron and the establishment of the Ealing Grove school in 1834.⁴¹ After leaving Ealing Grove in 1835, Craig went to Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, in 1836, where he worked as assistant editor of the *Star in the East*, the newspaper owned by James Hill.⁴² He had also taught at Hill's infant school. Hill had earlier written to Owen, asking his opinion on Craig's working in the school.⁴³

It was at Wisbech that Craig first encountered William Hodson. When Hodson proposed the Manea Fen community in August 1838, Craig and his wife both visited the estate.⁴⁴ Thus when Craig decided to leave Wisbech early in 1839, he was already acquainted with Hodson and the Manea Fen colony. A letter from Craig to Owen explained his reasons for determining to leave Hill. Circumstances had become such, he wrote, that it was impossible to remain in Wisbech, especially 'when these have to be suffered in connection with Mr. Hill's habits, views, and general conduct towards us of late.'⁴⁵ It may be that the rather acrimonious collapse of the

³⁸ *ibid.*, I. 24. 28 December 1839

³⁹ *ibid.*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

⁴⁰ For E. T. Craig see p. 90, n. 58.

For an account of Craig's career, see R. G. Garnett, 'E. T. Craig', pp. 135-150.

See also W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators 1750-1880*, pp. 79-83

⁴¹ R. G. Garnett, 'E. T. Craig', p. 140

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 142

⁴³ James Hill to Robert Owen, 2 August 1836. ROCC 809

⁴⁴ *New Moral World*, IV. 200. 25 August 1838

⁴⁵ E. T. Craig to Robert Owen, 18 February 1839. ROCC 1080

negotiations between Hill and the Rational Society over the purchase of Hill's estate a few months previously influenced this attitude.⁴⁶

At the time of his writing to Owen, in February 1839, Craig had been offered the job of running Manea Fen's schools, but he was inclined to accept a rival offer from Isaac Ironside in Sheffield.⁴⁷ Although Rowbotham, at this time the secretary of Manea Fen, assured Craig that the school had received three to four hundred applications for admission, Craig felt that Hodson possessed 'neither the capital, the locale, nor the judgement for so important an experiment.'⁴⁸ Rowbotham's figures suggest that the colony attracted a far higher degree of support and interest than indicated by other sources, and would seem to be of questionable accuracy. In the event Craig decided against Sheffield, and arrived at Manea Fen with his wife in April 1839.⁴⁹ Despite his apparent suitability for the post at Manea Fen, within three months he had decided to leave. Writing to Owen in July, he stated:

Finding from the character of Mr. Hodson and the individuals he is surrounded and influenced by, that charity and justice cannot be practised to parties who may differ from them, I deemed it most advisable to abandon the concern which I did on the 20th inst.⁵⁰

During his brief stay at the colony Craig was certainly involved with the school, and may have been instrumental in its establishment. His was the first name connected to the running of the school. Many of the teaching methods employed were similar to those used by Craig at the Ealing Grove school and at Ralahine.

⁴⁶ See chapters four and nine for Hill's negotiations with the Rational Society.

⁴⁷ The Sheffield Hall of Science was nearing completion at this time, and this may be why Ironside was searching for a teacher. (*New Moral World*, V. 19. 9 March 1839)

For Isaac Ironside see p. 119, n. 30.

⁴⁸ E. T. Craig to Robert Owen, 18 February 1839. ROCC 1080

⁴⁹ *Social Pioneer*, I. 7. 20 April 1839

Between the departure of Craig and the engagement in June 1840 of Henry Mote, a teacher from London, there would not seem to have been anyone with relevant experience in the community. For this period teaching duties were taken over by existing members. Henry Mote was a committed Owenite and teacher, and had been active in London Owenite circles since the early 1830s. In the late 1820s Mote taught at the Westminster Infant School.⁵¹ By February 1832 he had left the school, and he and his wife were introduced to Owen's Institution, the centre of London Owenism, by Philip Skene, via his brother George, both prominent figures in London co-operation.⁵² The Skenes' introduction was clearly welcomed, and Mote remained involved with the Institution and other co-operative organisations until he left for Manea Fen in 1840. He served as secretary to the Social Missionary Society, which operated from the Institution, in 1832.⁵³ Mote later acted as a director of the Community Friendly Society.⁵⁴ This society operated on the fringes of London Owenism. It was associated with Branch 32 (West London), which had collapsed by 1839 due to low attendance.⁵⁵ The society, formed in 1836 to raise funds for a community, had continued to operate despite the formation in 1837 of the National Community Friendly Society as an auxiliary to the Association of All Classes of All Nations, which rapidly became the dominant organisation collecting community subscriptions. Mote's participation in the Community Friendly Society may have predisposed him towards attending Manea Fen, as both organisations operated outside of the Owenite mainstream. In late 1839 Mote visited Manea Fen, and was evidently taken with what he saw there.⁵⁶

Teaching was initially conducted in the library, but the school building was finished by December 1839, and the school was running by

⁵⁰ E. T. Craig to Robert Owen, 28 July 1839. ROCC 1132

⁵¹ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, II. 11. November 1827

⁵² George Skene to Robert Owen, 23 February 1832. ROCC 512

⁵³ 'Statistical Table of Co-operative Societies Represented in Congress' in *Co-operative Congresses, Reports and Papers*

⁵⁴ Anthony Peacock to Robert Owen, 8 May 1837. ROCC 884

⁵⁵ *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations*, p. 17

⁵⁶ *Working Bee*, I. 8. 7 September 1839

February 1840.⁵⁷ During the spring of 1840 the children's day began at six in the morning, after which an hour was spent working with the gardener before breakfast at 8.00 am. Two hours were then spent with the schoolmaster, between 9.00 am and 11.00 am. An hour's recreation preceded dinner between 12.00 pm and 1.00 pm. William Cutting then taught music and singing from 1.00 pm until 2.00 pm, when the children returned to the school for a further two hours. The day finished with an hour and a half with the gardener, followed by a period of recreation. This long day was partly necessitated by the adults' own long working days, during which they would not have time to attend to the children. Women were appointed to care for the children during the day, and also to keep the school in order. Teaching, however, was performed by the schoolmaster.⁵⁸ The school was open to children over the age of five, and infants were cared for separately (although it was intended to found an infant school).

The arrangements made for the school clearly reflected the communal principles of the society. Children were readied for school by women appointed to do so, rather than by their parents. Whether children lived with their parents when not at school is unclear. 'Young females' did live separately, overseen by Mrs Green and Mrs Cutting, but this may have referred to young, single women rather than girls of an age to attend the school.⁵⁹ The hour at which children went to bed was specified, which may suggest that they did live together. Even if children did return to their parents at night, their waking hours were regulated by the community and spent in the care of persons appointed by the society rather than their parents. This arrangement mirrored that of Owen's famous infant schools at New Lanark, as described in *A New View of Society*.

In removing the children from their parents, and educating them in a rational manner, the community hoped to raise the next generation untainted by the ills of contemporary society. This was one of the theoretical

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, I. 22. 14 December 1839; I. 24. 28 December 1839

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, I. 36. 21 March 1840

justifications for communitarian life in the midst of the old world. Such a desire was clearly present in the plans, not realised, for the future development of the school. It was intended to build a school surrounded by five or six acres of land, and enclosed by a moat. None were to be allowed in without prior permission from the trustees, thus keeping all 'vicious influences' outside.⁶⁰ As Owen wrote in relation to education at New Lanark, 'the child will be removed, so far as is at present practicable, from the erroneous treatment of the yet untrained and untaught parents.'⁶¹ By removing the children from the care of their parents, the community was also meeting a more practical need. As all members had specific tasks to perform, the need to look after children would have been a distraction. By caring for the children communally, the female members were freed to do their own jobs.

While the *Working Bee* spoke of the importance of education in the progression to a perfect society, it is nevertheless clear that the system introduced at Manea Fen would have reinforced, rather than challenged, the gender concepts of the community. The desire of the community to raise a future generation free from the influences of the irrational world conflicted with the need to equip its children with practical skills needed in the current, unreformed society. This tension is apparent in the theoretical statements of the community on education, and in arguments derived from the two main theorists cited by the community, Robert Owen and Philippe de Fellenberg. This is not to suggest that the two are necessarily opposed, but rather that the community derived its broad definition of education from Owen, while citing Fellenberg in relation to a narrower concept of education. Owen himself admired Fellenberg, and sent his two sons to study at Fellenberg's school at Hofwyl.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

⁶¹ Robert Owen, 'A New View of Society' (1813-16) in Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. I., p. 58

Although the influence of Owen is readily apparent in the general attitudes of the *Working Bee* to education, and in the form of the projected buildings, the actual methods employed and the more limited aims of the educational programme may have been more influenced by Fellenberg. Fellenberg believed that the aim of education was to enable students to fulfil their respective roles in society in more effective manner, rather than to enable students to challenge their prescribed social positions.⁶² An early article quoted Fellenberg, and spoke of educating the agricultural labourer so as to maximise his production. Education was to take place in both the school room and the field, so that lessons could be applied practically.⁶³ The influence of this approach to education may be seen in the *Working Bee's* statement that it was women's 'especial field of labour' to raise children, and that they should be educated to this end.⁶⁴ While the content of lessons at Manea Fen is unclear, it seems that the educational programme was divided according to gender. By September 1840 boys and girls were educated separately. Gardening would seem to have been reserved exclusively for the boys.

The educational programme at Manea Fen was shaped by both of these influences. E. T. Craig, who may have been the formative influence on the school, was influenced by Johann Pestalozzi, Fellenberg, and Owen. The combination of outdoor work and lessons was employed by Craig at the Ealing Grove school, and at Ralahine, and indeed was a part of the practice of many progressive educationalists of the period. At Ealing Grove singing was also part of the teaching. Craig, and Owen, saw physical labour as an aid to other, intellectual, activities.⁶⁵ It was felt to produce a more fully developed character, and was not purely practical. At Ealing Grove objects were used extensively in teaching, and this method was also employed at

⁶² See W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators 1750-1880*, pp. 141-146

⁶³ *Working Bee*, I. 1. 20 July 1839

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, I. 24. 28 December 1839

⁶⁵ W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators 1750-1880*, pp. 158-169

Manea Fen. A visitor to the colony in November 1840 reported that the school was

...furnished with the means for teaching the children according to the modern practice, that is, as much as possible, by presenting their minds to the object, or a representation of it, intended to be explained.⁶⁶

By this point, however, Craig had long since departed and the use of this method cannot with any certainty be ascribed to his influence. The use of objects may also have derived from Owen's practice at New Lanark, which was distinct from the Pestalozzian object lesson. At New Lanark, objects were used to base knowledge on the natural world, rather than on existing preconceptions.⁶⁷ The importance of the natural world can also be seen in the rambles taken by the children at Manea Fen through the neighbouring fields, in order to teach them the classification of plants and so forth.⁶⁸ Mote would also appear to have been a progressive teacher. While at the Westminster Infant School he taught in an amusing and gentle manner. He did not use a strict, rote learning approach with the children. Instead he

leads them only to compare, to reflect, and to infer or draw conclusions: but the inferences or conclusions he leaves the mind to form for itself; and only when they are wrong, shows how they are so, and puts the mind on further examination.⁶⁹

Another possible influence on the Manea Fen schools was H. G. Wright, of Alcott House school at Ham common in Surrey. John Firmin, a member of the Lambeth Branch of the Rational Society, wrote to the *Working Bee* informing the community that Wright intended to visit. Wright apparently

⁶⁶ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 26. 28 November 1840

⁶⁷ W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators 1750-1880*, pp. 88-89

⁶⁸ *Working Bee*, I. 30. 8 February 1840

⁶⁹ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, II. 11. November 1827

believed that the school at Manea Fen was of great importance.⁷⁰ The school did attract other visitors, some of whom contributed financially to its upkeep.⁷¹ The extent of communication between Wright and Manea Fen is unclear. The students of Alcott House performed gardening with the aim of making the school independent in food, an aim that was also ascribed to the scholars at Manea Fen.⁷²

The school at Manea Fen was thus influenced by a variety of sources. It employed methods and techniques that, as the visitor quoted above realised, were following 'modern practice'. In educating its children, the community faced a dilemma implicit within their situation. It had to decide whether it was genuinely educating the new generation, fit to enter into the new moral world, or whether it merely wished to offer a superior form of education that would benefit its children in contemporary society. The concept of a broad education, influenced by Owenite theories of knowledge being based in the natural world and combining the advantages of physical and intellectual work, was present in the formulation of the educational programme. A desire to avoid training the children in the evils of current society can be readily recognised. However, as with the allocation of work between the adult members, the school failed to challenge preconceived gender roles and in many ways would seem to have been perpetuating current social forms.

7. 5. Conclusion

The life of the Hodsonians, isolated in the fens of Cambridgeshire, was subject to a range of demands not necessarily encountered by those left behind in the old immoral world. In part, these demands were common to other groups who sought to realise the dream of communal life. Other facets of the experience of Manea Fen were specific to their time and place.

⁷⁰ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 6. 11 July 1840

⁷¹ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 9. 1 August 1840

⁷² W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators 1750-1880*, p. 148
Working Bee, I. 26. 11 January 1840

The mode of living adopted at Manea Fen cannot be seen merely as a means to an end, as the communal life would have been the main attraction for many members. Part of the function of community was to provide a social environment shaped by a specific set of values, values which differed markedly from those predominant in wider society. Community life was to be rationally ordered, not subject to chance. Membership of the community meant to belong, as if to a greatly extended family. In reaction to an individualised wider society, community life emphasised the group as a whole. Individuals were to identify with the group, and it was from the group that they were to draw their support and their sense of self.

The adoption of a different set of values clearly necessitates an alternative range of social practices. Daily life at Manea Fen was shaped by the values and ideology of the community. It is also possible to distinguish between those practices which stemmed from the specific views of Manea Fen, and those which met demands encountered in many attempts to live in community. Thus, the prominence of education in the community was firmly rooted in Owenite attitudes. Those members who had belonged to branches of the Owenite movement would have been familiar with the range of lectures and classes offered in Manea Fen. Education shaped the weekly routine in the community, a reflection of its significance for the Hodsonians. Other practices, such as the adoption of a uniform, were less strongly based in Owen's writings. Although Owen did advocate particular forms of clothing, its adoption at Manea Fen did not follow Owen's descriptions. The uniform served a number of purposes. It aided the creation of a sense of belonging in the individual, by both separating him from the external society, and by promoting his identification with the group. Its adoption can thus be seen as a reaction to a problem faced by all communal societies, that of cohesion.

While life at Manea Fen was moulded by its communal ideology, the community also had to respond to a range practical demands. The extent to which its ideals could be realised was limited by economic considerations,

and by the relationship with wider society. This can be seen in the hiring of labourers, who formed a third class at the colony, besides members and candidates. Even though some were residents, they played little part in the community. Some attended the classes and sent their children to the school. They could also purchase goods at the store. 'Further than this,' Hodson stated at the 1840 Congress, 'there was no connection between the hired labourers and the members of the Society.'⁷³ The hired labourers highlight the exclusiveness of the community, and also challenged its principles. In employing them, the community was operating within the capitalist economy, although it did introduce labour notes. Moreover, hired labour contradicted the community's own desire to earn its living from the land, free from landowners and employers.

Financial considerations influenced recruitment into Manea Fen. The community was unable to support members in functions in which they were not already skilled. Unskilled workers were simply not productive enough to permit the luxury of employing them. Thus the community employed and recruited experienced workers for specific roles. This specialisation may have hindered a sense of group cohesion, and it was deliberately avoided by many communal groups for this reason. Furthermore, at Manea Fen this policy ensured the perpetuation of a gendered division of labour, despite the *Working Bee's* ardent advocacy of female equality. There were clearly limits on the extent to which the community was able to differentiate itself from wider society. Nevertheless, despite the compromises and limitations encountered in the implementation of the communal vision, Manea Fen offered many people the experience of a life ordered along radically different lines and moulded by an alternative series of social values.

⁷³ *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement)

CHAPTER 8. THE ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF MANEA FEN

8. Introduction

William Hodson's offer of land in 1838 immediately raised two of the central problems facing all communitarian experiments in this period. Firstly, there was the question of finance. Hodson by-passed the Owenite movement, with its carefully regulated system of subscriptions for a community, and Hodson's venture was initially financially dependent on him personally. The degree of control which this necessarily gave to Hodson raised doubts over the security of the venture and its claimed democratic constitution. Secondly, and this problem was inherent in the vast majority of community ventures and proposals of the time, Hodson's farm was in rural Cambridgeshire, far from the main centres of Owenism in London and the northern industrial cities. Agriculture was inevitably the community's main economic activity, one to which the members, drawn from Owenite branches, were not necessarily suited. Both of these factors had consequences for the activities of the community, and for its planned development.

A significant part of both the theoretical basis and the attraction of community was the return to the land, and thus it may seem somewhat ironic to count this among the weaknesses of the community plans of the period. Yet it was one that was clearly recognised by contemporaries. Owen, at various points, suggested founding a community close to London, which would have partly negated the inherent problems in founding a rural community. Early debates over community also raised the question of founding a manufacturing community, as opposed to an agricultural community. In 1832 William Wood, of the Cumberworth Co-operative Society, wrote to the Fourth Co-operative Congress, voicing his support for the former.

We live in hopes of seeing a Manufacturing Community arising up amongst us, as we should have no doubt of its success, but we cannot say that we should have such good hopes of an agricultural Community succeeding among a manufacturing population.¹

Wood's concern indicates the central problem in this regard, which was that co-operation was primarily based in urban areas, mainly in London and the north of England. Those who were drawn to the idea of community were largely artisans - tailors, printers, plumbers, and so forth. To relocate such men to the countryside immediately raised a number of problems. Any community based in a rural area was necessarily primarily dependent on agriculture. As Manea Fen discovered, using urban artisans in the place of rural labourers was unsatisfactory. This forced the community to employ hired labour, and thus imposed a further expense on the members. Being geographically removed from the main centres of Owenism had a further consequence, in that the community was separated from its most natural market. This too created difficulties at Manea Fen.

The second financial consequence of Hodson's offer of land was the community's economic dependence on Hodson himself. In the early days of the venture, both the members and Hodson expressed their hopes that the community would soon be able to re-pay to Hodson the amounts that he had lent to begin operations. The principal activities of the community were agriculture, combined with various manufactures, and it was hoped that these would be supplemented by a boarding school. While these activities did generate an income, and some money was repaid to Hodson, the vast bulk remained unpaid at the community's collapse. The community had elected to follow a policy of high investment during its short life, and its collapse prevented the members from enjoying the benefits of this policy. The collapse underlined the extent to which the community's financial dependence on Hodson undermined its claims to independence.

¹ *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, I. 10. November 1832

8. 1. Agriculture at Manea Fen

The Manea Fen community was located in the Cambridgeshire fens, a few miles from the east coast. The community was based on reclaimed land, resulting from the drainage and improvement which continued in the area throughout this period. While farming in the area demanded labour intensive agricultural techniques, the quality of the land was generally high. William Cobbett passed through the area during his *Rural Rides*, and wrote of the area around St. Edmund's

The whole country was as *level* as the table on which I am now writing. The horizon like the sea in a dead calm ... The land covered with beautiful grass, with sheep lying about upon it as fat as hogs stretched out sleeping in a sty ... Everything grows well here: earth without a stone so big as a pin's head; grass as thick as it can grow on the ground; immense bowling-greens separated by ditches; and not the sign of dock or thistle or other weed to be seen.²

Other contemporary observers, such as J. A. Clarke writing in 1848, claimed that the soil was among the best, and produced excellent pasture and crops.³ The land was well suited to oats, potatoes, and clover. Wheat could also be grown, although it was frequently sown late. As the soil retained more water than in other areas, frosts could force wheat seeds out of the soil if they were sown earlier than November or December.⁴

Despite the favourable views of some observers, opponents of the community were quick to question the suitability of the area. The quality of the fen land had been an area of contention between William Hodson and the Rational Society since the latter's plans to purchase the Wretton estate

² William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (2 vols., London, 1912), vol. II., p. 239

³ H. C. Darby, *The Draining of the Fens* (Cambridge, 1956), p. 239

⁴ George Beesley, *A Report on the State of Agriculture in Lancashire*, pp. 18-22

had fallen through. Isaac Ironside, the Sheffield Owenite, attributed Fleming's opposition to Manea Fen to his general prejudice against the area in the wake of the collapse of the Wretton negotiations.⁵ The Rational Society's doubts surfaced again in criticisms made of Manea Fen in the early days of the community. One query raised was over the healthiness of the area. The low-lying and damp land made ague a potential hazard. By the 1830s the ague was in decline, but would have remained a risk. Fenmen still drank brandy and took opium pills to guard against it in this period.⁶ The Hodsonians denied that there was any risk, and whether the community suffered from its choice of location cannot be determined. Another charge levelled against the site, by the critical *Star in the East*, was that it was liable to flooding.⁷ Many areas of the fens would have suffered in this manner. Manea Fen, in common with many farms in the area, had a windmill, which was also used to drain the clay pit.⁸

In an area so individual in its nature, agricultural practices necessarily differed from those employed elsewhere.⁹ The reclaimed land consisted of the surface peat, followed by a layer of soil, beneath which lay a layer of clay. The extent of these levels varied across the fens. Drainage reduced the depth of the surface peat and made the clay more accessible. The clay could be used for building, and supplied the brickyard at Manea Fen, but it could also be put to agricultural uses. In improving the fen land, the basic aim was to decrease the depth of the surface peat, and to increase that of the soil beneath. There were two principal methods by which this could be done. The first was simply to burn off the peat. The preferred approach was to plough the land and then leave it fallow for a season, after which the peat and soil were mixed and the land was 'clayed'. 'Claying' consisted of digging trenches across the fields, approximately two feet deep

⁵ Isaac Ironside to Robert Owen, 15 January 1839. ROCC 1110
For Isaac Ironside see p. 119, n. 30.

⁶ H. C. Darby, *The Draining of the Fens*, pp. 180-182

⁷ *Star in the East*, III. 125. 2 February 1839

⁸ The windmill can be seen in the illustration of the community in appendix B, p. 355.

⁹ Much of the following is drawn from H. C. Darby, *The Draining of the Fens*, pp. 238-246, except where otherwise indicated.

and two feet across. The clay removed from the trench was spread for four feet either side of the trench, and the next trench was then dug eight feet away from the first. This method, although it produced great improvement, was expensive. The loss of income from the fallow land, coupled with the labour-intensive nature of claying the land, was generally outweighed by the improvement in crop yield.¹⁰ In 1852 the cost of claying was estimated at 35s per acre. However, it brought a long-term improvement and would only have to be repeated infrequently. The primary benefits of this method were twofold. The addition of clay gave the soil greater solidity and prevented excessive loss of moisture. The combination of clay and peat provided a better balance of nutrients than the peat alone. The method was in use by 1810, and was widespread by the 1830s. It was employed at Manea Fen, where the trenches were dug four feet across.¹¹ From accounts in the *Working Bee*, the labour-intensive nature of the operation is clear. Details of jobs being performed on one day in September 1840 revealed that eighteen men were employed on claying the land, which represented nearly one quarter of all those present in the community at this time.¹²

The agricultural improvements made at Manea Fen would appear to have been successful. However, while the quality of the land was undoubtedly raised, the members themselves derived little benefit. The claying process was carried out during 1839 and 1840. It was not until late 1840 that the full quantity of wheat was sown.¹³ As claying of the land was still ongoing in September 1840, the sowing of a full crop may have been delayed until the process was completed.¹⁴ The collapse of the community in February 1841 meant that it was not able to enjoy the increased harvests. The harvests that were made were successful, however. The 1840 harvest could have partially benefited from the claying that had been carried out by

¹⁰ *A Letter Upon the Origin of Fen Land; the changes of surface & interior of it; its agriculture up to the present day, and how it may be improved, &c. addressed to the owners and occupiers of Fen Land in the Isle of Ely. By an Owner* (Peterborough, 1839), pp. 7-12

¹¹ *Working Bee*, I. 15. 26 October 1839

¹² *ibid.*, New Series I. 17. 26 September 1840

¹³ *ibid.*, New Series I. 20. 17 October 1840

¹⁴ *ibid.*, New Series I. 17. 26 September 1840

this point. This harvest, coupled with the produce of the kitchen gardens, was claimed to render the community self-sufficient in flour and vegetables.¹⁵ The wheat crop was to be retained for their own use, but there was a crop of oats intended for sale. It was estimated that this would command a price of £700.¹⁶ There was also a mustard crop valued at approximately £200.¹⁷ Agriculture was thus capable of generating revenue at Manea Fen. However, the farm had scarcely realised its full potential before the collapse of the community.

8. 2. Manufacturing at Manea Fen

After agriculture, the other principal source of income at Manea Fen was the brickyard. This was one instance in which the community benefited from the nature of the land, for clay was readily available beneath the surface peat. While the clay was accessible, in the low-lying land drainage was a problem at any depth below the surface. As was the case across much of the fens, the fields at Manea Fen lay a few feet below the level of the nearby Old Bedford River, which ran between raised banks. The windmill at Manea Fen was used to drain water from both the farm and the clay pit into the Old Bedford.¹⁸

The clay pit was in operation before Manea Fen itself. Hodson wrote to Robert Owen in August 1838 describing his preparations for the colony. He claimed to have made 7,000 bricks, and was digging clay for more.¹⁹ Seven months into community operations the brickyard was a fairly sizeable enterprise. At this time, the clay pit measured forty yards by twelve, and was twenty-two feet deep. There were seven floors for making bricks, and a kiln, with a further kiln under construction. A pug mill was

¹⁵ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 4. 27 June 1840

¹⁶ *ibid.*, New Series I. 8. 25 July 1840

¹⁷ *ibid.*, New Series I. 14. 5 September 1840

In the absence of precise figures, it is not possible to verify these estimates.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, I. 20. 30 November 1839

Benjamin Jones, *Co-operative Production* (Oxford, 1894, reprinted New York, 1968), p. 70

¹⁹ William Hodson to Robert Owen, 16 August 1838. ROCC 1042

being used to grind the clay.²⁰ The brickyard expanded over the life of Manea Fen. The carpenters worked on various items of equipment for the clay pit, and a machine for pressing bricks was built in July 1840.²¹ Fuel for the kilns was provided by the estate. Turf was cut, from an area of approximately two and one half acres between 1839 and 1840. The land remaining could still be used for farming.²²

The community began by employing its own members in the brickyard, but soon found that asking the urban artisans who formed the bulk of the membership, such as tailors, to perform such work was not advisable. Unaccustomed as they were to physical labour, the members tired rapidly, were inefficient, and could easily become disaffected with the whole venture. The community was thus forced to hire local labourers. Their numbers rose to a height of twenty brickmakers in June 1840.²³ As the community was only fifty strong at the time, this was clearly a significant number of people to employ. Great hopes were held for the productivity, and profitability, of the brickyard. The potential output was estimated at 100,000 bricks per week, with a profit of as much as £200 per week.²⁴ Although significant numbers of bricks were made, it is debatable whether either of these targets was met. The community's extensive building programme, including the cottages and schoolhouse, was carried out with community bricks, and the *Working Bee* occasionally reported the burning of a kiln of 40,000 or 60,000. In April 1840 the community was still awaiting a profit from the brickyard, although their own buildings would have consumed much of the earlier production. Some sales were made later in the year, but the extent and value of these is unknown. At Chatteris in July 1840 all extant production was sold.²⁵ Encouraged by this, the *Working Bee* reported a plan to heat the tile shed so that production could continue through the winter, when the weather otherwise stopped

²⁰ *Working Bee*, I. 3. 3 August 1839

²¹ *ibid.*, New Series I. 6. 11 July 1840

²² *ibid.*, I. 41. 25 April 1840

²³ *ibid.*, New Series I. 1. 6 June 1840

²⁴ *ibid.*, I. 46. 30 May 1840; New Series, I. 1. 6 June 1840

²⁵ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 9. 1 August 1840; New Series, I. 1. 6 June 1840

work. A railway was also planned, as the soft ground became almost impassable in winter.²⁶ Railways had been used previously, but perhaps only as a temporary measure to aid the building programme.²⁷ As the scale of operations increased, so did the range of goods. By June 1840 Manea Fen was able to offer flooring tiles as well as bricks, and had advertised for a person to make chimney pots and flower pots.²⁸

The brickyard was not the only manufacturing to be carried out at Manea Fen. While the brickyard was the largest enterprise, the community also housed a tailor, a seamstress' shop, the printers, a shoemaker and stocking manufacture. In the absence of any financial records it cannot be determined how far these ventures met an external as well as an internal demand. The printers, who produced the *Working Bee*, were catering for an outside market. They may also have carried out individual orders. The shoemaker also received some orders from neighbours.²⁹ While cloth was bought in from outside, the only clothing made at Manea Fen would seem to have been the community uniforms. A sale of stockings was recorded in November 1840, but there were no other sales reported in the *Bee*. It was planned to establish a machine establishment, to make threshing machines, drills and other similar products. The board decided that in this way they could take advantage of their position in the middle of an agricultural district.³⁰ The plan also had the advantage of relying on skilled workers, who would be far easier to recruit from among the urban-centred Owenite movement than agricultural labourers.

²⁶ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 26. 28 November 1840

²⁷ *ibid.*, I. 5. 17 August 1839

The railway can be seen in the centre of the illustration of the community in appendix B, p. 355.

²⁸ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 1. 6 June 1840

²⁹ *ibid.*, I. 36. 21 March 1840

³⁰ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 1. 6 June 1840

8. 3. Markets for community goods

The community's struggles to make their activities profitable were to little avail unless a market could be found for their produce. The most readily accessible market was the local labourers, who could be supplied by the store at Manea Fen. The community never managed to free itself of the need for hired labour, and at times the labourers could form a significant proportion of the total number of persons at the community. For example, in June 1840 there were fifty people belonging to the community, a figure that includes candidates and children as well as adult members. There were, in addition, twenty brickmakers and eight hired labourers. The latter were resident at the colony with their families.³¹

The sale of community goods was one of the ways in which the community hoped to limit the financial burden of its dependence on hired labour. Sales through the store would ensure that some of the money paid to labourers would return to the community. Labourers could also pay for food, education and, it was planned, housing. Hodson reported to the Owenite Congress of 1840 that he hoped this scheme would realise a significant profit.³² He may have been flattering the economic prospects of the community, but clearly an expectation of making a profit from one's own employees was nothing if not optimistic. It seems unlikely that rural labourers would have been able to pay more to the community than they earned themselves.

The scheme would, however, have reduced the need for currency. As the community was investing heavily in its infrastructure and in agricultural improvements, and as these investments had not yet yielded an increased income, there was a lack of free capital. This problem was also addressed by a later plan, reminiscent of the truck system used in factories, including New Lanark. It was suggested that the labourers be funded by a

³¹ *ibid.*, New Series I. 1. 6 June 1840

³² *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement)

system of labour notes. Labourers were to be paid in notes in the same denominations as coin. These notes could then be exchanged for cash, but the community hoped that they would be spent at the store instead. This scheme would free up the capital of the community, as less cash would be required to pay the labourers.³³ The scheme was approved by the directors, and introduced in mid-1840.³⁴

The use of the store as an outlet for community goods was only a partial solution. There remained a pressing need to access a wider market. Manea Fen was determined to establish its financial independence, and refused to beg for donations. Instead, by December 1840 the *Bee* was pleading with its readers to buy more community produce. It suggested that readers could buy additional copies, or find more subscribers. It also asked that more people buy community goods, and insisted that this was the sole form of support it would accept. It would take nothing for which an equal return was not made. Even while facing financial collapse, the *Bee* could not resist an opportunity to criticise the funding of Queenwood through subscriptions.³⁵ Manea Fen may not have approved of subscriptions, but it recognised that the Rational Society's branches provided a large potential market for community goods.

The national network of branches formed the most obvious market for community goods, as socialists were expected to support their fellows in community. Mutual aid was part of the co-operative ethos, and the co-operative stores of the late 1820s and early 1830s had demonstrated the power of purchasing in furthering the movement. A desire to access this market was a major factor in Hodson's determination to establish a union between the two societies. Hodson was clearly eager for some form of co-operation between Manea Fen and the Rational Society from the outset, and suggested a number of schemes by which this could be achieved. As the negotiations begun in 1840 progressed only slowly, Hodson also suggested

³³ *Working Bee*, I. 38. 4 April 1840

³⁴ *ibid.*, I. 46. 30 May 1840

that a number of depots be established across the country. Local depots for the sale of goods would answer the primary need of communities, for, as Hodson wrote, 'communities will not extend without external markets.' The socialists living throughout the nation would provide the best market for socialist-produced goods, and depots would provide access to this market. The scheme would also encourage loans of capital, as the depots would ensure the financial viability of communities by providing a constant market.³⁶

This lack of a readily accessible market for its goods was one of Manea Fen's most significant economic handicaps. The community's location in the fens must have meant that transportation costs were high. A comparison between Queenwood and Manea Fen written in October 1839 stressed the advantage of having a navigable river bordering the estate, and the trade passing through nearby rivers and ports was significant.³⁷ However, the cost of the boats owned by the community must have been considerable. At least one sailing boat (the *Morning Star*) and two six-oared cutters were purchased. There was also a number of lighters, apparently hired as the community planned to return them to their owners early in 1841.³⁸ They had not proved financially viable, an indication that the extent of the community's trade was not sufficient to cover the significant investment into the community's industrial activities.

8. 4. A worthwhile investment?

For Manea Fen's brief lifetime the amount invested in the community greatly exceeded the profit the community's various ventures raised. The community had followed an ambitious building programme, and had invested heavily in both agriculture and in the brickyard. This was a long-term plan, and the collapse of the community prevented its members from

³⁵ *ibid.*, New Series I. 29. 19 December 1840

³⁶ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 16. 19 September 1840

³⁷ The jetty on the Old Bedford River used by the community to load and unload goods can be seen in the illustration in appendix B, p. 355, along with the community's boats.

³⁸ *New Moral World*. IX. 8. 20 February 1841

enjoying its benefits. The investment into the community was high, and the great proportion of it was funded by Hodson personally.

The land at Manea Fen was composed of four fifty acre lots, with the fourth separated from the remaining three adjacent lots on the banks of the Old Bedford. Hodson had purchased the three lots by the river in April 1837 and April 1838, paying a total of £2,180, giving an average value of £14 10s per acre.³⁹ The land was then mortgaged for £1,500.⁴⁰ In April 1839 the mortgage was transferred from James Leach to Adderly Howard. Hodson had clashed with James Leach's brother Henry on the local Wisbech Board of Guardians. In June 1838 Henry Leach had attempted to use the threat of calling in the mortgage in an attempt to silence Hodson's opposition.⁴¹ Leach had then demanded that Hodson cease to associate with James Hill, the local radical proprietor of the *Star in the East* newspaper, and it may well be that Hodson's founding of a community on the land had proved to be the final blow. When the mortgage was transferred Hodson took the opportunity to raise the value to £2,800 and to split ten acres off from two of the lots, and to convey these ten acres to the community trustees.⁴² This was the only land to actually belong to the community. These ten acres were purchased by the trustees from Hodson for £300, and mortgaged with Howard for £200. The high cost of these ten acres was due to their containing the main buildings.

The remainder of the land was rented by the community. They held the land on a twenty-one year lease, and had the right to purchase the land at any time during the period of the lease for £21 per acre. The community paid five per cent of its value, or £199 10s per year as rent.⁴³ Had the

³⁸ *New Moral World*. IX. 8. 20 February 1841

³⁹ 50 Acres Adventurer's Land in Manea (i) 1718-1844; 50 Acres Fen in Manea (ii) 1767-1844. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R90/7

For a plan of the Manea Fen estate see appendix B, p. 360.

⁴⁰ Colony Farm 1839-1908. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R90/7

⁴¹ *Star in the East*, II. 93. 23 June 1838

⁴² Colony Farm 1839-1908. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R90/7

⁴³ *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement)

community bought the land at this price, considerably more than Hodson had paid, he would have made a profit of £1,060 for the 150 acres bordering the river.⁴⁴ Hodson may have included future improvements in his valuation, as the value of the estate was increased greatly by the members. Hodson himself valued the improvements to the community within the first year of operations at approximately £2,140.⁴⁵ Hodson claimed a profit of £1,100 in this first year, presumably indicating that expenditure had been approximately £1,000.⁴⁶ This method of calculating profit gives a misleading picture of the community's economic health, as profit tied up in buildings could not be utilised by the community. By October 1840 the estate's value had risen further, and Hodson valued the buildings built by the colonists at £2,680, and the estate as a whole at £5,130.⁴⁷ In January 1844 the three adjacent lots were valued independently for a solicitor at a total of £7,600, as Hodson wished to use them as security for a loan.⁴⁸ Of this sum, 140 acres and the original farm house accounted for £5,600, giving a value of £40 per acre, for land which had cost Hodson an average of £14 10s only six years previously. The buildings were valued at a total of £2,000, which had increased to £2,700 in October, when Hodson asked to increase the loan, as he continued to build cottages.⁴⁹ As the estate had contained a single cottage in 1838, and some form of brickyard, it is clear that the colonists significantly raised the value of the estate.

This improvement resulted from high levels of investment. By October 1840, twenty-two months into operations, the members had spent £3,000 on improvements. They had borrowed a total of £6,000 from Hodson.⁵⁰ Even if Hodson's own valuations were correct, and the value he

The figure of £199 10s is derived from a value of £21 per acre for 190 acres, with ten acres having been conveyed to the society in July 1839.

⁴⁴ This includes the £300 paid to Hodson for the ten acres owned by the community. The value of the fourth lot is currently unknown.

⁴⁵ Of this, £1,440 came from the cottages, £200 from the workshops, and £500 from the improvements made to the land.

⁴⁶ *New Moral World*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840 (supplement)

⁴⁷ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 20. 30 November 1839

⁴⁸ Deeds of Colony Farm. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R90/7

⁴⁹ John Cross to Barley and Wise, 16 October 1844. Wisbech and Fenland Museum papers

⁵⁰ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 20. 30 November 1839

gave to certain items was confirmed by the later independent valuations, the increased value of the estate did not immediately benefit the members. Profit tied up in fixed capital could not be utilised by the members, and they were forced to continue to borrow from Hodson. At the end of the community, one anonymous member alleged that Hodson had directed the expenditure of the community to his own ends.⁵¹ As has been seen, the value of the estate was certainly increased by the members' activities. Yet, if Hodson had cynically intended to use the labour of the socialists to improve his land, he would have found it simpler merely to employ labourers. While the community made some payments to Hodson, by its collapse the members still owed him a considerable sum, variously reported as being between £4,000 and £5,000.⁵² Although Hodson retained the estate, and its improved value, he had funded the improvements himself. By February 1841 the members were unable to keep up the mortgage payments to Adderly Howard, who called the mortgage in. The community's ten acres were conveyed back to Hodson, who transferred the mortgage to Elizabeth Bromhead.⁵³ The community was officially closed, and all debts to Hodson were cancelled.

8. 5. A financial assessment of Manea Fen

In the absence of any detailed financial records, it is difficult to assess whether Manea Fen could have proved viable in the long term, had it not collapsed in 1841. It is clear that the various activities of the community did generate an income. For trades such as stocking and clothing manufacture, it would seem unlikely that profits were significant. However, if the estimated values of the crops sold were accurate, agriculture at Manea Fen was generating a significant income. George Beesley, in reviewing agriculture on the Chat Moss, an area of land very similar to the fens,

⁵¹ *New Moral World*, IX. 8. 20 February 1841

⁵² 10 Acres in Manea Fifties 1837-44. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R90/7 Supplemental Abstract of Title of Mr. Wm. Hodson to 10 acres of land in Manea Fen in the Isle of Ely lately belonging to a Friendly Society called the Hodsonian Community. Wisbech and Fenland Museum Papers

⁵³ Colony Farm 1839-1908. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R90/7

claimed that farms in the area could prove highly profitable. He estimated that the yearly profit of a farm on the Moss could reach £5 13s 3d per acre, which applied to Manea Fen would generate a yearly income of approximately £1,000. This figure assumes that all available land was under cultivation, which it was not until at least 1840. According to Beesley, the growing of potatoes on the Moss could cover the expenses of reclaiming the land within the first year.⁵⁴ While it was clearly possible for agriculture in such areas to generate an income, the income needed to support a farm was considerably less than that needed to support the community, with its expanded infrastructure. At its peak there were fifty people resident at the community. After having paid £200 in rent, plus the interest payments on the ten acres held by the society, this sum would not have been sufficient to support the community. The collapse of the community so soon after improvements to the land had been completed prevents any discussion as to whether the cost of improvements would have been offset by increased crop values.

The viability of the brickyard is a more problematic area. If the sales reported in the *Working Bee* were carried through, significant numbers of bricks would have been sold. Furthermore, as the brickyard was apparently taken over by two further owners after the collapse of the community, Howard and Loveday, it may have been a viable concern. Hodson was still building cottages in 1844, presumably to house workers at the brickyard. However, the quality of the bricks may not have been very high.⁵⁵ That the fleet of lighters did not prove cost-effective and were to be returned to their owners may also indicate that trade in bricks during the life of the colony was not generating a significant income.

Thus, while Manea Fen was clearly generating an income at some level, this did not match the levels of expenditure. The collapse of the

⁵⁴ George Beesley, *A Report on the State of Agriculture in Lancashire*, p. 22

⁵⁵ *A Past Effort at Socialism: History of Manea Colony* (1914). Wisbech and Fenland Museum papers

John Cross to Barley and Wise, 16 October 1844. Wisbech and Fenland Museum Papers

community prevented the colonists from enjoying the fruits of their investment. Whether such investment would have proved worthwhile over the long-term is debatable. However, it was beyond the capacity of the community at such an early stage in its life. The levels of investment, together with a choice of industry which forced the community to rely on hired labour, ensured that the community had very little available capital. Towards the end of its life, standards of living at Manea Fen were low. The youths, and many of the adults, were reduced to a diet consisting largely of bread and milk, a diet claimed by the *Working Bee* to be their preference, as it avoided excisable articles.⁵⁶ High levels of expenditure also reinforced the community's reliance on Hodson.

At the time of its collapse, the community was still financially dependent on Hodson to continue their affairs, and to meet their liabilities. The community needed not only to feed and clothe its members, but also to pay the hired labourers. Furthermore, it had to make interest payments on the mortgage to Howard, of £10 per annum, and pay rent to Hodson of £199 10s. The rent was sufficient to cover Hodson's interest on his mortgage, but not the interest on his capital investment. In 1841 the society owed between £4,000 and £5,000, on which interest, at five per cent, would have been £200 to £250. Hodson was thus losing significant sums for as long as the community was unable to pay.

8. 6. The collapse of Manea Fen

The collapse of Manea Fen in February 1841 did not come suddenly, but was dragged out, slowly and acrimoniously, over the community's last couple of months. The immediate cause of the collapse was Hodson's decision to end the venture that he had begun, and his attempt to recover the money he was owed by the community ultimately forced the members to accept its dissolution. This was not an amicable process, however. The community split into two camps, those who accepted its collapse and those

⁵⁶ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 28. 12 December 1840

who did not, and there were allegations of violence from both sides. Hodson's motivation is unclear. He himself ascribed his decision to his 'altered views regarding Socialism'.⁵⁷ However, he later advertised for a tutor for his family, and a baker, joiner, carpenter, and six brickmakers, and stated that socialists were preferred.⁵⁸ It would appear that there were stronger motives. Hodson wrote of his change of heart regarding socialism in a letter to Lord Normanby, Secretary of State, in which he appealed for help in recovering money from the community. Clearly, it would not aid his cause if he presented himself as a socialist. The money itself would appear to have been a stronger motive.

Hodson had invested significant sums in the venture, and the community owed him upwards of £4,000 at this time. He had debts himself, and needed to pay interest on the mortgages for the estate at Manea Fen. The status of his other ventures is unknown, but he had another farm in the area and it is possible that he simply needed to divert his money elsewhere. At this time, Hodson was supposed to have told a creditor that he had 'just had a thousand pounds left him', and once the creditor had left Hodson turned to a companion with the remark, 'Yes! and pretty quick it left me to! [sic]'⁵⁹ Hodson later fled to America to escape his debts.⁶⁰ While the money was clearly a factor, a further issue was the question of Hodson's control over the community.

The extent to which Manea Fen's democratic constitution was undermined by Hodson's reluctance to relinquish control had been a contentious area for much of the community's life. The issue had surfaced during the discussion of union with the Rational Society in 1840. The Rational Society feared that to ally itself to a venture that was under the control of a single individual would leave it dependent on Hodson's continued support for the movement. Irrespective of Hodson's actual

⁵⁷ HO 45/92

⁵⁸ *New Moral World*, X. 24. 11 December 1841

⁵⁹ *A Past Effort at Socialism: History of Manea Colony* (1914) Wisbech and Fenland Museum papers

behaviour, the simple fact that he was financing the community ensured that he retained ultimate control, should he chose to exercise it, as the collapse of the community was to demonstrate. Yet the faction opposed to Hodson's ending of the community brought more serious allegations, claiming that Hodson exercised near despotic power. A member of this camp maintained that all those who opposed Hodson's decision met with 'insult and obloquy, and were finally compelled to leave from their reiteration and continuance.'⁶¹ The situation worsened until a clash with one member led Hodson to cancel meat supplies until further notice. It was this which finally produced the split between Hodson and the members.

Once Hodson had cut off the meat supplies, the members met and determined to take the running of the community into their own control. A programme of financial retrenchment was initiated, as the members decided to do without hired labour, return the fleet of lighters, and consult a solicitor on their financial position. They accused Hodson of pursuing an investment policy aimed at securing his own ends, rather than being directed to the best interests of the community, and they were now taking matters into their own hands. According to the faction opposed to Hodson, this prompted him into gradually forcing the members out through a combination of force and offers of money.

Hodson began by seizing the books of the community, and then refused to give the members the profit from their latest harvest, which he used to service his own debts. At a series of meetings, Hodson attempted to persuade the members to abandon the venture, offering money as an incentive, which some members accepted. Those who refused his offers were allegedly physically attacked by his hired labourers. The rooms and shops were broken into, and their contents removed. The most serious incident was the attempted shooting of Joseph Davidge, a member from London and former secretary of Branch 16 of the Rational Society, by a

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *New Moral World*, IX. 8. 20 February 1841

hired labourer. Hodson himself alleged that the group hostile to the dissolution of the society themselves threatened violence. He claimed they had threatened to burn the buildings, and that the lives of himself and those favouring dissolution were in danger. Hodson appealed to the local Chatteris magistrates, who were reluctant to become involved. Hodson next approached the Secretary of State.⁶² The community had disintegrated. By early February the majority of the members had left, having accepted Hodson's offer of a back-payment for their labour. A smaller group hung on, determined to continue the community.

Despite the determination of this smaller group, the departure of the majority had signalled the end of the community, and there was little that could be done by those wishing to continue. Hodson's offers of money, backed with threats of violence, had gradually overcome the wills of the members. While the minority seemed determined to refuse to give in to Hodson, the majority recognised the futility of their position and took steps to dissolve the community. On January 19, 1841, nearly a month after Hodson had withdrawn the meat supplies, the members held a Special General Meeting to replace two of their trustees.⁶³ This was not a regular meeting, as the election of trustees was normally done annually in August. It would appear that the meeting was held to ensure that the trustees represented the views of the majority. At this meeting two of the trustees were removed, and replaced by two more trustees elected by the members. One of those removed was Joseph Davidge, who would appear to have been a member of the group resolved to resist Hodson. It seems likely that William Cutting, the other trustee removed at the meeting, would also have been in this group. Once these men had been replaced, the trustees would appear to have been dominated by the group favouring the dissolution of the community. On February 5, 1841 the trustees formally conveyed the ten acres on which the community stood back to Hodson. The members

⁶² HO 45/92

⁶³ Supplemental Abstract of Title of Mr. Wm. Hodson to 10 acres of land in Manea Fen in the Isle of Ely lately belonging to a Friendly Society called the Hodsonian Community. Wisbech and Fenland Museum papers

decided that it was impractical to carry on the society, and the members 'agreed to abandon all Membership therewith with a view to a final dissolution thereof.'⁶⁴

This marked the official end of the community. For Towner, a friend of William Cutting, the collapse demonstrated that the first societies should be governed democratically. Cutting had evidently complained to Towner of Hodson's behaviour, for he replied that he was sorry to hear 'that your Society is likely to be broke up by the Baseness of Hodson'. For Towner, the collapse confirmed that the Rational Society had been correct in refusing to aid Manea Fen, 'I was in hopes [at] one time that a Union would have been affected between the two Societies [sic] but the Executive would have been very wrong to have put their own Society in Jeopardy'.⁶⁵ The *New Moral World* would have agreed with Towner, and re-printed an article from 1839 warning against the enthusiasm of professed friends.⁶⁶

Davidge and a small number of other members hung on for little time further. A week after the conveyance of the land to Hodson, Davidge appealed in the pages of the *New Moral World* for support from the nation's socialists.⁶⁷ Despite their determination, this small group could not have lasted for much longer. The following year Davidge presented a petition under the Friendly Societies acts to the Vice Chancellor protesting the dissolution of the society. The case was dismissed. As the Vice Chancellor said, the 'Society itself moreover seemed to be dissolved and how a non existing [sic] Society could present a Petition in the name of a non existing [sic] Trustee he could not understand.'⁶⁸ With the conclusion of this curious postscript, the Manea Fen community finally closed.

⁶⁴ Deeds of Colony Farm. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R90/7

⁶⁵ J. C. Towner to William Cutting, 3 January 1841. Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R96/41 Crump-Cutting papers

⁶⁶ *New Moral World*, IX. 8. 20 February 1841; V. 19. 2 March 1839

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, IX. 8. 20 February 1841

⁶⁸ Supplemental Abstract of Title of Mr. Wm. Hodson to 10 acres of land in Manea Fen in the Isle of Ely lately belonging to a Friendly Society called the Hodsonian Community. Wisbech and Fenland Museum papers

CHAPTER 9. THE UNITED ADVANCEMENT SOCIETY AND PANT GLAS

9. Introduction

Between 1838 and 1840 four communities were founded. Besides Queenwood and Manea Fen, there were the ventures of the United Advancement Society in Wisbech and the Society of United Friends in Liverpool. A comparison of these two organisations with Manea Fen reveals the common problems faced by communities in this period, as well as the variety of approaches to community. While there were ideological differences between the societies, they were united by their desire to found a community. James Hill, the principal figure in the United Advancement Society, was careful to describe himself as a socialist, but not an Owenite. Yet his belief in community as a method of social reform and his descriptions of community show him to have been heavily influenced by Owen. The Society of United Friends sought to provide an alternative to the official Owenite community at Queenwood. Both ventures, like Manea Fen, can thus be seen to have been motivated by a desire to establish an essentially Owenite community.

While sharing similar aims, there were significant differences between the three organisations. These differences are apparent in three main areas. Firstly, they were separated by their origins. Manea Fen was founded by a single figure, William Hodson. The Society of United Friends and the United Advancement Society were both societies, with elected officers. However, James Hill was the most prominent and influential member of the United Advancement Society, and had been instrumental in its establishment. The Society of United Friends was a more democratic and independent organisation. The second area in which they differed was that of funding. As has been seen, Manea Fen was financed almost entirely

by Hodson himself.¹ The other two societies were both forced to rely upon subscriptions, although the United Advancement Society also adopted wholesale trading to provide material benefits in the short term. Finally, they can be distinguished through the sources of their members. Both Manea Fen and the Society of United Friends drew their members from the Rational Society, whereas the United Advancement Society was a more localised affair, based in Wisbech. Not only do these differences demonstrate the range of approaches to community, but they also directly influenced the difficulties encountered by the three organisations. Each met difficulties stemming from their particular mode of proceeding.

9. 1. James Hill and the United Advancement Society

Before William Hodson encountered Owen in the spring of 1838 and began Manea Fen, another local radical was planning his own community. This was James Hill, proprietor of the *Star in the East* newspaper of Wisbech.² Both Hill and Hodson moved in local radical circles, and were directly associated by at least one more conservative critic.³ As proprietor of the *Star in the East* Hill was ensured a certain local notoriety, and he also ran a local infant school. Unlike Hodson, who was largely unknown outside the area before Manea Fen, Hill was a more prominent figure with strong links to the Owenite movement. He knew Owen personally, and Owen stayed with Hill and his wife Caroline when in the area. Hill sought Owen's advice when planning his infant school in 1836.⁴

James Hill was a significant figure in local radical politics. His ownership of the *Star in the East* gave him a platform for his views, which included familiar radical demands for parliamentary reforms, including the

¹ See chapter 8 for the financial situation of Manea Fen.

² James Hill and the United Advancement Society have been included in Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, pp. 68-70
Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm*, pp. 170-171

³ *Star in the East*, II. 93. 23 June 1838

⁴ James Hill to Robert Owen, 1 April 1836. ROCC 785
James Hill to Robert Owen, 2 August 1836. ROCC 809

introduction of the vote by ballot, the extension of the franchise, and the shortening of parliaments. Hill also called for the abolition of undeserved pensions and sinecures. Perhaps reflecting his residence in a significant port, he opposed impressment into the navy.⁵ Within Hill's views there was also a strong strand of agrarianism. He repeated the familiar argument that the current distribution of land was due to the Norman conquest, which had forcibly deprived the original owners of their property. Hill maintained that the people had a right to maintain themselves on the land, a situation currently prevented by the Corn Laws, which led to labourers being 'disinherited' and forced to live on wages, earned in mines or factories.⁶

Hill coupled these beliefs with support for Owenism. He was not, however, an uncritical devotee of Owen. There may have been a bust of Owen at Hill's infant school, and education was one area where he recognised Owen's influence, but Hill did not adopt all of Owen's views.⁷ Despite his personal relationship with Owen, and his evident support for social reform through the establishment of co-operative communities, Hill preferred to remain apart from the Owenite movement. The reason for this lay in the distinction Hill drew between Owenism and Socialism.

We have frequently made use of the phrase Socialism and Socialist, Owenism and Owenite, and have stood forth to defend both from the hostility of opponents, but we have throughout steadily refused to enrol ourselves amongst the body on the ground that it partook of too much that was sectarian.⁸

Hill objected to the sectarian and exclusive nature of the Owenite movement. His objections did not rest on 'a disapproval of the changes in society which are proposed to be effected' nor on 'a disapproval of the

⁵ *Star in the East*, I. 42. 1 July 1837

⁶ *ibid.*, II. 54. 23 September 1837

⁷ *ibid.*, III. 121. 5 January 1839

⁸ *ibid.*, III. 110. 20 October 1838

opinions they hold as Theologists', but on his belief that men should be able to associate together irrespective of their religious views.⁹ J. F. C. Harrison argues that from 1835, with the formation of the Association of All Classes of All Nations, later the Rational Society, Owenism adopted many of the characteristics of a sect.¹⁰ It was this aspect of Owenism that Hill objected to. He did not differ from Owen over his religious views, as did many within the co-operative movement, but because of the nature of the organisation which had emerged to implement Owen's views.

Despite his reluctance to involve himself with the Owenite movement, Hill shared its approach to social reform. He perceived his infant school, opened in 1837, as a means of striving to perfect the whole of society, and of 'the advancement of the world, toward that state when health, wealth, and happiness shall be the lot of all.'¹¹ Like many Owenites, Hill had no faith in the possibility of a sudden and dramatic shift to a new order, and instead focused on raising the next generation. He saw his school in the same manner as many Owenites perceived community, as a method of raising a new generation in the midst of the unreformed, old world. Indeed, while writing to Owen asking for advice on infant schools, Hill acknowledged that establishing a school was but a small step compared with a co-operative community.¹² He said then that something larger may follow, and in January 1838 Hill saw an opportunity to begin a more ambitious scheme.

A group of working class men in Wisbech proposed a Working Men's Association, a politically radical organisation. While supporting this attempt to improve the position of the working classes, Hill did not share their belief in political agitation as the most effective means of bringing an immediate improvement. He suggested that instead they should purchase land. The final goal was to relocate to their own estate, but until then they

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, pp. 92-102

¹¹ *Star in the East*, I. 43. 8 July 1837

¹² James Hill to Robert Owen, 1 April 1836. ROCC 785

could invest the profits from the sale of produce from the land in their funds. A weekly subscription of one shilling would provide the fund for the initial purchase of the estate.¹³ The emphasis of Hill's proposal was on providing immediate, practical benefits.

That Hill did not disagree with Owen over 'the changes in society which are proposed to be effected' was readily apparent in his plans for the society. Hill was later explicitly to describe the society as being a means by which 'Owen's plan' could be made reality. The society, through mobilising the resources of the working classes, provided the answer to one of the greatest difficulties in achieving Owen's plan, that of raising funds.¹⁴ The description of the buildings at what Hill named the 'Colony' reveals even more clearly the influence of Owen. Hill wrote of the advantages of a large number of people living together. Piped water and central heating from a single stove would prove more efficient and reduce women's labour. One kitchen and dining room would suffice for the whole community. Here Hill followed Owen's own descriptions of the ideal community remarkably closely.¹⁵ These were the same elements seized upon by William Hodson when he announced Manea Fen.¹⁶ Hill described his planned establishments variously as colonies or communities, and claimed that the first communities would provide 'a perfect education' for the children sent there, 'thus forming excellent members for future communities', a familiar Owenite view of community.¹⁷ Furthermore, although Hill rejected what he perceived as the sectarian aspect of Owenism, he suggested that the new society should meet weekly, partly to deal with business matters and the collection of subscriptions, but also to 'enjoy sociality in a rational way'. The social life provided by the Owenite branches was a significant part of both their attraction and their activities, and was here mirrored by Hill.

¹³ *ibid.*, II. 71. 20 January 1838

¹⁴ *ibid.*, II. 95. 7 July 1838

¹⁵ For example, see Robert Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark' (1821) in Gregory Claeys (ed.) *The Selected Works of Robert Owen*, vol. I., p. 314.

¹⁶ *New Moral World*, IV. 200. 25 August 1838

¹⁷ *Star in the East*, II. 95. 7 July 1838

As with Manea Fen, however, Hill was open to other influences, and there is a clear agrarian strand in his thinking. He portrayed ownership of the land as the 'salvation' of the working classes.¹⁸ When the society purchased its estate in 1839 a festival was held 'to celebrate the commencement of the redemption of the land by peaceable means into the hands of its rightful owners, the people - the only True [*sic*] lords of the soil'.¹⁹ These views, reflecting agrarian attitudes towards the land and its importance to social reform, were blended with Owen's communitarian approach. Despite such influences, the form of Hill's proposals for the new society largely followed Robert Owen. He may not have chosen to describe himself as an Owenite, but Hill's ultimate goal is readily recognisable within the overall umbrella of the Owenite movement.

Hill's plan made rapid progress. Hill launched the society at a meeting at his school house in Wisbech, where it was well received, and the first members joined the new society.²⁰ Soon after this, Hill made a significant addition to the role of the society. Funds were no longer reserved solely for purchasing land, but were now to be used to purchase goods. These goods would then be distributed among the members at cost price. Unlike the co-operative stores of the late 1820s and early 1830s, this small-scale trading was not to be used to generate a profit. Instead, the addition of trading was intended merely to confer material benefits upon the members in the short term, while the funds which would assure their long-term well-being accumulated. Any expenditure would be recouped in re-selling the goods amongst the membership, and thus the society's savings would not be affected.²¹

With the addition of wholesale trading, the society's membership rapidly increased. A public meeting was held in Wisbech to consider Hill's plan, and a provisional set of rules was drawn up. By the end of February

¹⁸ *ibid.*, III. 130. 9 March 1839

¹⁹ *ibid.*, III. 137. 27 April 1839

²⁰ *ibid.*, II. 73. 3 February 1838

²¹ *ibid.*, II. 74. 10 February 1838

1838 there were between one hundred and two hundred members, and Hill had named the society the United Advancement Society. The subscription was lowered to 6d, although Hill was confident that it would later be increased to the intended 1s when the members realised how much they would save through wholesale trading.²² The membership totalled over three hundred by the end of the next month, and the first wholesale purchase of tea was distributed.²³ The society next bought flour, which also sold well. The savings on tea amounted to 1s per pound. It was decided to continue to buy flour and tea, and to add coffee and soap.²⁴ At each weekly meeting the membership increased, and by April there were between three and four hundred members.²⁵ In April the society was placed on a proper legal footing as a Friendly Society. The rules were returned from the Revising Barrister in London, and the society was able to elect its officers. Hill was chosen as president, unopposed.

The United Advancement Society continued to grow throughout the spring of 1838. Hill also launched the clearly Owenite Mental Improvement Society, to give instruction and rational amusement.²⁶ The demand for goods was such that a store was opened, replacing the distribution of goods at the weekly meeting. The store was open every day from May, and in June its opening hours were extended. News of the United Advancement Society clearly spread, and in May a branch was being considered in Peterborough. Hill was enthused by the rapid growth and success of the society. Speaking in Wisbech in July 1838, Hill urged the establishment of similar societies in other towns. United Advancement Societies provided a method of utilising and marshalling the resources of the working classes. In Wisbech, the society now had four hundred members, and its funds totalled £160. Were other towns also to form societies the working classes could, by uniting, realise the economic power that they commanded. Hill was not arguing for a national organisation, but saw each United Advancement

²² *ibid.*, II. 75. 17 February 1838

²³ *ibid.*, II. 80. 24 March 1838

²⁴ *ibid.*, II. 81. 31 March 1838

²⁵ *ibid.*, II. 82. 7 April 1838

Society as an independent unit. Individual societies could unite their funds for a common project, or employ them as they saw fit. However, in advocating the spread of the society, Hill was careful to caution other towns against following Wisbech's example in all respects.

Hill strongly advised other United Advancement Societies not to adopt wholesale trading. Although trading proved popular with the members, it was also responsible for mobilising opposition among conservative groups within the town. The successful growth of the society had been interrupted for the first time in early July when six or eight members had withdrawn. The *Star in the East* had reported that, 'the unanimity which has characterised the proceedings of the society ... and the evident regret which we understand appeared on the countenances of the seceders, convince us that some undue influences have been at work.'²⁷ In cautioning other societies against adopting trading, Hill expanded upon the precise nature of these 'undue influences'. 'By avoiding the trading part', he said, 'they would be far less likely to meet with objections from their employers and the shopkeepers of the towns.' Having resurrected the trading society, it was perhaps not unexpected that Hill would also encounter the same difficulties as the co-operative trading societies of the late 1820s and early 1830s. These societies had met with opposition from local shopowners, as was the case in Bromley, where the meeting to discuss the establishment of a co-operative society was opposed by the local baker and 'some intelligent persons! [*sic*] who resorted to the convincing method of shooting peas at the windows'.²⁸

A concern for lost trade was not the sole reason for opposition to the United Advancement Society in Wisbech. Hill, as proprietor of the radical newspaper the *Star in the East*, was a natural target for conservative opponents in the town. His attempt to found the Infant school had also met with opposition. Hill's wife, Caroline Southwood Hill, alleged that a child

²⁶ *ibid.*, II. 87. 12 May 1838

²⁷ *ibid.*, II. 95. 7 July 1838

had been withdrawn from the school under pressure from the Relieving Officer of the Wisbech Board of Guardians. The officer had reportedly said, 'You may tell Mr. Hill, that I shall relieve no pauper whose children go to his school - I will not have their young morals disturbed.'²⁹ The United Advancement Society, with its roots in a politically radical working class organisation and its vocal defence of working class rights, unsurprisingly drew criticism from the local establishment.

and if [the working classes] found it much cheaper to employ a storekeeper at a few shillings per week ... than to maintain the trappings of a Mayor, an Alderman, or half a dozen Town Councillors ... let the Mayor, Alderman, and Councillors ask themselves whether the working men and women have not a right to do so, and whether it may not have been partly occasioned by their own arts.³⁰

The Peterborough United Advancement Society, which first met in August 1838, decided not to adopt trading, although they apparently did individually purchase goods through the Wisbech society. In Wisbech, despite Hill's cautious approach, trading continued to expand. By August 1838 the Wisbech society had existed for six months, and a special meeting was called to receive the half-yearly report and also to discuss the regulations governing trading.³¹ Hill was in favour of altering the provision for trading, thinking of the expansion of the United Advancement Societies, which was proceeding apace, with Lynn, Boston, and March all considering establishing societies.³² Hill's belief that trading could prove detrimental, due to the opposition it could arouse, led him to suggest removing the rules governing trading, as he wished to see a uniform set of rules for all future societies. However, the membership, who apparently did not share Hill's wider concerns, opposed any change. There was a unanimous vote in

²⁸ *Magazine of Useful Knowledge and Co-operative Miscellany*, I. 1. 1 October 1830

²⁹ *Star in the East*, II. 56. 7 October 1837

³⁰ *ibid.*, II. 95. 7 July 1838

³¹ *ibid.*, II. 101. 18 August 1838

favour of trading and the great savings that it offered. The range of goods purchased by the society increased, and it now supplied rice, raisins, currants, sugar, and candles in addition to the previous goods.³³ This is the first indication that the membership did not entirely share Hill's vision. Hill was prepared to defend trading against the attacks of the local establishment, but he regarded it as no more than a temporary measure, and one that should not be allowed to jeopardise the ultimate goal of the society, the purchase of land. For the members, however, trading was clearly a highly attractive part of the activities of the society. This tension became readily apparent once the society had accumulated enough funds to invest in an estate.

While the Wisbech United Advancement Society's funds gradually accumulated, Hill perceived an opportunity to achieve his goals more rapidly. As has been seen in chapter four, at this time the Owenite National Community Friendly Society was searching for a suitable location for a community. Hill became involved in a complex series of negotiations with the Owenites, which, while ultimately unsuccessful, initially appeared to offer Hill the chance to begin his plans without needing to wait for the United Advancement Society to purchase land itself. In September 1838 Owen, Finch, and Fleming arrived to inspect two potential estates. The first had been drawn to their attention by William Hodson, who at this time had just encountered Owenism and was eager to assist the movement. This estate was not considered suitable. While in the area, the Owenites also visited an estate of 700 acres secured by Hill.³⁴ At this time Hill did not own the estate, but had laid down a deposit and was awaiting the completion of the transaction. Hill had apparently acquired the estate with a view to carrying out some form of experiment, intending to 'move on progressively

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*, II. 102. 25 August 1838

³⁴ *ibid.*, III. 107. 29 September 1838; III. 108. 6 October 1838; III. 109. 13 October 1838
New Moral World, IV. 206. 6 October 1838.

For a detailed discussion of the negotiations see Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, pp. 70-72

in the future stages of carrying on the work'.³⁵ It seems likely, as Edward Royle suggests, that he hoped that the United Advancement Society would eventually be able to take over the estate.³⁶ In the interim, however, Hill evidently believed that an alliance with the Owenites would enable him to begin operations on the land without waiting for the United Advancement Society. During the negotiations, which were complicated by legal and financial wrangling, Hill suggested that he should be allowed to begin his own operations on the land, as there would necessarily be a delay before the Owenites were able to do so themselves. Should Hill's experiment prove successful, he would return the purchase money to the Owenites who would then have to look elsewhere for an estate. If, however, Hill's plans failed he would relinquish control of the estate.³⁷ Hill was clearly attempting to use the Owenite movement to remove any element of risk from his project. Should he fail, he would have sold the estate for the price he originally paid for it. Not surprisingly, the National Community Friendly Society refused to accept these terms. The negotiations foundered in October 1838.

With the failure of the negotiations between Hill and the Owenite movement, Hill was forced to focus his attentions on the United Advancement Society. The society progressed steadily through the summer of 1838. By August its subscriptions totalled £200, after £12 had been returned to those members who had seceded.³⁸ The Peterborough society was also expanding, and by December 1838 the two societies had six hundred and fifty members. Of these three hundred and sixty-four belonged to the Wisbech society, with the remaining two hundred and eighty-six belonging to Peterborough. The funds accumulated in Wisbech totalled £299, while Peterborough had £106.³⁹ In February 1839, nearly a year after the Wisbech society had begun, a meeting decided that the society's funds should now be invested in land. A committee was appointed to select an estate, and to report back to the annual meeting, which was to be held in two

³⁵ *Star in the East*, III. 111. 27 October 1838

³⁶ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 70

³⁷ *Star in the East*, III. 111. 27 October 1838

³⁸ *ibid.*, II. 102. 25 August 1838

weeks. The Peterborough society was consulted, and it appointed a committee to act alongside the Wisbech society.⁴⁰ A satisfactory report being received at the annual meeting, it was decided to purchase a small estate they had been offered near Wisbech. The size of the estate is unclear, but the society's funds would only have been sufficient for an estate of ten to twenty acres, depending on the area and the proportion of the society's funds invested in the estate. Hill welcomed the step as marking the first stage in the realisation of his plans. 'Thus have the working men and women of Wisbech, by a voluntary association amongst themselves, even in old society, set the example of working out their own salvation by becoming the proprietors of landed property from small savings'.⁴¹

In April 1839 the estate was officially conveyed to the society.⁴² The society celebrated the purchase at its annual festival. A party of six hundred marched from the infant school in Wisbech to the estate on the banks of the Nene, accompanied by a brass band. It carried with it two banners, one bearing the society's name, and the other the legend 'The Land of the People', a reminder of the agrarian leanings within the society. At the estate tables for tea, surmounted by arches of flower-decked boughs, had been arranged in the orchard. The gathering danced around a May-pole, before retiring to a ball at the infant school in the evening.⁴³

It was to be some time before the society could use its estate. Hill planned to use the estate for a Manual Labour school, which would operate in conjunction with his Educational Institution in Wisbech. He had moved away from community plans towards favouring an educational establishment during his negotiations with the National Community Friendly Society, perhaps believing it to be a more practical form of preliminary operations. The Manual Labour school would teach both agricultural and mechanical skills. Boys would be taught practical subjects

³⁹ *ibid.*, III. 118. 15 December 1838

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, III. 125. 2 February 1839

⁴¹ *ibid.*, III. 130. 9 March 1839

⁴² *ibid.*, III. 134. 6 April 1839

such as gardening, bricklaying, carpentry, and printing, alongside subjects such as history, geography, reading, writing, and arithmetic. Girls would be taught as much of this as was 'suitable to their physique', as well as domestic employments. The charge of 5s per week would include food and clothing.⁴⁴ While the plans for the school were finalised, a few immediate repairs were carried out on the estate. The crops were to be harvested, and the profit divided among the members in proportion to their contributions to the society's funds. Some land would be retained for the use of the school, while the remainder was either to be let or used to raise cows.⁴⁵

The society's celebrations ultimately proved premature. Rather than marking the completion of the first step towards their goals, the purchase of land heralded the eventual demise of the society. After the purchase of the estate in April 1839, the activities of the society slowed to such an extent that Hill felt obliged to report on the society in the pages of the *Star in the East* to counter fears that it had collapsed. While rumours of its collapse were unfounded, the society had certainly reduced the scope of its activities. This was a direct result of the tensions which had first become apparent during the summer of 1838.

The demand for trading among the members, and the opposition that this engendered among certain sectors of the town, had both conspired to weaken the society. The purchase of the estate had clearly consumed a significant portion of the society's funds, and this left less available for trading. Disappointed, some members left and took back their subscriptions. Hill was clearly exasperated by this, and reminded them 'that this was not the object for which the Society had been formed ... They looked to the present advantage too much, and lost sight of the ultimate one.'⁴⁶ Furthermore, opposition within the town had not abated since the summer of 1838. Some of the secessions were due to the influence of

⁴³ *ibid.*, III. 140. 18 May 1839

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, IV. 173. 4 January 1840

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, III. 137. 27 April 1838

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, IV. 167. 23 November 1839

'shopkeepers and their connections'. Employers allegedly forced members to leave under pain of dismissal. Once the estate was purchased, rumours were circulated claiming the security of the estate was in danger.

After over a year of such opposition Hill was no longer prepared to mount the same vigorous defence as he had done in 1838. His cautious approach to trading was finally adopted by the society, perhaps eased by the secession of those more interested in trading than the official aims of the society. A special meeting was held, at which it was decided to suspend trading. Furthermore, in an attempt to minimise the damaging effect of members withdrawing, the fifteenth rule, which entitled any member who withdrew to the return of his subscriptions, was suspended.⁴⁷ The United Advancement Society was once again repeating the experience of the earlier co-operative societies, which had also found similar measures to be necessary. The rule changes achieved Hill's earlier goal of making the society's regulations suitable for general application, which would aid the spread of the society. Hill responded to further criticisms of the society, and defended it against the charge of failure.⁴⁸ However, while the society did hold its second annual meeting in February 1840, there is little indication of any further activity after the land purchase.⁴⁹

9. 2. Pant Glas: 'a grazing farm in the clouds'⁵⁰

The second substantial undertaking to coincide with the Manea Fen community was Pant Glas. As has been discussed above, the Pant Glas community met with a similar reception to Manea Fen. Welcomed by those who sought a life in community, but regarded as a distraction by the Rational Society, Pant Glas was a potentially divisive influence.⁵¹ Pant Glas was not as considerable a venture as Manea Fen, and appears to have lasted

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, IV. 171. 21 December 1839, IV. 173. 4 January 1840

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, IV. 178. 8 February 1840

⁵⁰ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 15. 12 September 1840

⁵¹ See chapter 4 for a discussion of the relationship between Pant Glas and the Rational Society.

for little more than a year. It was not only the Rational Society's reaction that invites comparison of the two communities. Like Manea Fen, but unlike the United Advancement Society, Pant Glas drew its support from within the Rational Society. During its lifetime it also encountered a range of difficulties which would have been familiar to the Hodsonians. However, like James Hill's venture, the specific form of organisation adopted gave rise to a particular set of difficulties, different from those encountered by Manea Fen.

The Pant Glas community was formed by the Society of United Friends. This society, as was seen in chapter four, had its roots in the Rational Society's Liverpool branch. Most of its original members would appear to have also been members of the Rational Society in Liverpool, and the branch complained of their distracting influence at the 1840 Congress.⁵² The society's first secretary, James Spurr, was also a member of the Liverpool Rational School Society. This was a society headed by John Finch, the long-standing Liverpool co-operator and Owenite, to establish infant schools.⁵³ For the early part of its life, the Society of United Friends continued to meet in the same location as the Rational Society, at William Westwick's Community and Temperance Hotel in Lord Nelson Street. Westwick was the secretary of the Liverpool branch of the Rational Society. Thus the Society of United Friends grew out of the mainstream Owenite movement in Liverpool, motivated by a desire to move into community as soon as possible.

Announced in 1838, Manea Fen had drawn support from a general dissatisfaction among the Rational Society branches at the failure of the society to form a community. By 1839 the Rational Society had begun operations at Queenwood, and some within the Owenite movement moved to support the official community at the expense of what was seen as a rival venture at Manea Fen. However, the establishment of Queenwood was not

⁵² *New Moral World*, VII. 83. 23 May 1840

⁵³ James Spurr and John Finch to Robert Owen, 30 July 1839. ROCC 1135

sufficient to quell all dissatisfaction within the movement. The question was now not whether a community would be founded, but whether all who wanted to leave for it could be accommodated. It was this which led to the formation of the Society of United Friends. This frustration at the lack of opportunity at Queenwood was not confined to Liverpool, for the Society of United Friends established branches in Manchester and Warrington, both strong centres of Owenism.⁵⁴ It would seem likely that in these places, as in Liverpool, many of the members would have also been members of the Rational Society. The Society of United Friends was thus strongly rooted in the Rational Society. Like Manea Fen, the society recruited its members from the mainstream Owenite movement and it was from strong Owenite areas that it drew its support. This was in contrast to the United Advancement Society, which was formed in an area with no strong Owenite presence.

As with many similar societies, the Society of United Friends took advantage of the Friendly Societies legislation, and was officially enrolled in January 1840. Its stated aims were to ensure the well-being of its members, by providing employment, food, and education. The society was established on a democratic basis. The government, composed of a president, treasurer, secretary, and eight directors, was to be elected by the membership at the society's half-yearly meetings. Interested parties had to spend a period as a candidate, until they were elected to be full members. Upon becoming members, candidates were expected to pay 2s 6d, and thereafter had to make a weekly subscription of at least 6d. These payments went towards the entrance fee for the society's intended community. These fees stood at £12 for a man and £8 for a woman, with children under eighteen being free.⁵⁵

Fleming, as editor of the *New Moral World*, noted that these sums would prove to be too low, in the absence of significant financial backing

For John Finch see p. 88, n. 51.

⁵⁴ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 8. 25 July 1840

from another source.⁵⁶ John Moncas, who by March 1840 had succeeded William Wall as president of the Society of United Friends, defended the community's financial projections, in the first of what would prove to be a lengthy series of arguments over the society's finances. He argued that his society, unlike the Rational Society, did not aim to build the 'palace-like buildings, terraces, libraries, cottages, or machinery for raising up children from their supper-rooms to their bed-rooms'. Moncas' view of the Rational Society's plans, while not strictly accurate, does demonstrate that overly grandiose views of community were current among the movement, and helps to explain why so many had their expectations betrayed when they actually arrived at communities such as Manea Fen. The Society of United Friends had more explicitly lowly aims. Moncas wrote, 'our more humble purpose is to secure to the industrious a field for their own individual labour, by ... which ... they may obtain and secure a contented and happy independence, and banish from their firesides poverty, and the fear of it for ever.'⁵⁷ The aim of the society was to

exhibit a practical example to the industrious, moral, and intellectual working classes of this country, of the ease with which they may improve their condition, by establishing communities, founded upon the principle of equality of rights and property, in opposition to the system of individualised interests of competitive society.⁵⁸

Moncas' statements reveal the clear socialist basis of the Society of United Friends, and demonstrate that it had not moved far from the aims of the Rational Society, but merely believed that the advantages of community could be realised through a small scale, less expensive route. In this the Society of United Friends was reflecting debates which had continued within the communitarian movement from the early 1820s onwards.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, I. 30. 8 February 1840

⁵⁶ *New Moral World*, VII. 73. 14 March 1840

For G. A. Fleming see p. 109, n. 140.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, VII. 76. 4 April 1840

The society's regulations were largely typical of such societies. Where the Society of United Friends did depart from other communitarian societies was in the regulations concerned with the distribution of the society's profits.⁵⁹ Two-thirds of the net profits of the society became the common property of the society, whilst the remainder was distributed equally among the members, both male and female. These individual shares were placed against the members' credits, and could be withdrawn at a month's notice. While Fleming was critical of the entrance fees, he did approve of this measure as it permitted members to support families or relatives outside of the community.⁶⁰ Property brought into the community was to be valued, and that value placed against the member's account, with five per cent interest to be paid. Individual accumulation was not permitted by the society to interfere with the equality of the members, as each member benefited equally, irrespective of their contribution to the society's profits. In other aspects of life in the proposed venture equality was also ensured. All members were to be given a room, all meals were to be taken communally and all would receive the same food. Should the community be dissolved, its property would be divided equally among the members. There was thus little scope for material differences among the members.

By the time that the rules had returned from Tidd Pratt, the Registrar for Friendly Societies, the Society of United Friends had already located an estate. The estate was in northern Wales, not far from Liverpool, at a place known as Pant Glas. It was extensive, totalling 1,000 acres, and contained a farm house and several out-buildings. The first descriptions of the estate were naturally favourable, and full of assurances as to its suitability for a community. Although hilly, the land would support grain, turnips, and potatoes. Within the estate there were areas of good meadow land and a great supply of peat. A waterfall provided an opportunity for future

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Working Bee*, I. 30. 8 February 1840

⁶⁰ *New Moral World*, VII. 73. 14 March 1840

manufacturing.⁶¹ The Society of United Friends paid a rent of £140 per annum for ten years, and had the right to purchase the estate during that period for £4,000.⁶² In April 1840 the society took possession of the estate, and began operations. The sowing of the spring crops was underway, and the society had begun to purchase implements, as well as the beginnings of a stock of horses and cows. Moncas wrote that the society had many agriculturalists, carpenters, and spinners, but was now in need of an agricultural smith, a stone mason, a shoemaker, and a tailor. He cautioned prospective members that much hard work was needed in the community.⁶³

Having taken possession of an estate, the Society of United Friends appeared to be in a strong position. Membership was increasing, and the subscriptions continued to flow. The society attracted attention from across the Owenite movement. Members from Manchester and Liverpool had moved to the estate. Oats, potatoes, carrots, cabbages, and other crops were all planted. A steam engine was brought by one of the members from Liverpool, and leather for shoe making was purchased. Edward O'Brien, a bootmaker, arrived from Liverpool.⁶⁴ However, the society's first major difficulties also arose as a consequence of taking the estate. Like Manea Fen, Pant Glas soon began to suffer from a series of critical reports from those who had visited the community. The community's troubles began in May 1840, when two Owenites named Clark and Milroy wrote to the *New Moral World*. Clark was a member of the Leeds branch of the Rational Society. Attracted by the statements issued by the Society of United Friends, Clark, who was unemployed at this time, arranged with the society to join them at Pant Glas. He broke up his home in Leeds and travelled to Liverpool. Here he decided to visit the estate before committing himself to joining. In the company of Milroy, a member of the Liverpool branch, and two further people from Liverpool and Bury, he inspected Pant Glas.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Working Bee*, I. 30. 8 February 1840

⁶² *New Moral World*, VII. 76. 4 April 1840

⁶³ *Working Bee*, I. 41. 25 April 1840

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 13. 29 August 1840

⁶⁵ Milroy may have participated in building the Liverpool Hall of Science. See *New Moral World*, VII. 75. 28 March 1840

The two men were surprised by the discrepancy between the favourable reports issued by Moncas, and the reality of conditions at Pant Glas. Both criticised all aspects of the estate, and gave a picture of a rugged, barren hillside. Clark estimated that of the 1,000 acres only 200 could ever be properly cultivated, and that after immense labour. The hills were so steep that a team of horses could scarcely reach their summits. The land was too stony and bleak to support significant crops, and the poor roads made transporting manure to the estate impossible. The river surrounded by level land of which Moncas wrote was described by Clark as 'a rill at the bottom of a ravine between the mountains'. Where Moncas described groves of hazel trees, Milroy wrote of an area composed of 'nothing but rugged large stones, betwixt the crevices of which there is a number of hazel trees growing'. He condemned the estate as being 'merely a hill', and said that it did not deserve the name Pant Glas, 'as the meaning of it is Green Valley, when in reality it is nothing but the highest hill, except one ... in the parish.'⁶⁶

Later in May 1840 Clark and Milroy had their objections supported by James Spurr, the former secretary of the Society of United Friends. He too had visited the estate, and afterwards felt obliged to reinforce criticisms of the estate to save others 'from that destruction which would inevitably follow the breaking-up of their homes, to go to this place.'⁶⁷ These attacks led Moncas to defend their operations. After having lived at the community for the past few months, however, Moncas was not prepared to deny many of the critics' allegations. He admitted that the severe weather, the mountainous nature of the estate, and poor transport routes all posed great difficulties.⁶⁸ Moncas claimed to have been aware of these problems, and to have brought them to the attention of the society, from the very beginning, a claim which does not quite fit with his statements as they appeared in the *New Moral World* and the *Working Bee*. Despite these problems, he

⁶⁶ *New Moral World*, VII. 82. 16 May 1840

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, VII. 84. 30 May 1840

defended the productivity of the soil, and cited conversations with local farmers to support his case.⁶⁹

However, Moncas was aware that an estate which could function as a farm was not necessarily suitable for a community, and he concluded that the Society of United Friends had made 'an injudicious selection'.⁷⁰ His main concern was the weather, which was so harsh as to lead him to doubt the suitability of the estate for a community. 'I am compelled, therefore, to believe that the climate is too severe for myself and others similarly organized and trained, and that it is in consequence not favourable to the establishment of a social and happiness-seeking community.'⁷¹ Moncas reported that the Society of United Friends had been offered two estates near London, and suggested that delegates from the society's branches should report on both.⁷² Moncas himself believed that the society was now facing a crisis, while Spurr believed that after these critical reports the scheme was 'entirely exploded'. However, Pant Glas was still attracting attention from socialists eager to move to a community.⁷³ The *New Moral World* felt obliged to caution any still attracted by the venture.

We trust that those who are led by impatience to catch at every straw thrown up in the wind, and listen with eager ear and open mouth to the promise of large advantages with small means and little trouble, will be cautious how they suffer themselves to be in future misled.⁷⁴

Moncas' suggestion that the society delegate members to report on the estates was adopted by the society. In July 1840 the Society of United Friends held its half-yearly meeting, where reports were read from the delegates who had visited both Pant Glas and the alternative offers. While

⁶⁸ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 3. 20 June 1840

⁶⁹ *New Moral World*, VII. 85. 6 June 1840

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 3. 20 June 1840

⁷² *New Moral World*, VII. 85. 6 June 1840

⁷³ See chapter 4

the disadvantages of Pant Glas were recognised, it was still felt to be superior to the others, and the society endorsed its suitability for a social community. It was resolved to continue with operations at Pant Glas. Once this question had been decided, the society moved on to other business. The society's officers were elected, and a number of alterations made to the rules. Manchester replaced Liverpool as the society's base. Two alterations significantly reinforced the egalitarian basis of the society. It was decided that the community would be governed by a committee formed of the members on the estate, with a president elected by themselves. This form of government was noticeably more democratic than that adopted at the Rational Society's community at Queenwood, reflecting the Society of United Friends' origins in an independent group of working class men. It was also decided, in order to 'destroy the selfish principle', that every seven years the members' shares of the society's profits would be returned to the society.⁷⁵

The society's decision to continue with Pant Glas did not stifle all opposition. Shortly after the half-yearly meeting a new critic emerged. This was Joseph Gregory, who had been the society's agricultural assistant at Pant Glas from its foundation through to the time of the meeting. At that meeting he had moved that the society should consider taking land on Warburton Moss, near Manchester. Angered by the absence of his motion from reports of the meeting, Gregory now came forward to criticise Pant Glas. He had left Pant Glas, along with another agriculturalist named Robert Reid, in the belief that it would never flourish.⁷⁶ Gregory contested Moncas' reports of the extent of the estate, and the amount that was suitable for cultivation, and so sparked another long-running series of debates over the estate's quality.⁷⁷ A Manchester member of the Society of United Friends, William Parker, responded rapidly, quoting extensively from a letter which he claimed had been written by Gregory himself. The letter

⁷⁴ *New Moral World*, VII. 85. 6 June 1840

⁷⁵ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 8. 25 July 1840

⁷⁶ Robert Reid later went to the Manea Fen community, before returning to Liverpool. See *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 17. 26 September 1840; New Series, I. 29. 19 December 1840

gave details of the crops sown at Pant Glas. Parker also claimed that when the society visited Pant Glas after Clark and Milroy's attacks, it found Gregory ploughing one of the steepest hills on the estate with only one horse.⁷⁸ Without any further information, judging the accuracy of these claims and counter-claims is impossible. More significant than Parker's letter was a letter from Moncas, forwarded to the *Working Bee* by James Stanley, a Warrington member and one of the trustees of the society. The letter itself was unremarkable, and it gave the favourable account of activities on the estate that could be expected.⁷⁹ The significance of the letter was later revealed by Gregory, who claimed that it was written to quell growing unrest among the branches of the Society of United Friends.⁸⁰

According to Gregory, the motivation for Moncas' letter to Stanley was another letter, written by Charles Hook. Hook was a Warrington member who had moved to Pant Glas, and in a letter back to Warrington he wrote that the community was without meat. Stanley replied, writing that 'he was afraid of being beaten and ill-used by those whom he had advised to pay their money'. Gregory added that, 'I believe to defend the faith, (Pant Glas), among those who have subscribed to it at Warrington, is anything but agreeable.' Accordingly Hook assisted Moncas in writing a favourable account to Stanley so as to appease growing opposition in Warrington, and to prevent Stanley from 'being maltreated by those who have been subscribing their eight or ten shillings per week, out of sixteen or eighteen shillings per week wages.'⁸¹ In the absence of any further information, confirming the accuracy of Gregory's allegations remains difficult. If accurate, the incident indicates the difficulties faced by the Society of United Friends in maintaining support for the distant Pant Glas venture.

Unlike the Society of United Friends, Manea Fen was formed as a community before it established local branches. In many ways, the

⁷⁷ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 10. 8 August 1840

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 13. 29 August 1840

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 11. 15 August 1840

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, New Series, I. 15. 12 September 1840

problems encountered at Manea Fen were the reverse of those which arose at Pant Glas. Manea Fen struggled throughout its lifetime to establish contacts with the branches of the Rational Society, which it needed to provide a market for goods produced in the community.⁸² The Pant Glas community, on the other hand, was formed after the society which supported it. The Society of United Friends thus had to ensure that it maintained the support of the society behind the community. When critical reports circulated among the society, the effects could clearly be damaging. In this respect Pant Glas was closer to the Rational Society's official undertaking at Queenwood than to Manea Fen. The crisis which arose after Gregory's attacks was thus rooted in the nature of the society and its dependence on subscriptions. Those paying their subscriptions in Manchester, Warrington, and Liverpool naturally needed to believe that the venture was proving successful. As with the United Advancement Society and Manea Fen the nature of the organisations influenced the practical difficulties each society encountered.

Little was heard from Pant Glas after Gregory's allegations. Moncas replied defending the estate, and the dispute petered out soon after. After his involvement with the secessionist group at Pant Glas, Gregory returned to the Rational Society in Liverpool, where he was welcomed as a 'prodigal son returned to the bosom of the fold'.⁸³ Milroy was also once again active in the Liverpool branch at this time. Moncas continued as the most prominent advocate of the community, and was still to be found touring in aid of Pant Glas in the spring of 1841.⁸⁴ Nothing further was heard from the community after this time.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² See chapters 4 and 8 above.

⁸³ *New Moral World*, VIII. 13. 26 September 1840

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, IX. 21. 22 May 1841

9. 3. Conclusion

The three societies of Manea Fen, Pant Glas, and the United Advancement Society all adopted different approaches to founding a community. United by a shared desire to establish a co-operative community, each provided a different answer to the central question of how to acquire land. The diversity of organisational forms which had characterised the 1820s and the early 1830s continued into the late 1830s and 1840s, as shown by the societies discussed here and by others such as the Tyldesley co-operators' experiment on Chat Moss.⁸⁵ Although sharing a common aim, each society encountered different problems as they struggled to establish a viable community. These difficulties can be directly related to the organisational forms they adopted. An examination of three key areas, organisation, fund raising, and their support bases, reveals the main differences between the three societies.

While Hodson was able to begin Manea Fen with little preparation, Hill was forced to adopt a more gradual approach. Like many communitarian societies, Hill turned to subscriptions. Unlike Hodson, Hill had thus to maintain the society's interest over a prolonged period. It was partly for this reason that the society adopted wholesale trading, and thus came to resemble the earlier co-operative societies. Trading provided benefits in the short term until land was secured. For Hill, trading was merely a secondary activity, yet it was the main attraction for many. This tension, between the society's ultimate goal and short-term activity, weakened the society. Furthermore, trading antagonised shopkeepers and others, and their opposition hindered the society. The land purchase forced a partial solution to the problem, for little remained in the society's funds for trading. The decline in trading led to many members leaving, and the society was considerably weakened.

⁸⁵ See chapter 4 for the Tyldesley experiment.

That so many members of the United Advancement Society were attracted by its trading and the promise of cheap goods reflects another fundamental problem encountered by James Hill. Hodson and Hill may both have been planning ventures in the same area, but they looked to very different groups for their support. While Hodson drew most of his members from within the Owenite movement, and from across the country, Hill's venture was a far more local affair. Hill was attempting to build a communitarian society, with essentially Owenite goals, in an area where Owenism was not strong and had no local presence. Built on the proposed Working Men's Association, the United Advancement Society retained radical views, with little indication of Owenite leanings. A series of resolutions, passed at a meeting held soon after Hill announced the society, reflect the radical bias of the society, condemning the unequal distribution of wealth and the heavy taxation used to support oppressive institutions. Comparison with a more typical Owenite society, such as the Community Friendly Society formed a few years earlier in 1836, reveals the absence of many Owenite elements such as an emphasis on mutual co-operation and determinist views of the formation of character.⁸⁶ The United Advancement Society reveals the blend of ideals that could underpin a communitarian venture in this period. Hill himself moved away from proposing a community towards supporting educational plans for the society. The lack of a committed Owenite membership also contributed towards the weakness of the society once trading was abandoned. Trading clearly attracted many who were not committed to the ultimate goals of the society.

Like the United Advancement Society, the Society of United Friends also took a more gradual approach to founding a community. Without an offer of land, the society adopted subscriptions as the principal method of raising funds. Yet in many ways the Society of United Friends was more similar to Manea Fen than to the United Advancement Society. Like Manea Fen, the Society of United Friends was rooted in the Rational Society, and it

⁸⁶ *Rules to be observed for the government and management of the Community Friendly Society*, p. iii

was from that organisation that it drew most of its members. Thus, while the United Advancement Society added wholesale trading to its activities, the Society of United Friends restricted itself to collecting subscriptions. Unlike the Wisbech society the Society of United Friends did not find it necessary to offer the incentive of trading. It was apparent that it did collect funds at a far higher rate than the minimum subscription level of 6d per week. If Gregory is to be believed, the Warrington members were subscribing eight to ten shillings per week, which indicates the strength of support, or perhaps the degree of impatience, among the Warrington socialists.⁸⁷

Pant Glas suffered from financial difficulties, and an inability to achieve a sufficient return from their activities. Their choice of estate was unwise, and was clearly a bleak and desolate area. During the debates sparked by critics of the estate, Moncas drew a careful distinction which was central to community ventures in this period, but which was not frequently voiced. He wrote that Pant Glas was a viable farm, but would not prove adequate for community purposes.⁸⁸ An estate which could support a farming establishment could not necessarily maintain the additional infrastructure of a socialist community. The Society of United Friends was largely driven to take an estate such as Pant Glas, for as a young society dependent on subscriptions it could not command very extensive funds. The Pant Glas estate was valued at £4,000 for 1,000 acres, or only £4 per acre. Compared with the valuations of Manea Fen, which ranged between £21 and £40 per acre, this indicates the low value of the estate. The unwise choice of estate also threatened the stability of the society. Unlike Manea Fen, Pant Glas was dependent on maintaining support among the subscribers to the Society of United Friends. Critical reports of the Pant Glas estate led to an understandable concern among the

⁸⁷ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 15. 12 September 1840

The Warrington branch of the Rational Society contributed nothing to the Community Fund and nothing to the General Fund except in 1838 (Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 239). Gregory's figures may thus be inaccurate. On the other hand, the Warrington members may have decided that they stood to gain little from the Rational Society's own activities, and to have turned instead to Pant Glas.

members, who were subscribing significant amounts to support the venture. The difficulties encountered by Pant Glas stemmed directly from the organisational form adopted by the Society of United Friends.

⁸⁸ *New Moral World*, VII. 85. 6 June 1840

CHAPTER 10. THE LEEDS REDEMPTION SOCIETY AND THE WIDER MOVEMENT

10. Introduction

This chapter, while focusing on the Leeds Redemption Society, will also consider the national context created by the Rational Society's decline following the closure of its Queenwood community. The Rational Society continued to exist through into the 1850s, but it survived in little more than name only, with no more than 187 subscribing members by 1846.¹ The Central Board continued merely to oversee the settlement of the society's finances, which proved to be a protracted affair.² After this collapse a large number of alternative organisations emerged. Many of these shared similar aims, both with each other and with the attenuated remnant of the Rational Society, although with different emphases. Of these the Leeds Redemption Society was the most significant, partly because of its size, and because of its estate. It was the last essentially Owenite community in Britain.

10. 1. The national context 1845-1848

The collapse of the Rational Society produced a situation not dissimilar to that of the late 1820s and early 1830s. In London, Manchester, Liverpool, and other former centres of Owenism the debates of the early 1830s were revived and a variety of smaller, local organisations emerged. As in the 1820s and 1830s these societies pursued a variety of paths to community. Some, influenced by the failure of Queenwood, advocated a return to propaganda and education. Others continued to propose practical activity, ranging from partial plans to proposals for true communities.

¹ *Reasoner*, I. 6. 8 July 1846

² Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, pp. 208-210

With the collapse of the Rational Society many of its members formed new societies to continue its aims. In Manchester the local branch was re-organised as the Manchester Rational Society.³ Similar societies emerged in other cities. In the mid-1840s the main societies, besides the Leeds Redemption Society, were Goodwyn Barmby's Communist Church and the Co-operative League, both based in London. In London, as in the days before the formation of the Rational Society in 1835, co-operation was characterised by a variety of organisations, sharing a dedication to co-operative views but with slightly different aims. The Communist Church was formed by Barmby to unite Christianity and communism. It maintained that communion of goods was a part of the original Christian Church and called for its restoration as a religious duty.⁴ It had two groups in London, and was connected with societies in Liverpool, Glasgow, Paisley, Stirlingshire, and other areas.⁵ The Co-operative League was one of the London societies which emerged in the aftermath of the collapse of the Rational Society. Formed at the end of 1846, it counted many former Owenites among its number.⁶ Charles Jenneson, previously of the Finsbury branch of the Rational Society and a prominent London co-operator, was a member, as was J. D. Styles, a veteran of many co-operative organisations including the British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge.⁷ The League sought to unite all co-operators, to act as a centre for propaganda and education, and eventually to organise its members on co-operative principles for trade, manufacturing, and agriculture, and to introduce an equitable system of exchange.⁸ Their placards, as G. J. Holyoake observed, quoted the preamble to the old constitution and laws of the Rational Society of 1835, illustrating the extent to which they sought to continue the aims of that organisation.⁹

³ *Moral World*, I. 7. 11 October 1845

⁴ *Utilitarian Record*, 5 January 1848

⁵ *Moral World*, I. 4. 20 September 1845

⁶ *People's Journal: Annals of Industry*, week ending 5 December 1846

⁷ *Plan of the Co-operative League* (London, 1847), p. iii

For Charles Jenneson see p. 107, n. 30.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 9

⁹ *Reasoner*, II. 46. 14 April 1847

Another London society which brought together former Rational Society members was the Social Friends Society, with Henry Hetherington, the radical publisher and former co-operator, as secretary. Like the Rational Society before it, this society was formed 'for the purpose of applying the principles established by Robert Owen to social and personal improvement; and of co-operating for the purpose of ultimately establishing a community of united interests'. Hetherington called 'upon the hopeful votaries of communism ... to re-unite'. The society was established in January 1847, and met at the John Street Literary and Scientific Institution, once the centre of London Owenism.¹⁰ A society with the same name also emerged in Manchester.¹¹ Owen himself remained active, and along with James Rigby, G. A. Fleming, and Lloyd Jones was involved with a propagandist society named the Labour League, which met at the same location as the Co-operative League in 1848.¹² In London the John Street Institution continued, as did the old Finsbury Institution, despite the demise of the Rational Society which had established them. John Street provided a home for the Rational Society's Central Board, as the financial wrangling over Queenwood dragged on through the 1850s.

In 1846 the Communist Committee was formed at the John Street Institution. Debates within the John Street Institution demonstrated the continued existence of a clear, undiluted demand for a practical community. Again composed of former Owenites, including Henry Hetherington, G. J. Holyoake, Alexander Campbell, and Robert Buchanan, the Committee was formed to consider a variety of investment plans for the purchase of land.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, II. 41. 10 March 1847

¹¹ *ibid.*, I. 12. 20 August 1846

¹² *ibid.*, IV. 95. 22 March 1848

Utilitarian Record, 5 April 1848

Herald of Co-operation, I. 19. July 1848 (The *Herald of Co-operation* was a continuation of the *Herald of Redemption*, and took its new name from the fourth issue onwards.)

See p. 90, n. 59 for James Rigby, p. 109, n. 140 for G. A. Fleming, and p. 102, n. 106 for Lloyd Jones.

Two proposals were considered, one originating with Dr. Bowkett, and the other with James Hill, the former proprietor of the radical Wisbech newspaper the *Star in the East*.¹³ Bowkett's plan was not necessarily communal, while Hill's plan was more communal in its intention. It was not far removed from his proposals for the United Advancement Society in 1838, but now, perhaps influenced by the collapse of the Rational Society or to give it a broader appeal, Hill here allowed for a high degree of individual participation in his plan. He envisioned purchasing land and building housing in 'clusters', a variation on Owen's parallelograms, and Hill suggested ellipses, as they were just as convenient and more elegant. In planning the housing it would be possible to 'adopt the associative principle in heating, lighting, and domestic economy, just as far as does not trench inconveniently on individual habits and inclinations, and no farther.'¹⁴ While Hill himself hoped to see his plan adopted under a co-operative approach, he also allowed for individuals to invest in a private home, and to work their own land. Holyoake, in reporting Hill's plan, noted that Hill had not stressed the co-operative aspect of his plan as much as its purely practical advantages in order to avoid charges of socialism. Under his proposal there remained some scope for communal activity. The land would remain the property of the society, belonging to individuals for their lifetimes, before reverting to the society. It would also be possible to retain land for communal use, with small allotments being allocated to individuals.¹⁵

The John Street Communist Committee decided upon Dr. Bowkett's plan, while Hill's proposal formed the basis for the National Land and Building Association. William Devonshire Saull, the London merchant who had been involved with the co-operative movement in London since the 1830s, was one of the trustees.¹⁶ The Bowkett plan, however, did not satisfy all of those active at John Street, for it failed to meet the strong demand of

¹³ See chapter nine for a discussion of James Hill and the United Advancement Society.

¹⁴ *Reasoner*, I. 21. 21 October 1846

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*, I. 25. 18 November 1846

many members for specifically communitarian activity. At the meeting where Hill's and Bowkett's plans were discussed there was some support for Bowkett while 'others, who had not lost hope in the practical realization of a Community of United Interests, had no faith in any partial effort, terminating in the mere possession of a house, while the individual is left to struggle with a ruinous system of competition'.¹⁷ Under Bowkett's plan the participants would have received only a house, and, while Hill adopted a more co-operative approach, his plan also permitted individual participation. Neither plan met the demand for a true community which still existed within the branch. The John Street Communist Committee attempted to satisfy both elements by forming the John Street Provident Society with two classes of investors. The first class was for those interested in purchasing land individually, while the second was for the collective purchase of land, 'thus converting these societies into Communist Associations'.¹⁸ Tidd Pratt later refused to enrol the rules for the second class, but the Provident Society assured investors that it would remain possible to purchase collectively.¹⁹ G. J. Holyoake welcomed the Provident Society as providing an efficient method of raising the funds for a community, but it is clear that some regarded such proposals as mere half-way measures rather than true community proposals.

The communitarian dream clearly had not died with the collapse of Queenwood. The end of the Rational Society as an effective national organisation forced co-operators to turn to other methods of establishing communities, and groups considered not only non-communitarian plans such as those of Dr. Bowkett but also looked to Chartism as a possible alternative. In 1846 a group of John Street members visited O'Connorville, the Chartist Land Plan settlement, to ascertain 'how far it is desirable and practicable to imitate the Chartists' experiment, by those who are ... determined to realise practical co-operation in some form or other.'²⁰ In

¹⁷ *Reasoner*, I. 21. 21 October 1846

¹⁸ *ibid.*, I. 20. 14 October 1846

¹⁹ *Utilitarian Record*, 20 January 1847

²⁰ *Reasoner*, I. 17. 23 September 1846

Glasgow too a number of members joined the Chartist Land Plan seeking an alternative form of communitarian existence.²¹ The Chartist Land Plan provided an outlet for those who 'had not lost hope in the practical realization of a Community' but for whom there was no specifically communitarian venture. For the Glasgow co-operators the Chartist plan proved to be 'not sufficiently Co-operative', and they turned their attentions to forming a branch of the Leeds Redemption Society.²² The decision was postponed, and instead the co-operators contacted other similar groups in Scotland to ascertain the support for a community in the area.

10. 2. The establishment of the Leeds Redemption Society

The Leeds Redemption Society was formed in 1845.²³ It was dedicated to establishing a community, which it did in 1848, and it finally ended in 1855. In the contemporary proliferation of new organisations and societies it was guaranteed a prominent position because of its possession of land. Above all, for those seeking a replacement for Queenwood it represented virtually the only opportunity for practical activity, and during the decade of its life it was the sole substantial organisation to found a community.

Leeds had long been one of the main centres of the Owenite movement. The city hosted the 1840 annual Congress, and the Rational Society's periodical, the *New Moral World*, was published there between 1839 and 1841. Despite this strength, the end of the Rational Society came rapidly in Leeds, and by July 1846 John Ardill was the only member of the Rational Society remaining there.²⁴ Ardill was also president of the short-lived rival Central Board, elected at the 1846 Congress during prolonged debates over the future of the Rational Society.²⁵ However, the local

²¹ *Utilitarian Record*, 1 December 1847

²² A branch was not formed in Glasgow for another two years.

²³ The most complete previous study of the Leeds Redemption Society is J. F. C. Harrison, *Social Reform in Victorian Leeds: The Work of James Hole* (Leeds, 1954), pp. 2-13. See also W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below*, pp. 240-243.

²⁴ *Reasoner*, I. 6. 8 July 1846

²⁵ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 210

support that had underpinned the Rational Society in Leeds did not dissipate entirely with its collapse. The formation of the Leeds Redemption Society in 1845 drew upon this support, and counted former Owenites among its number. David Green, one of the main figures behind the society, was a publisher of socialist literature. James Hole, another significant member, included the Owenites Lloyd Jones and William Pare among his acquaintances.²⁶ Lloyd Jones was also associated with the society.²⁷

The theoretical stance of the Leeds society was clearly influenced by Owen. It believed society to be divided between competing interests, and to suffer from poverty, ignorance, and crime. Community was the solution to these social problems. However, unlike Owen, the Leeds society described its aims in strictly economic terms. It defined communism as 'a wider, juster [*sic*] system of *producing, distributing, and consuming* wealth'.²⁸ It perceived one of the greatest social problems to be the division between the interests of capital and labour. This led to inequalities of wealth, and to the dominance of the laws of supply and demand over the regulation of wages. Wages were not just, as labourers did not receive a full return for their labour. Furthermore reward was irrespective of the value of labour to society. The answer was to 'unite the labour of all for the benefit of all'.²⁹ The society sought to overcome the distinction between capitalists and labourers, and to make all 'labouring capitalists'.³⁰ Co-operation would place exchange on an equitable basis, and would limit production to what was necessary.³¹

The society believed Owen's community plans offered a more viable solution than political agitation or strikes. It rejected change through political means, writing the 'difference between mere political agitation and Communism, is all the difference between denouncing capitalists, and

²⁶ For William Pare see p. 37, n. 27.

²⁷ J. F. C. Harrison, *Social Reform in Victorian Leeds*, pp. 1, 3, 57

²⁸ *Herald of Co-operation*, I. 13. January 1848

²⁹ *Herald of Redemption*, I. 1. January 1847

³⁰ *Herald of Co-operation*, I. 15. March 1848

³¹ *Herald of Redemption*, I. 2. February 1847

becoming capitalists one's self ... between asking others to liberate us, and trying to liberate ourselves.'³² Although embracing Owen's vision of community, the society was careful to distance itself from his views on moral and religious issues.

The failure, but well merited failure, of this design, was owing to the heterogeneous elements composing it. ... While the problem simply was, How shall the working class obtain a fair portion of wealth? ... the advocates of this system thought it necessary to unite some metaphysical questions, of which the best that can be said is, that they neither understood them themselves, nor did any one else. They imagined ... that a man's having his character formed *for* him, and his procuring bread and butter, stood to each other as cause and effect.³³

The Leeds Redemption Society rejected what it perceived as the sectarian nature of Owenism, and stressed that it enforced no views or opinions, and was open to all. Harrison sees this as a reluctance to associate the society with the Rational Society, which by the 1840s had attracted much public condemnation for its views on religion and marriage.³⁴ The Bishop of Exeter's attacks on Owenism in 1840 certainly increased public awareness and criticism of the movement, but it should be remembered that co-operators had been distancing themselves from Owen's moral or religious views from the 1820s, preferring to present co-operation in economic and practical terms.³⁵ As Harrison argues, however, the society's debt to Owen is clear.

The Leeds Redemption Society began in late 1845. As with most similar societies, its rules were certified by Tidd Pratt under the Friendly

³² *Herald of Co-operation*, I. 16. April 1848

³³ *Herald of Redemption*, I. 1. January 1847

³⁴ J. F. C. Harrison, *Social Reform in Victorian Leeds*, p. 5

³⁵ For example, see *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, I. 2. February 1826

Societies legislation. Its officers were elected quarterly, and were not remunerated. Leeds was divided into fifteen districts, and members toured the streets to collect the weekly subscriptions. The society also distributed tracts.³⁶ The society grew rapidly, and by March 1846 had three hundred subscribers.³⁷ By June, there were 400 subscribing to the society.³⁸ The society continued to increase its numbers, and on its first anniversary in January 1847 had over 600 contributors.³⁹ It also found supporters outside of Leeds, and a number of branches emerged. By April 1847 branches had been formed in Bingley, North Cave, Oldham, and Nottingham. Other areas, including Manchester, Cambridge, Barnsley, Newport, and Birstall planned branches.

By mid-1847 the Leeds Redemption Society had become a substantial movement. It attracted those who, like the Glasgow co-operators, had remained committed to the communitarian movement and who had failed to find an alternative in Chartism or other semi-communitarian schemes. William Howitt, editor of the *People's Journal*, welcomed the society as 'a most important movement'. He wrote, the 'Leeds Redemption Society, if it succeeds, will be the first association of working men who will, in this country, have the honour of carrying out for themselves the substantial portion of the plans of Owen, St. Simon, or Fourier. They will have affected this without the attachment of any religious or irreligious dogmas to their scheme.'⁴⁰

10. 3. The 1848 Communist Congress

In May 1847 Goodwyn Barmby suggested that the Leeds Redemption Society attend a Communist Conference along with the other communist

³⁶ *Herald of Redemption*, I. 1. January 1847

³⁷ *People's Journal*, I. 10. 7 March 1846

³⁸ *ibid.*, I. 10. 20 June 1846

³⁹ *Herald of Redemption*, I. 1. January 1847

⁴⁰ *People's Journal*, I. 25. 20 June 1846

organisations in the country.⁴¹ His aim was to bring together the various societies and to start a periodical dedicated to the communist cause. This suggestion was not acted upon, but in 1848 the London-based Co-operative League revived the suggestion. Shortly before Congress met, the Redemption Society acquired an estate on which to begin community operations.⁴² The society's possession of land place it at the forefront of the communitarian societies in the nation.

In May, the month that had always seen the Owenite Congresses, a number of communist societies came together. The Congress illustrated both the gradual recovery of communist societies following the collapse of the Rational Society as well as the breadth of the movement. Present at the Congress were two non-Owenite organisations; the Icarians, influenced by the French communitarian Etienne Cabet, and the Fourierists. The Icarians in London met at the John Street Literary Institution.⁴³ The three main societies of the previous year, the Leeds Redemption Society, the Co-operative League, and the Communist Church were all present, as were Hill for his National Land Association, Isaac Ironside for the Sheffield Communists, and a recent society named the British Co-operative Association.⁴⁴ The latter was a London society which sought to introduce co-operation in production and distribution. It employed its own members when out of work, in the manner of the earlier co-operative societies.⁴⁵ James Rigby, the former Owenite leader, was also at the Congress, reporting on the attempt by himself, G. A. Fleming, Lloyd Jones, and Robert Owen to begin a newspaper named the *Communist*. This group of Owen and his friends was also behind the Labour League, mentioned above.⁴⁶

⁴¹ From 1845 many societies adopted the term 'communism' to describe their views, rather than socialism or co-operation which had been the dominant terms of the previous decade. This shift may have been intended to prevent their views from being discredited by the collapse of the Rational Society.

⁴² *Herald of Co-operation*, I. 17. May 1848

⁴³ *Reasoner*, III. 57. 30 June 1847

⁴⁴ *Herald of Co-operation*, I. 18. June 1848

For Isaac Ironside see p. 119, n. 30.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, I. 14. February 1848

⁴⁶ *Reasoner*, IV. 95. 22 March 1848
Utilitarian Record, 5 April 1848

The Congress sought to co-ordinate the efforts of the various communist organisations in the nation. A 'National Propagandist Association' was to be formed in London, and a weekly newspaper was proposed to replace the *Co-operative League Circular* and the Leeds Redemption Society's *Herald of Co-operation*. This later became the *Spirit of the Age*. The Leeds Redemption Society refused to make the latter their official organ as it advanced political views, whereas the Leeds society was careful to maintain an apolitical stance. Indeed, this stance led the Rev. E. R. Larken to resign as a delegate of the society at the 1848 Congress when the chairman accepted a motion put by Barmby that Congress should acknowledge the need for universal suffrage. The pre-eminent position of the Leeds Redemption Society for those seeking a practical community was re-enforced on the fifth day of the Congress when a resolution was passed stating that 'all parties wishing for immediate practical operations should join the Redemption Society'.⁴⁷

10. 4. The progress of the Leeds Redemption Society

In May 1848 the Leeds Redemption Society announced that it had been given a gift of a 220 acre estate in Wales. As with Manea Fen, the opportunity to begin practical operations was offered by a landlord friendly to the society's aims. The estate was the property of a Mr. Williams, and it lay in south Wales, near Caermarthen. Williams had returned from America, where he had been impressed by the success of communal experiments. The offer was made in August 1847, at which time David Green of the Leeds Redemption Society visited the estate. Green returned impressed with the land. The estate was partly cultivated, and the remainder was growing gorse. Within the estate there was a waterfall, as well as lime, stone, and clay suitable for building. Timber supplies were small. Roads were good, and there was a canal within three miles. Green reported that

Herald of Co-operation, I. 19. July 1848

⁴⁷ *Herald of Co-operation*, I. 18. June 1848

the estate was suitable for both agriculture and manufacturing. The offer presented the society with a dilemma. At present, the estate was beyond the means of the society. A meeting of the members was summoned to discuss two options. The first was to decline the offer until the society had amassed sufficient funds, and to mount a propaganda campaign until then. The alternative was to take the estate immediately, which would necessitate a significant fund-raising effort on the part of the society. Its current funds totalled £150, and yet it was estimated that £3,000 would be needed to successfully manage the estate.⁴⁸ The offer of the estate was not as generous as it first seemed. There was a mortgage of £1,200, which the society would have to pay off.⁴⁹ A special general meeting of the society in August 1847 resolved to accept the estate. The meeting subscribed £150, which the society welcomed as a good beginning. Yet at the meeting it was noted that the required £3,000, when divided among its 500 members, resulted in £6 per person, a significant sum. A subscription list was issued, and members were encouraged to subscribe sums of £2, £3, £5, or £10 to be paid in instalments by the end of 1848.⁵⁰ Subscriptions began to flow in, but at a rate far below that required. By October 1847 the society held £178, with a further £166 subscribed but not yet paid, giving a total of £344.⁵¹

By the time of the Communist Congress in May 1848 the Leeds Redemption Society's position had only slightly improved. There was now close to £200 in the hands of the society, with further sums owing on promised subscriptions.⁵² The estate was made over to the society, which had now drawn up its plans for the land. Its plans were close to those of other earlier societies, and reflected the priorities and backgrounds of the members. The soil was essentially good, although there was much scope for improvement, and this was to be the first task for the society. Progress was to be cautious. No member was to be sent to the estate until they could work profitably, and the community was to be as self-sufficient as

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, I. 8. August 1847

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, I. 17. May 1848

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, I. 9. September 1847

⁵¹ *ibid.*, I. 10. October 1847

possible.⁵³ Buildings, proportionate to the needs of those settled on the estate, would be erected. Small handicrafts would be introduced, followed in due course by larger scale manufacturing. Schools would be built. Each member would have a separate house or set of apartments, although there would be common catering. As with many other ventures, including Manea Fen, property brought into the society was to be valued. If the member continued beyond his probation period, any funds contributed in this manner were to be added to the general stock of the society. If the member left, the original fund would be returned, along with interest.

The society did not wish to infringe the privacy of its members, but it did hope to see members contributing to a communal lifestyle. It wished to see members meet for social activities, but said that in 'this matter, and in those of ordinary and trivial domestic detail, the Society will interfere as little as possible with the arrangements made by each associate for the comfort of himself and his family; but it will take care to render the position of each, with respect to dwellings, food, clothing, and education, superior to that enjoyed by working men under the present competitive system, and will expect that each will do his duty to it in return.'⁵⁴ In this the society was retreating from the more communal proposals of the 1830s and early 1840s, which would have been reluctant to admit such a degree of private arrangements, and it may be that the society was eager to present its proposals as a solution to essentially economic problems. In distancing itself from the community ventures of Robert Owen, the Leeds society, while recognising the social benefits to be gained in a communal venture, was evidently reluctant to focus on the broader aspects of communities.⁵⁵

By May 1848 the society realised that it had reached a crisis point. The society was in a strong position, with a number of branches across the nation. Within the past year further branches had been formed in Hull and

⁵² *ibid.*, I. 18. June 1848

⁵³ *ibid.*, I. 19. July 1848

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, I. 17. May 1848

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, I. 19. July 1848

London.⁵⁶ The London branch counted Slaney and Charles Jennesson, both members of the Co-operative League, among its members.⁵⁷ The society had many hundred members in Leeds alone. The offer of the estate provided a good opportunity to begin practical operations. Yet, despite its strengths, accepting the offer risked placing the society in a precarious position. The mortgage would have to be paid, and further sums would have to be invested in the estate. The society's funds of £200 were only a fraction of the estimated £3,000 that would be needed. Plans for the estate were cautious, but unless further funds could be found progress on the estate would not even realise their modest aims. Despite being aware of the difficulties it faced, in May 1848 the society resolved that 'immediate practical measures should be proceeded with; and that suitable individuals be chosen to be located on the estate at the earliest possible opportunity.'⁵⁸

Throughout 1848 the society was evidently torn between beginning operations immediately but with little capital, and waiting until the financial status of the society was strong enough to guarantee success. In September 1848 the Redemption Society in Leeds embarked upon a winter campaign of public meetings and lectures in an attempt to rouse support for the society. It hoped that the following year would find the society in a financial position to begin operations in Wales.⁵⁹ Through the autumn of 1848 the society progressed slowly. Branches were formed in Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Stockport.⁶⁰ By October the desire to seize the chance offered by the estate was clearly strong within the society. The Redemption Society appeal for aid, 'the friends of community *must no longer hesitate*; a crisis is approaching, big with the fate of our cause. That which was thought at a great distance is close at hand'.⁶¹ The society was driven forward by the thought of finally beginning practical operations and was caught up in the vision of a successful community: 'the banner of practical

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, I. 5. May 1847

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, I. 19. July 1848

Reasoner, VII. 183. 28 November 1849

⁵⁸ *Herald of Co-operation*, I. 19. July 1848

⁵⁹ *Spirit of the Age*, I. 9. 23 September 1848

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, I. 17. 18 November 1848

communion is unfurled, - its troops, though few, are marshalled in unsubduable array, and confident of victory; 'tis for ye to say, how long we wage this war.'⁶²

The following month the society took possession of two of the farms on the estate. Plans for the farms were cautious. The society estimated its maximum possible income for the next year, and resolved to spend less than this. Should it prove unable to cultivate the farms itself it would sub-let. Labourers were hired to begin the ploughing and sowing of eleven acres. A meeting of all the society's members was called, to decide upon future plans and to begin selecting which of the society's own members would move to the farms. At this stage the society called for men able to perform agricultural labour and to begin the agricultural improvements needed on the farms.⁶³ Faced with the imminent possibility of beginning practical operations, the Redemption Society began to employ increasingly millennial language in calling for support. 'Labour ye, then, with might and main, to make our Redemption Society the mountain top of the New World of Communism, on which the Ark of Hope may rest till this deluge of ignorance subsides.'⁶⁴

The desire within the society to make use of the estate as soon as possible did not diminish. While subscriptions continued to flow, expectations of the £3,000 which the society had estimated as the amount needed to begin operations remained unrealistic. By the end of 1848, after the legal expenses for conveying and taking possession of the estate, the society's funds only totalled £209.⁶⁵ A meeting was held in late November 1848 to confirm future plans for the estate. At this meeting a lone voice was raised in opposition to the decision of the society's executive to press ahead with operations despite a clear lack of sufficient funding. The available funds would not permit the cultivation of the whole of the estate. The

⁶¹ *ibid.*, I. 14. 28 October 1848

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ *ibid.*, I. 16. 11 November 1848

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, I. 17. 18 November 1848

second resolution proposed at the meeting called for the approval of the future policy, and it was this which William Egglestone, the corresponding secretary, objected to. He moved an amendment which called for the society to halt proceedings until much greater funds were available. The amendment was not passed, and the original resolution stood. The meeting continued to authorise immediate activity on the estate. The executive was authorised to withdraw the society's £200 from the saving's bank as needed, and elections were to be arranged for the members to be sent to the estate.⁶⁶

The election of members for the estate took place in January 1849. Advertisements for an agriculturalist, a joiner, a stone-mason, a boot and shoemaker, and two women appeared in December 1848.⁶⁷ The society warned that the first members faced a period of hard work. No applications for the post of mason were received, but the other positions were filled. John Brown, a Cheshire farmer, was elected as the agriculturalist. He was to be accompanied by his wife and young son. The joiner was William Perry, from near Windsor. Blackburn, a Leeds man, was elected as the shoemaker. There were only six applications in total, three of which were for the post of shoemaker and two for the joiner. Williams, the estate's original owner, was elected as the community's president.⁶⁸ The election was held in Leeds, and only Leeds members voted, which led to a complaint from London. The Leeds society suggested that future elections could be held in all the branches simultaneously, with votes being counted in Leeds.⁶⁹ Within a fortnight of the elections Perry and Blackburn had travelled to the estate, the latter taking with him a Chinese pig, a gift of the White Horse Inn near Leeds.⁷⁰ Brown passed through Leeds on his way to the estate in late January.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, I. 25. 13 January 1848

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, I. 19. 2 December 1848

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, I. 20. 9 December 1848

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, I. 24. 6 January 1849

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, I. 26. 20 January 1849

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

10. 5. The wider movement 1849-1852

Having taken possession of its estate, the Leeds Redemption Society confirmed its position as the pre-eminent communist organisation in the country. G. J. Holyoake wrote that the society was 'at the head of all Communist movements in England, having both a legally protected society and an estate.'⁷¹ It was the society's involvement with a practical experiment, located on the land, which underpinned its position and separated it from a number of propagandist societies. The collapse of the Rational Society, precipitated by the closure of the Queenwood community, had led many to doubt the wisdom of further practical operations in the immediate future. Support for the Leeds Redemption Society demonstrated that significant demand did still exist for an actual community, rather than continued propaganda and preparation. Both approaches continued to attract support in the late 1840s. In Glasgow, branches were formed of both the Redemption Society and a recent society named the League of Social Reform.⁷² This last was a propagandist society, based in London, and composed largely of former luminaries of the Owenite movement. Among its members were Lloyd Jones, J. E. Smith, Henry Hetherington, G. A. Fleming, G. J. Holyoake, Alexander Campbell, and Robert Buchanan. James Rigby was the society's secretary, and James Corss, former secretary of the London Co-operative Society in the 1820s and of the Rational Society's Central Board, was the treasurer.⁷³ Formed in late 1849, the League aimed to use tracts, lectures, and public meetings to urge 'the necessity of home colonization' as the nearest approximation to true social equality.⁷⁴

The League of Social Reform, although composed of substantial figures from the Rational Society, was not associated with the John Street

⁷¹ *Reasoner*, V. 115. 9 August 1848

⁷² *Spirit of the Age*, I, 27. 27 January 1849; I. 29. 10 February 1849

The society was also referred to as the League of Social Progress

⁷³ *ibid.*, I. 22. 23 December 1848

Reasoner, VI. 139. 3 January 1849

⁷⁴ *Spirit of the Age*, I. 21. 16 December 1848

Institution, the former centre of London Owenism. Discussions were held at the Institution on the question of whether to admit the League 'to the fraternal offices of the Institution', but no decision was reached. The issue was clearly divisive.⁷⁵ Elements within the Institution perceived the League as a splinter group, and believed that it had been impolitic to found that society while the Rational Society still existed. The Rational Society was based at John Street, but hopes of its resuscitation were largely unrealistic. Those Owenites in London were not the only ones to continue to support the Rational Society. Branches still existed in Lambeth, Hyde, Glasgow, Hull, Derby, Sheffield, and Halifax in 1849.⁷⁶ At the time of the Communist Conference in 1848 the Sheffield branch resolved that it could not participate in any public agitation for socialist principles until matters at Harmony had been resolved.⁷⁷ By this time the Rational Society was a dying organisation, kept alive only to oversee the legal and financial settlement of the Harmony estate. Those active within the communist movement were directing their attentions elsewhere, as illustrated by the League of Social Reform. This society appears to have fed into the later Social Reform League. Henry A. Ivory was secretary of the Social Reform League, and had been a member of the League of Social Reform. Lloyd Jones was also associated with both societies. As in the 1820s and 1830s, the inconsistency of the press in reporting the activities and even the names of societies makes it difficult to establish their precise nature. The Social Reform League may also have been a continuation of the Labour League, formed in 1848, as it operated from the same buildings. The Social Reform League was behind the second major Congress since the collapse of the Rational Society, when in May 1850 delegates from a number of societies met in London. These societies included a Manchester society, with which J. R. Cooper, James Campbell, and Mackenzie, all former Owenites, were associated. Holyoake was delegated to represent the society. This society

⁷⁵ *Reasoner*, VI. 155. 16 May 1849; VI. 157. 30 May 1849

⁷⁶ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 210

⁷⁷ *Reasoner*, IV. 103. 17 May 1848

favoured continued propaganda over further, inadequately supported communities.⁷⁸

1850 saw a further attempt to co-ordinate communist organisations from across the country when a number of delegates gathered at the Social Hall in Manchester. Drawing mainly on the north of England, the delegates included James Campbell, and James Spurr, a former member of the Society of United Friends, the Liverpool organisation behind the Pant Glas community of the early 1840s.⁷⁹ Spurr was associated with the Liverpool Association of Progress, an organisation which aimed to unite all social and political reformers, and which may have developed from the earlier Friends of Socialism.⁸⁰ Its secretary was John Melson, who had previously been secretary to the Rational Society branch in Liverpool and a member of the Queenwood community.⁸¹ This meeting marked the opening of the Social Hall, an indication that support for socialism remained alive in Manchester.⁸² The society behind the Hall was probably that represented by Holyoake at the Congress in London in May 1850. Holyoake was invited to lecture, as the society had heard much of Christian Socialism, and wished to hear something of socialism which was not Christian.⁸³

Manchester continued to provide a focus for socialist societies. Two conferences were held in 1852, with delegates from across the country.⁸⁴ James Spurr and Holyoake were again present, among others. By the time of the second 1852 conference the emphasis had shifted from communism to Secularism and freethought, and the societies present described themselves largely as Secularist societies. The Secularist movement built

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, IX. 208. 22 May 1850

⁷⁹ See chapter 8 for a discussion of Pant Glas.

⁸⁰ *Spirit of the Age*, I. 17. 18 November 1848

Reasoner, IX. 208. 22 May 1850

⁸¹ 'Statistical Table of the Branches of the Association of All Classes of All Nations' in *Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations* Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 248

⁸² The Social Hall was opposite Carpenters' Hall, long the meeting place for Manchester Owenites.

⁸³ *Reasoner*, X. 231. 30 October 1850

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, XII. 312. 19 May 1852, XIII. 334. 20 October 1852, XIII. 335. 27 October 1852

on the former Owenite movement, to the extent that, along with the resurgent co-operative movement, Edward Royle describes them as being in many ways part of the same movement. The three shared many members.⁸⁵ This continuity between the Owenite and Secularist movements is apparent at the second 1852 conference, as illustrated by the Paisley Society of Social Friends. Its name, with the phrase 'Social Friends', a frequent component of the title of socialist societies in the 1830s and 1840s, indicates its socialist background. The society had existed for fourteen years, and had been connected with the Rational Society. Now independent, it maintained the same views on social reform. The same was true of other societies at the conference.

10. 6. The Leeds Redemption Society and the Welsh estate

By early 1849 the Leeds Redemption Society's development of their Welsh farm was underway. Members had been elected to go to the farm, and labour had been hired to begin agricultural operations. Progress was slow and cautious. Limited by the available funds, the society could not invest heavily in the farm. By late 1849 the society had purchased livestock, including twenty sheep, twelve cows, one bull, two horses, six or seven pigs, and some poultry. Wheat and oats were growing. A former member of the Queenwood community visited the estate and reported that 'the means exist, with good management, of a completely successful experiment.'⁸⁶ By this time the farm superintendent was Robert Swindells. Swindells was an agriculturalist from Hyde who had been the Queenwood community's shepherd. A committed communitarian, he had been resident at Queenwood from December 1839 through to the community's end in 1845. He had then been involved with William Galpin's attempt to continue the community at Little Bentley Farm, which lasted for about a year.⁸⁷ Swindells returned to Hyde before hearing of the Redemption Society and

⁸⁵ Edward Royle, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement 1791-1866* (Manchester, 1974), p. 257

⁸⁶ *Reasoner*, VII. 172. 12 September 1849

⁸⁷ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, pp. 135, 207

travelling to Leeds in October 1848.⁸⁸ For Swindells, the Redemption Society offered an opportunity to continue his active participation in community life. The society reported of him that 'his faith is unscathed, and he is prepared for the new battle.'⁸⁹

By late 1849 the estate had begun to send goods to Leeds for sale to the members. Butter and a killed ox arrived in November, and the society made a profit on their sale. David Green was led by these sales to enthusiastically describe the society's trading potential. Believing that the society would soon have the ability to meet all its members' needs, he wrote

As soon as we get fairly masters of the traffic here in Leeds we shall seek to extend it to the Branches, and, by and by, we shall become a great merchant body...⁹⁰

As with other British communal ventures, the society had met difficulties in employing hired labour, and complained that hired labourers were not as economical or as conscientious as their own members.⁹¹ At this time there were fourteen men resident at the community. The society had begun small-scale manufacturing, with the employment of a shoemaker, James Bentley, on the farm.⁹² During 1850 the community supplied members in Leeds with farm produce worth £38 15s. Expenditure on the estate was heavy, with £139 14s 4d being spent on drainage. While the cost was high, the society believed that the improved agriculture would, over the long term, recoup the expense.⁹³ By 1851 there were ten people resident at the farm. The original members, elected in January 1849, had all left. With the exception of a farmer from Pembroke, who may have been a hired labourer, they were all from northern towns, including Stockport, Wakefield, Bolton, and Leeds. Only one family was present, John and Hannah Grey and their daughter

⁸⁸ Hyde had a branch of the Leeds Redemption Society.

⁸⁹ *Spirit of the Age*, I. 12. 14 October 1848

⁹⁰ *Reasoner*, VII. 181. 14 November 1849

⁹¹ *Christian Socialist*, I. 15. 8 February 1851

⁹² *ibid.*, I. 31. 31 May 1851

HO 107/2472/8 (1851 census)

Sarah, aged ten. Some of the members were younger than might have been expected, including two labourers from Leeds, aged fifteen and sixteen, and a girl aged fourteen, also from Leeds. None were there with their families. As would be expected given the small size of the community, apart from a joiner and a shoemaker, all of the men were acting as labourers.⁹⁴

The initial success of the community encouraged the society to expand its operations. In the summer of 1851 the Redemption Society held a Congress in Leeds, intended not only for members of the society, but for all co-operators and supporters. The Congress planned to introduce a propagandist fund to bring together the different communist groups. At the Congress the society also launched its plan for expanding manufacturing on the estate. £1,000 was to be raised in £1 shares to enlarge the shoemaking business and to begin making clothing. Communal buildings were to be erected. The shares were payable in instalments of 6d per week.⁹⁵ A fortnight of extensive propaganda was planned to build support for the society, beginning on 14 July 1851.⁹⁶ A pamphlet named *Fourteen Days Propagandism: What to Say* was issued to members to prepare them for the intensive publicity drive. Throughout 1851 the society increased its activities. Open-air camp meetings on Holbeck Moor, Leeds, attracted audiences of over one thousand.⁹⁷ Members of the society toured nearby areas to give lectures. The society continued to attract new supporters. There were now 1,488 members and candidates for the society as a whole, including its branches.⁹⁸ A Pudsey Redemption Society began, using the same rules as the Leeds society, but not as a branch of that society. Branches were formed in Bradford and Stanningly.⁹⁹

As a supplement to activities on their estate, in the summer of 1851 the Leeds Redemption Society announced plans for a co-operative store in

⁹³ *Christian Socialist*, II. 52. 25 October 1851

⁹⁴ HO 107/2472/8 (1851 census)

⁹⁵ *Fourteen Days Propagandism: What to Say* (Leeds, 1851), p. 3

⁹⁶ *Christian Socialist*, I. 34. 21 June 1851

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, II. 50. 11 October 1851

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, II. 41. 9 August 1851

Leeds.¹⁰⁰ An attempt to open a store by the Leeds and District Flour Mill Society, which shared several members with the Redemption Society, had recently been abandoned. In formulating their plans for the store, the Redemption Society contacted groups in Rochdale, possibly the Rochdale pioneers, and London to ask their advice. In London, the society may have contacted the Christian Socialists, who at this time were becoming increasingly involved with consumers co-operation. The Christian Socialists attracted former Owenites, including Lloyd Jones, James Rigby, and G. A. Fleming. Lloyd Jones had contacts among the working-class leaders in London and the north, and he was a significant factor in the increasing influence of the Christian Socialists.¹⁰¹ In 1850 the Christian Socialists opened a co-operative store in London, influenced by Lloyd Jones, who was familiar with the co-operative stores opening in the north of England. By the spring of 1851, this had become the Central Co-operative Agency, planned as a wholesale centre for co-operative stores across the nation. Lloyd Jones toured the north of England, and persuaded many stores to take goods from London.¹⁰² In 1852 Edward Vansittart Neale initiated the Co-operative League, intended to bring together 'those who take an interest in the plans of Social Reform based upon the idea of Co-operation'.¹⁰³ This society counted significant numbers of Owenites among its members, including Owen himself, James Rigby, G. A. Fleming, J. E. Smith, Henry Travis, James Corss, William Pare and Robert Alger. James Hole, William Eggleston, and Dr. Lees, all of the Leeds Redemption Society, also joined.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, II. 47. 20 September 1851

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, II. 41. 9 August 1851

¹⁰¹ Torben Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism 1848-54* (Aarhus, 1962), p. 177

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 181

¹⁰³ *Transactions of the Co-operative League* (London, 1852), I. May 1852, p. 5

The Co-operative League formed by Neale should not be confused with the society of the same name formed in 1846, as discussed above.

¹⁰⁴ *Transactions of the Co-operative League*

The copy of this work belonging to the Goldsmiths' Collection at the University of London contains a manuscript list of members drawn up by William Coningham, Chairman of the League.

From mid-1851 the Redemption Society maintained links with the Christian Socialists and with the growing consumers co-operation movement. Neale, who was one of the major figures in the Christian Socialist movement, visited the Redemption Societies at both Leeds and Bury, and addressed a meeting held to celebrate the harvest-home of the Leeds Redemption Society's estate in November 1851.¹⁰⁵ The laws for the society's store were passed in October 1851, premises were found the following month, and trading began in December.¹⁰⁶ Besides butter, cheese, shoes, and other goods from their estate, the society ordered goods from the Central Agency, as well as conducting a tailoring business from the store.¹⁰⁷ G. J. Holyoake reported that the principal produce sent from Wales was blackberry jam, made from blackberries gathered around the estate by labourers' children and sold to the community for a shilling a basket.¹⁰⁸ The store received supplies from the Bradford store, and from the Salford Hatters, both of whom also took cloth from the Leeds society.¹⁰⁹ Leeds also supplied cloth to the Central Agency in London.¹¹⁰ By spring 1852 the store in Leeds had reached and passed the paying point, and business continued to grow steadily.¹¹¹

10. 7. Conclusion

While in 1852 the Leeds Redemption Society appeared to be making steady, if slow, progress, by 1853 the obstacles in its path had proved too great. At some point in either 1853 or 1854 the estate in Wales was given up, and returned to Williams, its original owner. The society lasted for another year, before ceasing in 1855. All of its debts were paid in full, and the

¹⁰⁵ Philip N. Backstrom, *Christian Socialism and Co-operation in Victorian England* (London, 1874), p. 34

Christian Socialist, II. 54. 8 November 1851

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, II. 52. 25 October 1851; II. 57. 29 November 1851; II. 59. 13 December 1851

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, II. 58. 5 December 1851; II. 60. 20 December 1851

Journal of Association, I. 2. 10 January 1852

¹⁰⁸ G. J. Holyoake, *The Jubilee History of the Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society Limited* (Manchester, 1897), p. 3

¹⁰⁹ *Journal of Association*, I. 6. 2 February 1852

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, I. 14. 29 March 1852

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, I. 15. 5 April 1852

surplus was divided among some of the public institutions of Leeds.¹¹² The reasons for the society's eventual demise are unclear. Benjamin Jones relied on personal communications from former members of the society for the information in his work, *Co-operative Production* (1894). Despite the society's claims to be self-sufficient, it seems probable that the estate and its mortgage placed too great a demand upon the financial resources of the society. The estate required significant investment, especially for drainage, and the society never realised the sums it had originally estimated as necessary for the management of the estate.

A contemporary of the Leeds Redemption Society was the Leeds District Flour Mill Society, founded in 1847, with the limited aim of providing its members with unadulterated flour. This society was the precursor of the Leeds Co-operative Society, and it provided an alternative outlet for the energies of those involved with the Leeds Redemption Society. Members of the Leeds Redemption Society, including James Hole, William Eggleston, and David Green were also part of this venture. As the Redemption Society struggled to raise the funds it needed, members of the society became increasingly involved with the Flour Society. 1854 saw an attempt by Hole, Green, Lloyd Jones, and Edwin Gaunt, all Leeds Redemption Society members, to persuade the Flour Society to become involved in wider co-operation, and to add the selling of provisions to the society's activities, which caused much debate within the society. The Flour Society rejected such a step, and its advocates were forced to leave and found a new society. The ultimate aim of the new society was to use accumulated funds to eventually employ their own members, and to found, in Holyoake's words, an 'industrial city', or co-operative community.¹¹³ The new society was unable to secure sufficient members, and its projectors returned to the Flour Society. A co-operative store was eventually opened in 1856, and the Leeds Co-operative Society grew steadily. Many of the major figures of the Leeds Redemption Society were later involved in the

¹¹² Benjamin Jones, *Co-operative Production*, pp. 107-109

Leeds Co-operative Society, including, besides those mentioned above, Robert Carter, William Campbell, William Bell, and John Hunt.¹¹⁴

The links between the Flour Society and the Leeds Redemption Society, and the diversion of energies into the Co-operative Society upon the decline of the Redemption Society reflects the wider turn to co-operation as a method of social reform over an immediate return to the land. The end of the Leeds Redemption Society marked the end of widespread Owenite communitarianism. The demand for social reform which had driven the communitarian movement sought other means to achieve its aims, and the attention of reformers shifted to the growing co-operative movement. For a decade the Leeds society had provided a clear indication of the demand for a practical community as a form of social reform. Its community, though small, had survived for five or six years, making it one of the most enduring Owenite communities established in Britain. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Rational Society the Redemption Society was the main organisation to which those who had not lost faith in the future offered by co-operative communities turned.

¹¹³ G. J. Holyoake, *The Jubilee History of the Leeds Industrial Co-operative Society Limited*, pp. 48-51

¹¹⁴ J. F. C. Harrison, *Social Reform in Victorian Leeds*, p. 3

CHAPTER 11. OWENITE EMIGRATION 1825-1855

11. Introduction

As has been seen throughout this work, for nearly thirty years the communitarian movement in Britain gave rise to many communal proposals and ventures. The impulse that drove men to participate in these activities also underpinned a variety of communal emigration proposals. In theory, the focus of the communitarian movement was on domestic schemes. Emigration was opposed as an unnecessary palliative held out by political economists. Owen's objections to Malthus led the Owenites to reject calls for resettling surplus population overseas. Owen's plan, with its more rational and efficient use of land, offered an opportunity to support greatly increased numbers of people in Britain. Yet despite such theoretical opposition, communal emigration proposals can be found from the 1820s through to the 1840s and 1850s. The latter years saw a marked increase in the number of communal emigration schemes, as popular interest in emigration also soared.

Gregory Claeys argues that communal emigration in the 1840s was a response to the failure of the Rational Society's community at Queenwood, the end of which he perceives as marking the end of domestic communitarianism. For Claeys, socialist emigration forms an interim phase between Owenite communitarianism and the co-operative movement from the 1860s onwards.¹ Here it is argued that communal emigration should be seen, not as a discrete phase in the history of British communitarianism, but as a strand within the movement, running parallel and reacting to many of the same developments as domestic schemes. This chapter concludes with a case study of one such scheme, that of the London Owenite, Thomas Hunt.

¹ Gregory Claeys, 'John Adolphus Etzler, technological utopianism, and British socialism' in *English Historical Review*, 101 (1986), pp. 351-375

11. 1. Socialists and emigration in the nineteenth century

During the nineteenth century emigration moved through a number of phases. The French wars had interrupted emigration, and with their end and the coming of economic depression emigration began to increase. It continued to grow, with some fluctuation, until mid-century. The 1840s and early 1850s saw particularly high rates of emigration. Emigration continued at a high level until interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War.² Much of this was to the United States, although at periods after the middle of the century Canada and Australia attracted emigrants at ten to twenty per cent of the totals for the United States.³

Emigration was caused by a variety of factors, which varied across social groupings and geographical regions. There are, however, a number of general factors. Periods of emigration frequently coincided with times of depression. Unemployment drove many to seek work overseas. Other general factors include social distress and unease following changes to British society under industrialisation. Individuals would also have left through opposition to the political or religious climate in Britain.

Emigration was held out as a solution to domestic unemployment and distress. Edward Gibbon Wakefield, one of the most prominent advocates of emigration in this period, regarded emigration as beneficial to the nation, by providing an outlet for surplus capital and labour.⁴ His plan for systematic emigration was partly adopted as government policy from the 1830s, and his approach was highly influential. The government sponsored a number of emigration projects, and emigration societies blossomed. Emigration journals emerged, full of advice for the intending emigrant, and

² Stanley C. Johnson, *A History of Emigration from the United Kingdom to North America, 1763-1912* (London, 1966), pp. 14-15

³ Edward Royle, *Modern Britain* (London, 1997), p. 64

⁴ W. S. Shepperson, *British Emigration to North America* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 13-16, 246

American travel literature became popular. Agents retained by American employers sought to direct emigrants to particular areas or industries.⁵

Other groups, however, believed that emigration weakened the nation. Emigration found little favour among those who supported domestic political or economic reform. While political economists supported emigration as a relief from a surplus of labour, others viewed it, not as a means by which unwanted labour was removed, but as a way by which labour was lost to the nation. In 1830 William Cobbett wrote,

...it is not the aged, the infirm, the halt, the blind, and the idiots that go: it is the youth, the strength, the wealth, and the spirit that will no longer brook hunger and thirst, in order that the maws of tax-eaters and Jews may be crammed.⁶

Amongst both socialists and Chartists opposition to emigration rested on a belief that it served merely to relieve the pressure of demands for reform, thus perpetuating an unjust system. Emigrants might improve their own situations, but they would be harming those who remained behind by diminishing the chances of reform. This attitude is clearly demonstrated by the *New Moral World's* opposition to the Social United Interest Colonisation Society of 1839. While acknowledging the possibilities of this emigration scheme, the periodical rejected it as being motivated by 'mere selfish or family interests'. The socialist leaders were concerned with more than 'individual advantage'.

They have lifted the standard of revolt against an irrational system of society, in the very centre of its power; and *here*, in England, shall the great battle between the antagonist principles of competition and co-operation be fought; here,

⁵ Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration 1607-1860*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1945), pp. 146-171

W. S. Shepperson, *British Emigration to North America*, pp. 76-80

⁶ John Derry (ed.), *Cobbett's England* (London, 1997), p. 203

side by side with the darkest evils of the one, shall be exhibited the felicity attainable by the other.⁷

Socialist opposition to emigration is indicated by their use of the term 'home colonisation' to describe their schemes, the very phrase indicating a rejection of the use of overseas colonies to solve domestic problems. William Pare explicitly contrasted the two in 1831, arguing that home colonies offered a superior means of alleviating domestic distress.⁸ However, the idea is not necessarily radical. Indeed, many conservative groups supported home colonisation and the provision of small allotments for labourers as it could be used to reinforce a hierarchical, traditional social order.⁹

Furthermore, for socialists their views on emigration were closely linked to their rejection of Malthus and their advocacy of community. To support emigration would be to admit the possibility of overpopulation, which in turn undermined their assurances that communities could support greatly increased numbers from a given area of land. Home colonisation would no longer appear a viable method of social reform.¹⁰

Theoretical opposition did not prevent emigration from proving attractive to some reformers. This was especially true of emigration to the United States, which was seen as a world free from the miseries and inequalities of Europe and the Old World.¹¹ As Cobbett wrote, 'The United States form another England without its unbearable taxes, its insolent game laws, its intolerable dead-weight, and its treadmills.'¹² To emigrate to New Zealand, Australia, or Canada meant to continue living under the British

⁷ *New Moral World*, V. 33. 8 June 1839

⁸ *Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets: A Political Register*, 28 January 1831
For William Pare, see p. 37, n. 27.

⁹ Jamie L. Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States*, pp. 43-45

¹⁰ Gregory Claeys, 'John Adolphus Etzler, technological utopianism, and British socialism', p. 367

¹¹ Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration*, pp. 146-171

¹² John Derry (ed.), *Cobbett's England*, p. 205

social system. This, coupled with the greater availability of land in America, meant that it was frequently regarded as the best destination.¹³ Although frequently based on a misunderstanding of the actual situation in the United States, this myth exercised a powerful attraction, and could produce disappointment among emigrants once they became aware of the realities of life in the United States.¹⁴

For radicals the United States, with its republican government, stood as an example of what was possible, and as an inspiration for domestic reformers. Significant numbers of Chartists emigrated to America, if not always entirely willingly, including national leaders such as George Julian Harney and Peter Bussey.¹⁵ However, a growing awareness of the inequalities which persisted in the United States, couple with the economic distress of the 1840s, caused a reassessment of the radical argument linking America's advantages to its republican government. In part this was influenced by the Owenites, who used the inequalities still present in America to support their belief that the root of social problems was competition and private property, not the form of government.¹⁶ Increasing familiarity with America, through the reports of emigrants and travellers, also served to weaken America's importance as an example.¹⁷ Among the travellers was the *Northern Star* correspondent Lawrence Pitkeithly, whose reports warned against glowing accounts of the United States, and pointed out that there was significant unemployment and low wages.¹⁸ By the 1850s America had lost its force as a political symbol.¹⁹

¹³ For an example of this view see *Spirit of the Age*, I. 2. 5 August 1848

¹⁴ Ray Boston, *British Chartists in America 1839-1900* (Manchester, 1971), pp. 13-20

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 22

¹⁶ Gregory Claeys, 'The Example of America a Warning to England? The Transformation of America in British Radicalism and Socialism, 1790-1850' in Malcolm Chase and Ian Dyck (eds.), *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J. F. C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 68-75

¹⁷ Jamie L. Bronstein, 'From the Land of Liberty to Land Monopoly: the United States in a Chartist Context' in Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson, and Stephen Roberts (eds.), *The Chartist Legacy* (Rendlesham, Suffolk, 1999), p. 157

¹⁸ *Northern Star*, VI. 281. 1 April 1843

¹⁹ Jamie L. Bronstein, 'From the Land of Liberty to Land Monopoly', p. 164

For socialists America held a specific appeal. Communal movements had a long history of emigration to America. It was commonplace to find the examples of the Shakers and Rappites, both of which originated in Europe, held up to demonstrate the efficacy of the communal lifestyle. John Finch reported on his tour of the American communities to encourage the domestic movement.²⁰ Owen himself had attempted a community at New Harmony in Indiana in the 1820s. Thus emigration, particularly to America, provided a refuge for many reformers in this period. Examples of radical and Chartist emigrants are well known, but there were also significant numbers of socialists involved with emigration through the period.²¹ At least five members of the Manea Fen community, including William Hodson, the community's founder, later emigrated to America. Hodson apparently emigrated to escape his debts, but the others were all involved with some aspect of social reform once in America.²² The social missionaries John Green, Frederick Hollick, and T. S. Mackintosh also emigrated. Joseph Smith, the prominent Manchester Owenite, left for America.²³ Two significant Owenites, C. F. Green and Samuel Bower, who had both lived at the Queenwood community, also went to America.²⁴ Bower, an influential theorist whose works included *The Peopling of Utopia* (1838), participated in the short-lived Fruitlands community near Harvard. James Spurr, a former member of the Society of United Friends, the organisation behind the Pant Glas community, was also involved with emigration. Although not himself an emigrant, in the 1850s he ran a hotel in Liverpool and advertised that he had entered into arrangements with a shipping house, and could provide information for those emigrating to Canada or United States.²⁵ Although America was the

²⁰ *New Moral World*, XII. 29. 1 January 1844 to XIII. 2. 6 July 1844

For John Finch see p. 88, n. 51.

²¹ For Chartist emigration, see Ray Boston, *British Chartists in America*

²² *A Past Effort at Socialism: History of Manea Colony* (1914). Wisbech and Fenland Museum papers

Hodson emigrated in 1844. He apparently returned to England, but left once more for America, where he died.

²³ *Radical*, I. 11. July 1887

²⁴ *New Moral World*, IX. 17. 24 April 1841

J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, p. 128

²⁵ *Reasoner*, VI. 136. 3 January 1849

main destination for emigrants, socialists found their way to other countries. In 1840 a group of Owenites reported that Owen's views were spreading rapidly in Australia. One of their number, a Francis Shea from Liverpool, had made his way to New Zealand, where he hoped to found a community.²⁶

11. 2. Communal emigration proposals 1827 to 1839

Emigration proposals need to be considered alongside their domestic counterparts if the nature of communal emigration is to be appreciated in this period. Communal emigration provided a parallel path to community from the time of the first domestic communitarian schemes. Plans for overseas communities reflected the same considerations that led to domestic proposals. This is evident from the beginning of the communitarian movement in the 1820s.

Co-operation in the 1820s was characterised by the rapid growth of a large number of local organisations. Organisations such as the London Co-operative Society and the smaller Co-operative Community Fund Association sought to raise funds for communities near London. Amongst the number of small societies which emerged in this period was the Pennsylvanian Co-operative Society. Based in London, the society's aims were largely shared with its contemporary communitarian organisations, differing only in that it looked to America as the location for its proposed community. The details of the proposed community differed little from those of proposals for domestic communities, outlining an essentially agricultural community with equal remuneration of its members and communal living.²⁷ The rules of the society were sold at the Red Lion Square premises of the London Co-operative Society, illustrating the degree to which communal emigration proposals were an integral part of the wider communitarian movement.²⁸

²⁶ *New Moral World*, VII. 67. 1 February 1840

²⁷ *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald*, III. 1. January 1828

²⁸ *Trades' Free Press*, III. 127. 16 December 1827

An even clearer illustration of the extent to which emigration provided an alternative to a domestic community is the Social Community Company of Manchester. This organisation aimed primarily at a community in Britain, but planned to emigrate 'if some favourable and unexpected change in the social and political condition of England' did not previously occur.²⁹ The society was prepared to wait until the spring of 1834 before leaving Britain to join New Harmony, Owen's community in Indiana, which had, however, long since ceased to function as a true co-operative community. James Rigby represented the society at the Sixth Co-operative Congress of October 1833, and from his report it would appear that the society had effectively resolved to emigrate.³⁰ Yet this had not been the society's original intention. When formed in late 1832 no mention had been made of the possibility of emigrating, and the focus had been solely on a domestic community.³¹ It may be that the society had been led to consider emigration through the difficulties involved in establishing a community in Britain. This society did not operate on the fringes of Manchester communitarianism, but was part of mainstream co-operation in that city, sharing members such as George Mandley and Elijah Dixon with the Manchester Association and the District Council, both co-ordinating bodies for the area. It was also apparently later associated with the Salford Infant School, for a time the centre of local co-operation. That it later turned overseas indicates the extent to which emigration was an alternative considered within the mainstream movement.

What ultimately became of the society is unclear. It may have later become the Manchester and Salford Community Company, an organisation which sent twenty-three of its members to purchase land in Cincinnati 'whereon to try the principle of mutual co-operation, on something like the Owenian plan' in the spring of 1834.³² For a man who watched these

²⁹ *Crisis*, III. 7. + 8. 19 October 1833

³⁰ For James Rigby see p. 90, n. 59.

³¹ *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, October 1832

For further information on the Social Community Company and its relationship to Manchester co-operation see chapter 3.

³² *Crisis*, IV. 5. 10 May 1834

emigrants leave from the Liverpool docks, the fact that they were prepared to leave England and their families stood as a strong statement of their 'disgust at a society as it is at present instituted' and their dedication to Owenite principles.³³

Those who left had been active members of the co-operative circle centred on the Salford Infant School. Their presence was missed at the school's annual Whit Thursday excursion, when a toast was drunk to their success.³⁴ What became of the members once they left England in 1834 is uncertain. In 1843 Lloyd Jones recalled a communal emigration scheme which sent its members from Salford to North America in 1834, which may well have referred to the Manchester and Salford Community Company. According to Lloyd Jones, the emigrants were initially successful. One hundred and twenty acres were purchased, and further funds were sent from Salford. Eventually, however, the scheme collapsed, leaving 'a number of our poor fellows to struggle in the wilderness with a fate which ... has not been one of the happiest.'³⁵

Both of the societies discussed above belonged to the mainstream co-operative movement. The Pennsylvania Co-operative Society had links to the main London co-operative society, while the Social Community Company shared members with the core co-operative societies in Manchester and Salford. A similar situation existed with a later society, the Social United Interest Colonization Society, of Birmingham. Formed in early 1839, this organisation was composed of members of the dominant

The Manchester and Salford Community Company was founded in approximately early 1833, or at about the same time as the Social Community Company, making an identification of the two organisations reasonable. The spring of 1834 was also the date proposed by the Social Community Company for its leaving England.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*, IV. 9. 7 June 1834

³⁵ *New Moral World*, XII. 26. 23 December 1843

Lloyd Jones also reported on another communal emigration scheme based in Manchester, but unfortunately gave no date for its operations. This party settled in Perry County, Pennsylvania, before the scheme collapsed. Some members eventually returned to Britain. For Lloyd Jones see p. 102, n. 106.

Owenite organisation at this time, the Rational Society.³⁶ The ultimate aim of the Rational Society was the formation of a community in Britain, and presumably the members of the Social United Interest Colonization Society had originally supported this goal. A growing awareness on their part of the difficulties facing a domestic community had, however, led them to favour the establishment of a community in the United States.

By leaving for America the Social United Interest Colonization Society hoped to avoid a number of obstacles. The most obvious advantage was the lower land prices in America. The society demonstrated that a community would be far cheaper in America. Whereas Owen had calculated that £50 per member would be needed for a community of 500 in Britain, the Birmingham society estimated that only £14 13s 8d would be needed in America, saving close to £18,000. The society also believed that America, with its history of communal experiments, offered a more favourable reception to such ventures. With a rather idealised view of the freedoms to be found in America, the society claimed that there it would not encounter the 'contaminating influences' of England, or the opposition of local authorities and clergy.³⁷ The society was here drawing upon arguments used by those who favoured propaganda and education over practical action to justify emigration. Debates within the co-operative movement in the early 1830s had focused on the question of whether a community could be usefully established in the midst of an unreformed society, or whether further education was needed before the country was ready to accept Robert Owen's views.³⁸ The Social United Interest Colonization Society here adopted the latter view, but used it to support emigration to America, a country where, it believed, society was not yet in such a deprived state as to offer any obstacle to community.

³⁶ To avoid confusion, the name the Rational Society will be used throughout this chapter to refer to both the AACAN and the Rational Society.

³⁷ *Social Pioneer*, I. 9. 4 May 1839

³⁸ See chapters two and three for debates within the early co-operative movement.

The Social United Interest Colonization Society was not welcomed by the mainstream movement. While criticism in the *New Moral World* focused on the fact that it favoured emigration over a domestic community, opposition to this and other emigration schemes was also clearly attributable to the fact that they were regarded as distractions from the Rational Society's own community plans.³⁹ In May 1839 the society presented itself at the Owenite congress, held in Birmingham. A committee was appointed to meet them, but the congress refused to hear the society. The Owenites could not help the Birmingham society as they were concentrating on their own venture, which became the Queenwood community later that year.⁴⁰ The Social United Interest Colonization Society stood in a similar relation to the official Owenite movement as did those domestic community ventures not sanctioned by the Rational Society. Manea Fen in particular was regarded as a distraction from the official Queenwood community. As the mainstream movement struggled to marshal support behind its own community any other ventures were considered as potential threats, and in this respect emigration schemes were regarded in a similar light to domestic communities.

11. 3. Emigration and the Queenwood community: the 1840s

During the 1840s there was a marked increase in the number of socialists emigrating, both as individuals and in communal schemes. The increase was such that the Rational Society's 1840 Congress made arrangements for the granting of branch charters to groups overseas.⁴¹ It was led to take this step after a group from the society purchased land in Illinois for a community. A branch was later opened in New York, with Benjamin Timms, a former member of the Manea Fen community, as its secretary.⁴²

³⁹ *New Moral World*, V. 33. 8 June 1839

⁴⁰ *Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Association of All Classes of All Nations*, p. 79

⁴¹ *New Moral World*, VII. 82. 16 May 1840

⁴² *ibid.*, IX. 6. 8 February 1841

Timms was not the only member of Manea Fen to emigrate to the United States. John Green, Samuel Crump, and James Cutting all also emigrated, along with William Hodson, the community's founder.

Yet the Rational Society still discouraged emigration, by both individuals and groups. Owen himself called for socialists to dedicate their activities to domestic ventures.⁴³ Such criticism was motivated by both an ideological opposition to emigration, and a desire to maintain support for the Rational Society's own community at Queenwood, which began operations in late 1839. Emigration weakened a number of branches, and active communitarians were lost to the movement, along with the funds that they took overseas. The Rational Society responded to the various emigration schemes that emerged in the 1840s in the same manner as it reacted to the unofficial domestic communities, illustrating the extent to which similar circumstances shaped both domestic and emigration proposals. Emigration in these years continued to run parallel to domestic action.

In 1842 the Manchester branch drew a direct parallel between the distraction posed by emigration and the communities of Manea Fen and Pant Glas when complaining of the activities of a Mr. Wilson. Wilson, an agent for American employers, was attempting to persuade Manchester socialists to emigrate. The Manchester branch wrote

...knowing the evils that have arisen from similar attempts - such as the 'Hodsonian Community,' and the 'Pant Glass [sic] affair,' we were desirous you should know, in order that you might give such advise [sic] and directions as in your wisdom seem fitting.⁴⁴

Other emigration schemes were also described in a similar fashion to these domestic ventures. At the 1843 Congress a number of branches reported on a variety of domestic and emigration schemes. In their reports the branches demonstrated that emigration schemes and domestic communities were both responses to the pace of domestic communitarianism, specifically the slow progress of Queenwood. In 1840

⁴³ *ibid.*, V. 32. 1 June 1839

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, X. 39. 26 March 1842

the Pant Glas community had been founded through its founders' impatience to enter community before places were available for them at Queenwood, and the same was true of emigration and domestic schemes in a number of branches.⁴⁵ John Buxton, the Salford delegate, reported that 'Manchester had been frequently disappointed with private and partial experiments.' Members of the branch had left for Manea Fen, Pant Glas, and Chat Moss, and further numbers 'were constantly emigrating from that place, to experience disappointment in a foreign county.' 'Now seeing no prospect of being located on the Hampshire estate at present,' Buxton continued, 'many of the members had thought it prudent to endeavour to obtain an eligible site as soon as possible'. In the event the members had decided to wait to see what measures were brought forward at the Congress before proceeding with their own independent plans.⁴⁶

Hadfield of the Bolton branch spoke of a similar attempt to secure land at Bolton some two or three years previously.⁴⁷ The Lambeth branch reported that some members had decided to attempt a community in America, having despaired of ever entering community in Britain. Twenty-five members were leaving, taking with them a capital of £2,000.⁴⁸ The perceived lack of opportunity at Queenwood also lay behind emigration from the Huddersfield branch. This branch had also lost twenty-five members, again through emigration to America. With them they had taken an average of £200 each.⁴⁹ Both branches provide clear examples that emigration deprived the domestic movement not only of committed communitarians, but also of capital that could have been employed in supporting Queenwood.

A similar situation prevailed at the 1844 Congress. Ellis, a delegate from the London A1 branch, referred to 'the co-operative emigration parties in the Branch' and his distress at seeing so many determined to leave for

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, VII. 75. 25 March 1840

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, XI. 47. 20 May 1843

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, XI. 48. 27 May 1843

America.⁵⁰ Within the branch there were at least four societies, including the Equality Society, the Democratic Co-operative Society, the Utilitarian Co-operative Emigration Association, and the Co-operative Emigration Society, inspired by the emigration of branch member Thomas Hunt to found a community in 1843. In late 1844 the first three of these societies determined to assist each other, partly in reaction to the opposition of the Rational Society to emigration.⁵¹ The Democratic Co-operative Society was unusual in demanding its members hold no religious beliefs.⁵² Members of these societies were anxious to sell their Rational Society scrip, or community shares, an indication that emigration attracted those who were actively involved in domestic communitarianism. This again shows the damaging effect of emigration on the Rational Society's own operations.

A further co-operative emigration society active in London at this time was the Albion Phalanx Emigration Association, whose name indicates the influence of Fourier.⁵³ Formed in 1844, another emigration society was the Potters' Joint Stock Emigration Society, formed in the Staffordshire Potteries. Although the society was not communitarian, it did draw its economic analysis and ideals from Owenite arguments.⁵⁴ The society purchased land in Wisconsin, naming its settlement Pottersville, and a number of families were sent out in 1847.⁵⁵

Yet the 1844 Congress also demonstrated the continuing demand for domestic communities. Isaac Ironside, of Sheffield, spoke of a small group of five Sheffield Owenites who had taken a plot of land and a cottage, in a venture similar to that of the Tyldesley co-operators in 1838 or the group from Failsworth in 1832.⁵⁶ Despite the establishment of Queenwood, small-

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, XI. 49. 3 June 1843

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, XII. 48. 25 May 1844

⁵¹ *ibid.*, XIII. 15. 5 October 1844

⁵² *Movement*, I. 29. 29 June 1844

⁵³ *ibid.*, I. 10. 17 February 1844

⁵⁴ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, pp. 228-229

⁵⁵ W. S. Shepperson, *British Emigration to North America*, pp. 95-98

⁵⁶ *New Moral World*, XII. 48. 25 May 1844

The Tyldesley co-operators are covered in chapter four, and the Failsworth group in chapter two.

scale, immediate attempts proved as attractive as they had done in the early days of the co-operative movement.

The largest communal emigration society of the period was the Tropical Emigration Society.⁵⁷ Founded in 1844, the Tropical Emigration Society was based on the ideas of John Etzler. Etzler's plans for social reform combined his own inventions of labour saving machinery and a high degree of communal living, creating a technological utopia. His first major work was *The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men, Without Labour, By Powers of Nature and Machinery*, published in 1833. Etzler's works were reviewed in the socialist and radical press, but it was not until the 1840s that he began to receive widespread attention. The Tropical Emigration Society planned to implement Etzler's community proposals in Venezuela. The society met with early success, and within a year the society had over 1,500 members.⁵⁸ Besides its base in London, by early 1845 branches were formed in Bradford, Bingley, and Newcastle. Parties were sent out to Venezuela, but a poor choice of location and a lack of sufficient preparation led to the society's collapse in 1847. Like other communal emigration schemes in these years, the Tropical Emigration Society was regarded by the Rational Society as a diversion from official activities. James Nockles, reporting from Glasgow at the 1844 Congress, referred to the distraction of the association recently formed there to support Etzler.⁵⁹

With the collapse of the Rational Society in 1845 the communitarian movement fragmented. In place of the nation-wide Rational Society, a number of smaller, local organisations emerged. As in the previous two decades, emigration societies continued to exist alongside domestic

For Isaac Ironside see p. 119, n. 30.

⁵⁷ The following is largely drawn from Gregory Claeys, 'John Adolphus Etzler, technological utopianism, and British socialism', pp. 351-375

⁵⁸ Among its members was Thomas Powell, formerly a member of the propagandist organisation, the British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge, of the early 1830s. He settled in Trinidad, where he was forced to stay to support the family he had acquired, despite his desire to return to England. (Co-operative Union, Holyoake Papers, Misc. It. 15. 24 March 1862)

⁵⁹ *New Moral World*, XII. 48. 25 May 1844

societies. One such was the North Texan Colonization Company, which operated from the same Fleet Street address as the League of Social Progress.⁶⁰ This society emerged from a group centred on the *Spirit of the Age* periodical. The group later divided into two organisations, the North Texan Colonization Company and the North Texas Association. The former claimed to hold over 20,000 acres in Texas, close to Icaria, the colony founded by Etienne Cabet. Cabet had attracted supporters in Britain, and his progress in Texas was followed by British socialists. At the 1848 London Congress of communist societies, those planning to emigrate were directed to the Icarians, as a communal scheme was preferable to going out as an individual.⁶¹ The Icarians had inspired another community proposal, whose founder planned to emigrate to Texas in September 1848.⁶²

The estate of the North Texan Colonization Company was to be divided into four lots of 5,120 acres. In each 120 acres were to be kept for public use, and the remainder was partitioned into 25 acre lots. Each lot, including the fare and use of the public buildings, would cost £30. Those 'desirous of locating themselves on the Co-operative or Communistic Principle of Joint Labour' could have contiguous lots.⁶³ Demand for lots for a co-operative settlement was such that a Co-operative Emigration Society was organised as part of the North Texan Colonization Company to arrange the co-operative sections.⁶⁴ Forty members left Britain, only to be temporarily stranded in Louisiana. The society finally purchased six hundred and forty acres in Texas. What eventually became of the group is unclear, but discouraging reports halted the emigration of a second group.⁶⁵ A further semi-communal emigration scheme at this time was that of George Sheppard, editor of the *Eastern Counties Herald*. Sheppard, inspired by Fourier, organised an emigration society at Hull in 1849. The society purchased 2,000 acres in Iowa. The members held individual

⁶⁰ *Spirit of the Age*, I. 7. 9 September 1848

⁶¹ *Herald of Redemption*, I. 18. June 1848

⁶² *Spirit of the Age*, I. 5. 26 August 1848

⁶³ *ibid.*, I. 7. 9 September 1848

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, I. 8. 16 September 1848

⁶⁵ W. S. Shepperson, *British Emigration to North America*, pp. 101-102

estates, but co-operated in building a central village. By 1851, however, most of the members had dispersed, finding the opportunities offered by neighbouring towns more attractive than their own scheme.⁶⁶

11. 4. Thomas Hunt and the Colony of Equality

On the afternoon of 11 June 1843 a tea party was held at the John Street Institution to wish farewell to Thomas Hunt and other members of the A1 branch leaving for America.⁶⁷ Unlike many other communal emigration schemes, Hunt's attempts to found a community in America are well detailed in letters he sent back to the branch, which were frequently published in the *New Moral World*. A prominent member of the A1 branch, he had been active in London Owenite circles for many years. Not afraid to voice his opinions, Hunt had opposed the Central Board on many occasions. His prominence and following in London helped to ensure that his progress was reported in Britain. Hunt thus provides a well documented example of an emigration scheme of this time.

Thomas Hunt's emigration proposal was conceived in direct opposition to the Rational Society's Queenwood community. Slow progress at Queenwood caused him to decide that the funds expended on Queenwood would have been better employed in the United States. The success of the Rappites, a much-used example of European communal emigration, had first led him to consider America. Hunt compared Queenwood with the cost of a community of one hundred in America. One hundred was chosen as the largest number of people at Queenwood. Whereas £30,000 had been spent on Queenwood, the cost of a community in America was estimated at £1,440. Had the Rational Society's money been expended in America, its £30,000 would have funded 2,100 people.⁶⁸ The tension between the Owenites' official course of home colonization and the various emigration

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 103

⁶⁷ *New Moral World*, XI. 51. 17 June 1843

proposals made itself felt at Hunt's tea party. Even as the branch bid farewell to some of its members, Robert Clark, president and chair of the occasion, said that Queenwood was 'all in all to us; and, for his own part, he would never abandon it whilst one brick of it remained.'⁶⁹

Hunt planned to begin with a community of twenty families, located on a farm of two hundred acres. Membership would be limited to those who accepted the Owenite principle that man's character was formed for, and not by, him. A first party of fifteen to twenty people would be sent out to prepare the way for the rest. This group would include experienced farmers, builders, and others whose skills would be needed to erect temporary buildings and begin cultivating the farm. Hunt envisaged a community with cottages arranged in a crescent around a central, two-storey public building. There would be orchards and gardens surrounding the cottages. Members would have a right to an equal share of the community's land, and if they desired they could retire to their individual plot. They would not be allowed to do so, however, until all the land was under cultivation.⁷⁰

Hunt's plan soon found supporters among the London Owenites. A society was formed, and the first section of emigrants left for America in June 1843. On 27 July the party arrived at Staten Island. They stayed briefly in New York before beginning their journey to Milwaukee, leaving for Troy by boat along the Hudson.⁷¹ While in New York Hunt was visited by John Green, the former social missionary and member of the Manea Fen community. Green was one of a group of active Owenites in New York, which included many British immigrants. Among them was Benjamin Timms, also of Manea Fen.

⁶⁸ Thomas Hunt, *Report to a Meeting of Intending Emigrants, Comprehending a Practical Plan for Founding Co-operative Colonies of United Interests, in the North-Western Territories of the United States* (London, 1843), pp. 2-3

⁶⁹ *New Moral World*, XI. 51. 17 June 1843

⁷⁰ Thomas Hunt, *Report to a Meeting of Intending Emigrants*, pp. 11-19

⁷¹ *New Moral World*, XII. 9. 26 August 1843

Green brought news of a community with which he was involved, then being formed in Pennsylvania. This community provides a clear demonstration of the different situation facing communitarians in North America, and of the practical advantages to be found there. The society behind the community was the One-Mentian, or Social Community, Society. Formed by John Hooper, the society emerged from New York Owenite circles. Essentially Owenite, the community promised sexual equality and marriage based on 'a communion of souls'. A share in the community was \$50. The society received subscriptions totalling \$1,500, all of which had gone on their estate of nearly 800 acres. The estate was purchased outright, and the society had no debts, rent, or mortgage.⁷² Forty members were settled on the estate.⁷³ The One-Mentian Society apparently chose a poor location, and the community lasted for about a year.⁷⁴ A group of members from the community founded the Goose Pond Community in 1843, on the site of the Fourierist Social Reform Unity community, also in Pennsylvania.⁷⁵

Hunt and his party left New York for Troy, and travelled from there through the Erie Canal to Buffalo. While in Buffalo Hunt met two British Owenites, Joseph Williams and Mr. Nixon. Williams had lectured on socialism at Manchester. Nixon had left England to join a group of Nottingham Owenites, led by the social missionary Henry Knight. This group of fifteen had left England in 1842, and purchased 120 acres in Illinois.⁷⁶ Hunt also heard of another community scheme near Buffalo. Nixon accompanied Hunt as they left for Milwaukee, sailing through the Great Lakes.

⁷² *ibid.*, XII. 38. 16 March 1844

⁷³ Frederick A. Bushee, 'Communitistic Societies in the United States' in *Political Science Quarterly*, 20 (1905), p. 661

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ A. E. Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, p. 240

⁷⁶ *New Moral World*, XII. 26. 23 December 1843

This community was presumed to have collapsed by 1845. See *New Moral World*, XIII. 39. 22 March 1845

Having left England in June 1843, Hunt finally arrived at Milwaukee in September.⁷⁷ From Milwaukee he and three others searched for an estate, covering three hundred miles on foot. The recent influx of immigrants to the area meant that most of the estates near Milwaukee had been taken. Hunt's party decided upon an estate about thirty miles from Milwaukee, in the township of Mukwonago, and here they established the Colony of Equality. The township consisted of twenty houses, and had previously been a Native American village, from which time the name Mukwonago, which meant 'place of bears', had been retained.⁷⁸ Only three miles away was a farm belonging to a Mr. Francis, who, like Hunt's group, had belonged to the John Street branch of the Rational Society. A Mr. Daws, of the Harlington branch of the Rational Society, also later settled near Hunt.⁷⁹ As they had arrived too late to sow any crops, the group planned to spend the remainder of the year on improving their housing, which at first consisted of a two-storey log house.⁸⁰

The community's early life proved harsh. The weather was unforgiving, with an average temperature of only 36 degrees Fahrenheit between 1 November and 16 December 1843. Frost set in from late October, and the members frequently had to work in several inches of snow. At the other extreme, the community was threatened by forest fires. Living conditions were cramped, with most of the members housed in a building measuring forty feet by seventeen feet, with ten bedrooms. With the onset of winter their buildings proved not to be entirely weatherproof. Yet Hunt remained cheerful, and insisted that they were living well. Food was relatively cheap, and untaxed. Despite this, they were living one shilling above his original estimate of 2s 6d per week. Eight hogs and a heifer were bought to last the community through the winter.⁸¹ The members

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, XII. 38. 16 March 1844

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, XIII. 7. 10 August 1844

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, XII. 39. 23 March 1844; XIII. 7. 10 August 1844

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, XII. 38. 16 March 1844

⁸¹ *ibid.*, XII. 39. 23 March 1844

supplemented their diet by hunting, although in a bizarre hunting accident Jack, the community's favourite cat, was shot.⁸²

The members spent much of the winter clearing ground in preparation for a spring crop of wheat. Not being accustomed to the area, the members failed to realise that a crop could not be raised on recently broken soil. No wheat crop would be possible in 1844. It became apparent that the community had made a major mistake in not purchasing improved land, as Hunt had originally intended, or in not arriving earlier in the year. Crops of Indian corn, potatoes, and turnips, however, could be grown.⁸³ Unable to rely on their own estate, the community decided to rent thirty-one acres on which to plant wheat. This proved expensive, with the rent exceeding the original cost of the land.⁸⁴ The need to house some members in Milwaukee and the cost of renting land contributed to the community's deficit over its first two years. In March 1845 the community was valued at \$2,548, including the land and improvements, stock, tools, and cash held by the community. At this time \$2,758 had been expended, leaving a deficit of \$210.⁸⁵ Hunt's original estimates, based on an estate with seventy-five acres of improved land, had allowed for a deficit in the first year, but had expected the community to yield a profit from its second year onwards.⁸⁶ Despite this deficit, the community had no debts, and Hunt was confident for the future.

The community had been weakened by the loss of a number of members, and this had contributed to the deficit. By June 1845 fourteen members, adults and children, had left. With them they took money and goods valued at \$130. Thirteen remained, of whom nine were adults. The members had been carefully chosen for their skills, and the loss of these men slowed the community's progress. Among the first to leave were the community's only carpenters, which slowed the construction of their first

⁸² *ibid.*, XII. 47. 18 May 1844

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, XIII. 7. 10 August 1844; XIII. 58. 2 August 1845

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, XIII. 58. 2 August 1845

building.⁸⁷ Early in 1845 the community lost its only farmer when the Johnson family, which accounted for eight of the fourteen, left. Hunt insisted they could manage without him, and they received some advice from Daws, their neighbour and former Rational Society member. In 1845 an acrimonious dispute threatened the stability of the community. Two trustees wrote to the society in London claiming that the community was bankrupt and requesting that the society be dissolved. Hunt was forced to ask the London society to dismiss the two from their position as trustees. The society supported Hunt, and passed a resolution stating that he had their full confidence.⁸⁸ The community also suffered one death. George Roberts, who had been ill since leaving England, died in February 1844. He was buried in unconsecrated ground half a mile from the community buildings.⁸⁹

Having survived its first year, the community found itself in a more secure position. A second draft of members had left England in the autumn of 1844.⁹⁰ In the spring of 1845 their first wheat crop was sown, which promised to make the community self-sufficient in food.⁹¹ They were also producing items such as candles and soap, reducing their reliance on purchased goods. The hostile secession of members in early 1845, which had threatened to split the community, had been taken into account by Hunt when framing the community's rules. Hunt sent the new rules to London for the approval of the society, and he also sent them to the State Legislature in order to obtain an Act of Incorporation for the community. The new rules drew on the Wisconsin Phalanx's Act of Incorporation, and also John Finch's account of the Zoar community.⁹² One of the most significant changes was the extensive provision made for secessions, designed to protect the community. Of the changes Hunt wrote, 'If we are to carry out our objects successfully, and without the embarrassments we have hitherto

⁸⁶ Thomas Hunt, *Report to a Meeting of Intending Emigrants*, pp. 13-15

⁸⁷ *New Moral World*, XIII. 7. 10 August 1844

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, XIII. 58. 2 August 1845

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, XII. 48. 25 May 1844; XIII. 7. 2 August 1844

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, XII. 50. 8 June 1844; XIII. 16. 12 October 1844

⁹¹ *ibid.*, XIII. 58. 2 August 1845

⁹² *Herald of Progress*, I. 9. 14 February 1846

encountered, the government of this place must be strong and unshackled'.⁹³ Despite these attempts to secure the community's future it collapsed in the summer of 1846. Some members bought land nearby, and others left for Milwaukee. The community helped its members through the transition to a new country, but was abandoned once it had outlived this initial function.⁹⁴ Hunt himself was still resident at Mukwonago in 1848.⁹⁵

Hunt's time in America illustrates the communal emigrant experience. His contacts with socialist emigrants show him not to have been alone, but one of a number who left Britain, many of whom remained involved with communal schemes. Hunt's experience demonstrates the advantages America offered to communitarians. It was in the matter of land that Hunt's estimates of America's advantages proved most accurate. He had allowed £200 for the purchase of 200 acres, and had actually bought 263 acres for only £100.⁹⁶ The estate was bought in two sections, of 175 and 88 acres. Both were purchased from the government for \$1.25 per acre, although the group had to pay an additional \$180 for improvements made to the first section by its previous owner. The total cost of the 263 acres was thus slightly over \$500. At this time Hunt reported that a sovereign could be exchanged for slightly under \$5, which gives an approximate figure of £100, an extraordinarily low figure in comparison with Britain.⁹⁷

Hunt's experience was not unique. The One-Mention Society had also benefited from low land prices. The finances of the society bore out Hunt's estimate of the advantages of establishing a community in America. A rough calculation shows the community to have purchased the estate for \$2, or 8s, per acre.⁹⁸ The total cost was close to £300. Compared with

⁹³ *ibid.*, I. 10. 28 February 1846

⁹⁴ J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, pp. 174-175, 177-179

⁹⁵ *Power of the Pence*, I. 1. 11 November 1848

⁹⁶ Thomas Hunt, *Report to a Meeting of Intending Emigrants*, p. 13

⁹⁷ *New Moral World*, XII. 38. 16 March 1844

⁹⁸ Hooper gave the extent of the estate at nearly 800 acres, while Wilson, of the Owenite Social Institution in New York, gave a figure of 715 acres. The first estimate gives a figure of \$2.10 per acre, while the second gives a figure of \$1.90 per acre, thus giving an average of \$2 per acre.

New Moral World, XII. 38. 16 March 1844; XII. 30. 20 January 1844

Manea Fen, which mortgaged its ten acres for £200, this demonstrates the much lower price of land in America. Even the relatively poor estate of the Pant Glas community was valued at £4 per acre. The low cost allowed both societies to purchase their estates outright. Unlike the majority of the British communities, they did not need to devote a major portion of its income to paying rent or the interest on a mortgage, thus removing one of the most significant difficulties facing British communitarians.

While Hunt estimated the amounts to be saved fairly accurately, the failure of his community demonstrated that he had not managed to overcome all of the difficulties encountered by communities. In part the problems faced by the community stemmed from its particular geographical area, and the community's progress was hindered by its ignorance of local farming techniques. However, it also encountered difficulties in generating a sufficient level of commitment among its members, and in this faced a problem common to all community ventures.

11. 5. Conclusion

Emigration schemes can be found from the time of the first community proposals. These emigration proposals need to be considered alongside domestic plans, in order to place emigration proposals in context. When examined in the context of domestic communitarianism, it becomes apparent that both were shaped by similar demands. Rather than marking a discrete phase, socialist emigration needs to be addressed as a part of the mainstream communitarian movement. As communitarianism moved through a number of periods from 1825 to 1855, communal emigration proposals can be seen to mirror the same demands as domestic communitarianism.

During the late 1820s and early 1830s the communitarian movement was characterised by the use of co-operative trading. In this period a number of domestic community proposals emerged, and communities were

established in Devon and at Orbiston. Owen's decision to found a community at New Harmony, in Indiana, shows that the focus of the movement was not fully on domestic communities. At this time the Pennsylvanian Co-operative Society was formed, with its proposal for an American community. That the London Co-operative Society distributed its rules shows this society to have had links with the communitarian mainstream.⁹⁹ With the collapse of the co-operative stores in the early 1830s, the communitarian movement came to be dominated by the AACAN, later the Rational Society, formed in 1835. Although the Rational Society became a national movement, with branches in all of the main centres of Owenism, the communitarian movement was never fully under its control. Impatience at the time it took the Rational Society to establish an official community led to a number of domestic schemes during the late 1830s, as has been seen in earlier chapters. Manea Fen in particular attracted support for this reason. The same motivation also lay behind communal emigration at this time. The Birmingham based Social United Interest Colonization Society was founded by members of the Rational Society who had lost faith in the possibility of a domestic community.

In the 1840s emigration, both popular and socialist, increased markedly. Gregory Claeys sees the increase in socialist emigration at this time as marking the beginning of a new phase in British communitarianism. Through linking the growth of socialist emigration to the failure of the Queenwood community, Claeys perceives the enthusiasm for socialist emigration schemes as indicating 'the failure of the strategy of socialist land colonization in Britain' and as 'a partial acknowledgement of the futility of nearly thirty years of domestic communitarian exertion'.¹⁰⁰ However, Claeys overestimates the position of Queenwood within the wider communitarian movement. Although officially the focus of the movement, earlier chapters have demonstrated that the movement found other outlets for its energies and was never fully focused on the Queenwood community.

⁹⁹ *Trades' Free Press*, III. 127. 16 December 1827

Dissatisfaction with proceedings there led to a number of other ventures, including Manea Fen and Pant Glas. This situation continued into the 1840s, and those seeking alternatives to Queenwood proposed and enacted a number of domestic communitarian schemes. Furthermore, as was demonstrated in the preceding chapter, domestic communitarianism did not end with the collapse of Queenwood, but continued through the activities of a number of diverse societies. The Leeds Redemption Society, which lasted for ten years, illustrated the continuing demand for a community in Britain. It was both more enduring and more widespread than the Tropical Emigration Society, which Claeys argues demonstrated the strength of demand for communal emigration.

As with Chartist emigration, it is difficult to draw a direct connection between socialist emigration and the failure of the domestic movement. Chartist emigration clearly affected the movement, but was not entirely a response to failure, and may instead have been a contributory factor. The same is true of socialist emigration, as can be seen in contemporary debates. For example, at the 1843 Congress James Campbell Smith reported from the London Branch A1 that community fund subscriptions were falling, due to a lack of confidence in the Central Board. This was Thomas Hunt's branch, and there were a number of emigration societies within the branch, inspired by Hunt. Lloyd Jones asked if the declining subscriptions could be due to this support for emigration. Smith replied that dissatisfaction with the Central Board pre-dated the branch's interest in emigration.¹⁰¹ Jones and Smith held different views of emigration, the former believing it weakened the movement, and the latter perceiving as a response to the movement's failings. Clearly, communal emigration did stem partly from dissatisfaction with Queenwood and the Rational Society. However, emigration was not the only option for those seeking alternatives to Queenwood, and its growth did not indicate the end of domestic communitarianism.

¹⁰⁰ Gregory Claeys, 'John Adolphus Etzler, technological utopianism, and British socialism', p. 352

If this is accepted, then another explanation needs to be sought for the increase in such schemes in the 1840s and 1850s. This explanation would appear to lie largely in the growth of popular interest in emigration in these years. Emigration also became easier, with the advent of steam-assisted ships, and cheaper. Socialists would have been affected by the increasing distress and depression which drove much popular emigration. Furthermore, the demand for community was in part driven by the search for a new life under better conditions, a search which also clearly underlay emigration. Communitarians seeking an alternative to Queenwood or other existing communities, were evidently drawn by the increasingly popular option of emigration. Throughout the period covered by this work, communal emigration provided an alternative to domestic plans. For a variety of reasons, from cheaper land to a belief in wider opportunity and greater social and political freedom, men turned overseas to realise their communitarian dreams.

¹⁰¹ *New Moral World*, XI. 47. 20 May 1843

CHAPTER 12. CONCLUSION

12. The legacy of the Owenite movement

The collapse of the Leeds Redemption Society in 1855 marked the end of Owenite communitarianism in Britain. Owen had held up an inspirational vision of a new moral world, but provided little indication as to how it was to be attained. A central theme of the present work is the variety of answers that were proposed during the 30-year history of communitarian experiments.

These experiments began with the Orbiston community and the emergence of an Owenite movement around the London Co-operative Society in 1825. At its beginning, the movement had derived its force from its critique of the emerging industrial and capitalist society. Under the impact of industrialisation, the early part of the century was a time of great social change. The eventual outcome of this change was far from evident, and communitarianism was an attempt to shape the outcome at a time when society was still perceived as fluid and malleable. Yet by mid-century this belief in the possibility of fashioning society along communitarian lines was no longer so persuasive. In part, increasing prosperity removed some of the more immediate, material concerns that had been significant elements in communitarianism. More than this, the industrial and capitalist society which the movement had rejected was now more firmly entrenched and mature. The opportunity for re-directing a society at a time of great change appeared to have passed.

With the collapse of Owenism's institutional framework and the passing of the communal experiments the energies of the movement were directed into other efforts. Some Owenites maintained their support for Owen's theories. Henry Travis and William Pare, Owen's literary executors

after his death in 1858, continued their belief in communitarianism.¹ Reprints of Owenite works illustrated a continuing interest in his views.² Others became increasingly involved in phrenology or spiritualism, including Owen himself in his last years.

As shown in chapter ten, two movements which benefited significantly from the support of former Owenites were secularism and the resurgent co-operative movement. The emergence of numbers of local secularist societies in the 1850s in many ways reflected the earlier Owenite provincial branches, and indeed provided a forum for continued activity for such organisations. But it was the co-operative movement that provided the most effective vehicle to express Owen's vision of widespread social reform. As was seen earlier, with the decline of the Leeds Redemption Society many of its members turned to the emerging Leeds co-operative society, and this pattern was repeated elsewhere. Among the most prominent of the former Owenites to support co-operation was G. J. Holyoake. While some former Owenites turned to co-operation, and maintained their belief in an eventual progress to a communitarian society, consumers' co-operation did not represent a rejection of industrial and capitalist society, as communitarianism had done. Rather an accommodation with capitalist society was to be reached, and reforms would be wrought from within. As Edward Royle has written, 'co-operative idealism was instead channelled into co-operation in the community, rather than co-operation in communities.'³

12. 1. Fundamental difficulties

Although the communities considered in previous chapters differed in many aspects, they all encountered similar difficulties that were primarily economic. From the time of the early co-operative movement there had been suggestions of manufacturing communities close to, or indeed in,

¹ For William Pare see p. 37, n. 27.

² J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites*, pp. 235-239

urban areas. Yet the suggestion was largely ignored. A significant part of the appeal of community was the return to land, and in many ways community was a reaction against the growing towns and cities. Land, however, was expensive in Britain. Its acquisition proved the major difficulty encountered by communities. Many communities depended on offers of land from landowners friendly to the cause. This was true of Manea Fen, Pant Glas, and Queenwood. Even so, land of reasonable quality could prove a financial burden on the community, as was the case at Manea Fen. Cheaper land was less productive and thus limited a community's ability to support its infrastructure, as happened at Pant Glas.

As support for the Owenite movement was centred in urban areas the agricultural focus of the actual communities posed a range of practical difficulties over and above the fact that they were remote from their areas of natural support. Urban artisans were unsuited to agricultural work, and communities were frequently forced to hire local labourers. Communities frequently attempted to introduce small-scale manufacturing, to better employ the skills of their members, but these were of too small a scale and too far removed from potential markets to succeed commercially.

The membership of the communities covered here was overwhelmingly drawn from amongst urban artisans. At the experiment on Chat Moss, established by co-operators from Tyldesley, the members' trades reflected their proximity to the Manchester cotton industry. The members included a warper, two dressers, a spinner, an overlooker of weavers, and a tailor. Also involved were a mechanic, a smith, a miner, and a shoemaker.⁴ Similar patterns are seen elsewhere. The Failsworth experiment was established by fustian cutters, again from Manchester.⁵ At Manea Fen the first members included a joiner and carpenter, an engineer, a plumber and glazier, a smith, a shoemaker, and several bricklayers.⁶

³ Edward Royle, *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, p. 228

⁴ *Working Bee*, New Series, I. 17. 26 September 1840

⁵ *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, May 1832

⁶ *Social Pioneer*, I. 3. 23 March 1839

Although Owenism attracted middle class members, few were present in these small-scale communities. There were occasionally more wealthy supporters, such as Jasper Vesey at the Devon and Exeter community or William Hodson at Manea Fen, but unlike at Queenwood, where Owen himself attracted middle-class supporters, there were no significant numbers of middle-class Owenites in these communities. Possibly the small-scale of these ventures was less appealing, or perhaps the blend of immediate practical aims and a significant element of self-help with the wider communitarian vision was not so attractive to middle class idealists.

Communities encountered a range of other difficulties. Manea Fen illustrates the problems involved in creating a committed membership. In part this was associated with the communities' economic problems, and with the sheer hardship inherent in these ventures. Many arriving at Manea Fen had fondly dreamed of a life of ease, and believed that the promises of palatial communities and four hours' work a day were to be realised immediately. They were rapidly disabused. Pant Glas was careful to make it clear from the beginning that it aimed only to provide a basic standard of living. Attempts to use urban labourers in agricultural or physical tasks also led to disaffection. Communities and societies usually attempted to restrict membership to those who understood Owen's ideas, and yet, as Manea Fen found, this was not always sufficient to ensure a unified membership. As the marriage scandal of 1839 illustrates, not all those who were active in the movement shared exactly the same views of what community entailed. Manea Fen and Queenwood also encountered difficulties in their attempts to implement Owenite beliefs in female equality. Manea Fen broke down individual families through communal child care and housing. While its rhetoric spoke of female equality, its practice would appear to have weakened the community's unity by depriving women of their former influence over their families without permitting women influence over the community as a whole. Queenwood encountered similar problems.

12. 2. The diverse character of communitarianism

This work has covered a range of communities and proposed experiments. While united by their adoption of community as a method of alleviating social problems, there were also vast differences between their concepts of community and their views on the purpose and utility of interim organisations. Many of these differences are illustrated by the career of George Waddington, a London communitarian who has made sporadic appearances throughout the present work.

In August 1830 Waddington wrote to Robert Owen.⁷ Living in the London suburbs with nine acres of land, Waddington ran a School of Economy with a strong emphasis on spade horticulture. Having heard Owen lecture, Waddington had become convinced that extended cultivation was an essential part of the solution to the current distress. By 1830 he had carried out a number of experiments in cultivation, and continued to do so into the 1840s. Waddington wrote to ask Owen's help in promoting the First London Friendly Society, his latest project. The society was to help the unemployed. It would provide a register for its members and for employers looking for workers. While out of work, members could work on its gardens, and there was to be a store for the sale of produce. The society would also provide an education, including rural husbandry and economy. There would be meetings for discussions, and areas for recreation.

What became of the First London Friendly Society is unclear. Waddington did establish an agricultural institution for the employment of paupers near London. His 1830 School of Economy at Barnsbury and Sydenham, in north London, founded with the patronage of the London socialists, lasted for two years.⁸ Waddington continued to operate on the fringes of the Owenite movement. He proposed a co-operative colony in 1830. In this proposal he suggested that 'Soldiers and Policemen should be

⁷ George Waddington to Robert Owen, August 1830. ROCC 290

⁸ *New Moral World*, IX. 6. 6 February 1841

colonized, and *produce their own necessities*', indicating familiar radical attitudes towards the state's protectors.⁹ In 1835 he formed a committee and took land on which to found a community.¹⁰ By 1839 one of his ventures had collapsed, and its members' goods were seized against Waddington's debts.¹¹ In early 1841 George Waddington wrote to the Owenite journal, the *New Moral World*, to promote his latest project. Waddington complained that, 'I have been twice defeated in attempts to form small communities; but I am still of opinion that they should begin on a small scale, and gradually advance.'¹² His advocacy of spade husbandry as a route to the establishment of communities attracted little attention. A few months later his approach to the Owenites in Sheffield was rejected as a distraction from the task at hand - the 'official' Queenwood community.¹³

Waddington's significance lies not so much in his particular proposals, as in the fact that he was but one of many. For over ten years Waddington was an active participant in the broader communitarian movement, yet he was not a significant part of the official Owenite societies. During the period of his involvement he advanced a variety of proposals, united only by the inspiration they drew from Owen and from community. His First London Friendly Society was essentially a benefit society, married with elements Waddington had drawn from Owen, especially an emphasis on small-scale cultivation. His later proposals for small communities founded on spade agriculture stood in contrast to the larger and more expensive approach chosen by the Queenwood community. Waddington illustrates that neither concepts of community, nor the communitarian movement, were monolithic in this period. Rather both were characterised by plurality and diversity.

While the larger communities have attracted more attention from historians, community in this period meant far more than ventures such as

⁹ *British Co-operator*, I. 7. October 1830

¹⁰ *New Moral World*, I. 26. 25 April 1835; I. 27. 2 May 1835; I. 30. 23 May 1835

¹¹ *ibid.*, V. 19. 2 March 1839

¹² *ibid.*, IX. 6. 6 February 1841

Ralahine, Orbiston, or Queenwood. Indeed, in many ways these ventures were atypical products of a movement which embraced a wide variety of proposals and forms of action. While Owen's ideal community stood as an inspiration for the communitarian movement, community in practice was not limited to this ideal form. Community has a far broader meaning, and a wide variety of ventures were justified by their founders in terms of community. It is perhaps helpful to see community in this period as a continuum, including a range of positions.

Within this range of attitudes four key positions can be outlined. For Owen himself a community experiment would demonstrate the truth of his views. Although communities were described as experiments, Owen did not believe that there was any need to test his theories. For others within the movement, communities served a range of purposes. Some saw them as paving the way for Owen's experiment, through training people, preparing public opinion, or persuading potential financial supporters. For others, such as William Hodson, individual communities were justified in their own right, and would contribute towards the change to a communitarian society. On a more practical level, some communities were conceived to answer an immediate problem, and with little discussion of their theoretical basis.

Throughout this work a number of ventures have been studied, occupying a number of points within this continuum. Proposed ventures such as that of the friend of Henry Shorto, the Salisbury cutler who wrote to Owen in 1835, may have been far removed from Owen's ideal, and from experiments such as Queenwood, yet for contemporaries they derived their inspiration from Owen, and drew upon the idea of community.¹⁴ Shorto's friend planned a community of only three families. A similar venture was that of the four Failsworth co-operators, members of the Owenian co-

¹³ *ibid.*, X. 5. 31 July 1841

¹⁴ Henry Short to Robert Owen, 11 August 1835. ROCC 745
See also chapter two.

operative society, who began a small experiment near Manchester in 1832 'on community principles'.¹⁵

Although such ventures can be seen as being positioned on a spectrum that extended to larger communities such as the Leeds Redemption Society's experiment and Manea Fen, this should not be taken to mean that all who participated in a community experiment necessarily wished to belong to Owen's idea. Rather, they appropriated elements of community to suit their particular circumstances. This can be seen in the proposals of the London co-operator, James Tucker.¹⁶ Tucker planned establishments which would combine elements of schools and benefit societies with elements drawn from community. These proposals were deliberately intended by Tucker as part of a continuum, as a method of gradually habituating the population to community.

The form of these ventures was, therefore, not merely a question of means, but of approach. Some ventures and proposals aimed to approximate as closely as possible to Owen's ideal parallelogram. This was evident in the plans of the London Co-operative Society of 1825, with its expensive community providing changing work and supporting a wealth of cultural objectives.¹⁷ The grandiose building programme at Orbiston, and to a certain extent Harmony Hall at Queenwood, can also be seen in this manner. Yet this was not necessarily the goal for all. While community was a means of achieving complete social reform, it was also seized upon as a solution to particular problems. A proposal could belong to the overall continuum, and yet also have a particular focus serving a specific purpose. The two are not mutually exclusive, and there was thus a variety of approaches, all drawing upon community for their inspiration and justification.

¹⁵ *The Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, May 1832
See chapter two.

¹⁶ See chapter three for a discussion of James Tucker.

At the Fourth Co-operative Congress, held in Liverpool in 1832, Thomas Hirst recognised this variety of approaches. He spoke of the 'many attempts making by the friends of the system to approximate as nearly as possible to a state of Community, by the partial union of a few families'. While some would have preferred the efforts of the co-operative movement to have been focused on a single venture, Hirst welcomed these small-scale attempts, seeing them as 'so many adult schools, where a practical knowledge of some part of the system, at least, might be gained.'¹⁸ He was thus bringing this range of experiments within the continuum, seeing them as being justified in terms of community and as contributions to the movement. Hirst was not alone in this. Reports of small-scale experiments frequently described them using the term 'incipient community'. As argued earlier, this phrase indicates a particular way of thinking about community and the question of how to attain the new moral world. In describing ventures as incipient communities, these ventures were being seen as preparatory, as means of opening the way to a full realisation of Owen's vision. Such an attitude encompassed a diverse range of experiments, from that of the Failsworth co-operators, which was described as an incipient community by the *Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, through to Manea Fen.¹⁹

Yet while individual ventures were welcomed by many as steps towards an ideal, they also served a variety of more immediate purposes. This can be seen in many of the experiments included here. For Shorto's friend, community provided a solution to his unemployment and the depression of his trade, as was true of the fustian cutters involved at Failsworth. Spa Fields, one of the earliest communities, was driven partly by the economic advantages of shared household expenses, while it also hoped to realise some of the other advantages of association, including education. The United Advancement Society of Wisbech was undermined

¹⁷ *Articles of Agreement for the Formation of a Community on Principles of Mutual Co-operation, within Fifty Miles of London*

¹⁸ *The Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator*, New Series, May 1832

¹⁹ *ibid.*

by the excessive attachment of its members to the immediate benefits offered by its wholesale trading, at the expense of its future goals. James Tucker's plans placed great emphasis on education, and also fulfilled some of the roles of benefit societies in supporting the old and unemployed.

12. 3. Success and failure

R. G. Garnett wrote that the 'communities failed only as communities.'²⁰ The question of success or failure cannot be addressed in clear-cut, black and white terms. Clearly, none of the communities lasted for long, and the movement did not achieve its stated aims. Yet the movement was not without its attainments. For individual participants in these communities, the movement's value may have lain in the opportunity, however, brief, that it offered to live according to their ideals. The community experience, for men such as Samuel Crump of Manea Fen, was part of a life dedicated to social reform. In a wider context, the movement's enduring legacy indicates that the questions it raised and sought to answer remained pertinent. It provided a critique of industrial society, indicating not merely the economic, but also the wider social impact of industrialisation. In essence the movement attempted to articulate an argument against the damaging social effects of economic inequality, and to provide a vehicle to demonstrate the benefits of social justice and a recognition of female equality.

Against that aspirational background there is nothing surprising about the diversities of concept and style that the communitarian movement constantly displayed. Nevertheless, this aspect seems to have been underplayed in much of the literature, which often seeks to cite the communitarian movement as an exemplar of some particular point of view, and thus to confer on it a degree of coherence and clarity that in fact it did not possess. The present work attempts to make a start in demonstrating that the reality was much more fragmented and diverse.

²⁰ R. G. Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain*, p. 26

APPENDIX A. LIST OF THE MAIN COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETIES INCLUDED IN THE TEXT

Association of All Classes of All Nations

Established by Robert Owen in 1835, the Association of All Classes of All Nations was the dominant Owenite society until its collapse in 1845. Its ultimate aim was to establish a community. A Community Fund organised subscriptions. This was replaced by the National Community Friendly Society in 1837. In 1839 the Association of All Classes of All Nations and the National Community Friendly Society merged, to form the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists. This society was officially referred to as the Rational Society from 1842. The society was a national organisation, with branches across the country. It organised social missionaries to tour areas promoting the society. Many branches built Halls of Science or Social Institutions as local centres.

British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge

Formed in 1829, the British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge stemmed from the First London. The society's role was the promotion of co-operation. It included representatives from many of the London co-operative societies, and was in communication with groups across the country. It also ran a bazaar for the exchange of goods. The society included prominent London co-operators and radicals, such as George Skene, Benjamin Warden, George Petrie, William Lovett, and James Watson.

Chat Moss

It has been suggested that a community was formed at Chat Moss in the early 1830s. No such community was in fact established. However, one of the men linked with the suggested community, Elijah Dixon, was later involved with a co-operative farm on the Moss in 1841. This experiment was begun by the Christian Co-operative Joint Stock Community, a society established in Manchester in 1840.

Co-operative Community Fund Association

The Co-operative Community Fund Association was formed by a group from within the London Co-operative Society in 1826. The society sought to establish a community, but on a relatively small scale. Funds were initially to be raised by subscriptions, but the society later adopted trading as a method of raising funds more rapidly. An Auxiliary Fund was established to manage this side of the society's activities.

Co-operative League

Formed in 1846, the Co-operative League was formed by former Owenites after the collapse of the Rational Society in 1845. It was established as a centre for propaganda and education. It should not be confused with the later society of the same name.

Co-operative League

The Co-operative League was formed in 1852, by Edward Vansittart Neale. Neale was a prominent Christian Socialist, and he intended the society to bring together all those involved in co-operation. The society included many former members of the Owenite movement, including Robert Owen himself, James Rigby, G. A. Fleming, and William Pare.

Colony of Equality

The Colony of Equality was established by Thomas Hunt, the London Owenite. The community was formed in 1843, near Milwaukee in the United States. Its progress was hindered by its members' lack of familiarity with local agriculture, and the community was broken up in 1846.

Communist Church

The Communist Church, formed by Goodwyn Barmby, was one of the most prominent London societies following the collapse of the Rational Society in 1845. It was established to unite Christianity and communism. It had two groups in London, and was associated with societies in Liverpool, Glasgow, Paisley, Stirlingshire, and elsewhere.

Community Friendly Society

Formed in 1836, the Community Friendly Society was a continuation of the Social Land Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society. The change of name accompanied a re-organisation of the society, which also enrolled itself as a Friendly Society at this time. The society was briefly granted a charter as a branch of the Association of All Classes of All Nations, before continuing to operate independently.

Devon and Exeter Community

In 1826 a group of men from the Devon and Exeter Co-operative society formed a community on thirty-seven acres of land, six miles outside Exeter. The main figure behind the community was Jasper Vesey, a local linen draper and hosier. A number of members were settled on the land, but the community collapsed later the same year when Vesey withdrew his financial support. The members later formed another community in the same area, known as Downlands.

Downlands Community

This community was formed by members of the short-lived Devon and Exeter Community. Begun in late 1826 or early 1827, it was established close to the earlier experiment. A few trades were begun, in addition to agriculture, and the community also ran a school. Downlands appears to have collapsed later in 1827.

East London Branch 1

The East London Branch 1 was formed to assist the Manea Fen community in 1839. William Hodson, the founder of Manea Fen, proposed a Hodsonian Society with regional branches, but the East London Branch 1 was its sole result. It stemmed largely from the Rational Society's Branch 16, in Finsbury.

Failsworth Community

The Failsworth Community was established by four members of the Owenian Co-operative Society of Manchester, in 1832. All four were fustian cutters, and planned to continue at their trade while also cultivating their land. Their affairs were to be managed on a communal basis.

Institution of the Industrious Classes

Opened by Robert Owen in 1832, the Institution was the centre of London Owenism. Originally based in Gray's Inn Road, the Institution later moved to Charlotte Street. It hosted a wide range of activities, including discussions, lectures, and a school. The Social Missionary and Tract Society, formed in 1832 to distribute information, was based at the Institution.

League of Social Reform

Formed in 1849, the League of Social Reform was a propagandist organisation formed to promote communitarianism through lectures and tracts. It included many former Owenites, including James Rigby, G. A. Fleming, and Lloyd Jones. The society may have continued as the Social Reform League, which organised the London conference of 1850.

Leeds Redemption Society

The Leeds Redemption Society was formed in 1845. It was the most significant society formed after the collapse of the Rational Society. The society drew upon support for the former society in Leeds. Branches were also established in a number of places, including Bradford, Nottingham, Oldham, Birmingham, and London. Its aim was to establish a community, and it secured an estate in 1848. Members were settled upon the land from 1849, and the community lasted until 1853 or 1854. The society itself lasted until 1855.

London Co-operative Society

Formed in late 1824, the London Co-operative Society aimed to establish a community. It sought to raise funds through issuing shares. The society published the *Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald* to advertise its activities. Both Robert Owen and William Thompson were associated with the society. After the collapse of the Spa Fields community, the society provided the focus for the emerging Owenite movement in the capital. Two later societies, the London Co-operative Trading Fund Association and the Co-operative Community Fund Association, were formed by groups from within the London Co-operative Society. The society lasted until the late 1820s.

London Co-operative Trading Fund Association

Normally referred to as the First London, the London Co-operative Trading Fund Association was the first co-operative society established in London. The society was formed in 1827 by a group from the London Co-operative Society, including the brothers Philip and George Skene and G. C. Penn. Its aim was to use the profits of trading to fund a community. The British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge grew from the propaganda activities of the First London.

Manchester Association

Referred to by a variety of titles, the Manchester Association was formed of delegates from the Manchester and Salford co-operative societies in the early 1830s. Like the British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge, the Manchester Association was established to promote co-operation. Members of the Association included men who would later be prominent in the Owenite movement, including James Rigby, Joseph Smith, and E. T. Craig.

Manchester Central Committee

The Manchester Central Committee was established in 1839 to aid the Manea Fen community. Its role was to assist in recruiting members and raising funds. The committee also published the *Social Pioneer* periodical to promote and defend Manea Fen. It severed connections with Manea Fen after the scandal of April 1839.

Manea Fen

The Manea Fen community officially began in 1839. It was established by William Hodson, a Cambridgeshire farmer, on his land in the fens. After Queenwood and Orbiston, this was one of the largest Owenite communities in Britain. The community was not welcomed by the official Owenite movement, which regarded it as a distraction from its own activities at the Queenwood community. Manea Fen collapsed in 1841.

National Equitable Labour Exchange

The National Equitable Labour Exchange was established by Robert Owen in London in September 1832. It was to provide a forum for the exchange of goods valued according to the labour involved in their manufacture. While the Labour Exchange was initially successful, it was closed in 1834. Relying predominantly on artisans for articles, the Exchange was not able to supply a sufficiently broad range of goods. Furthermore, the labour notes remained linked to market values. The only provincial labour exchange was opened in Birmingham in 1833, and it too closed in 1834.

North London Community

The North London Community was formed at Barnsbury Park, north London, in 1831. The land belonged to Pierre Baume, a French émigré associated with radical circles in Finsbury. The community consisted of three or four families, who continued to work in their trades and spent their spare time cultivating the land. Among the members was George Petrie, a prominent figure in London radicalism and co-operation. The community appears to have ended with his death in 1836.

Pant Glas

The Pant Glas community was formed in 1840 by the Society of United Friends. This society was formed by a splinter group from the Liverpool branch of the Rational Society. Branches of the society were formed in Manchester and Warrington. The community was formed on a hill farm in north Wales, but the estate was incapable of supporting the community, which collapsed in 1841.

Pennsylvanian Co-operative Society

Formed in 1827, the Pennsylvanian Co-operative Society intended to establish a community in the United States. Based in London, the society was in contact with the London Co-operative Society.

Philosophical Co-operative Land Association

Formed in London by William Cameron in 1832, the Philosophical Co-operative Land Association aimed to raise funds for a community through subscriptions. It also managed weekly meetings to prepare its members for community.

Queenwood

The Queenwood community was established by the Rational Society in 1839. It was the only community in Britain with which Robert Owen himself was directly associated. Queenwood was established at Tytherly, in Hampshire. The *New Moral World*, the periodical of the Rational Society, was later printed at Queenwood, and Owenite Congresses were also held there. Ending in 1845, the community lasted longer than any other British community. ||

Salford Community Association

The Salford Community Association was established in 1836 to raise funds for a community. G. A. Fleming, later a prominent Owenite and editor of the *New Moral World*, was the society's secretary. It was intended as a national organisation, but at the 1837 Owenite Congress the society was absorbed into the newly-formed National Community Friendly Society.

Social Community Company

The Social Community Company was formed in Manchester in 1832. Its aim was to raise funds for a community, by collecting subscriptions towards £10 shares. Its members were prepared to emigrate should they not succeed in Britain, and the society sent twenty-three members to Cincinnati to establish a community in 1834. Its members included many prominent Manchester co-operators, including Elijah Dixon, who later established a community at Chat Moss.

Social Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society

Frequently referred to as the Social Community, this society was established by Benjamin Warden in London in 1833. Based at the Institution of the Industrious Classes, the society was to host discussions and meetings, and to encourage mutual support among its members. It would gradually prepare its members for community. Local classes were established across London, and a branch was formed in Manchester. The society ended by 1834, although its members later established the Social Land Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society.

Social Land Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society

Formed in 1834, the Social Land Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society was a continuation of the Social Community of Friends to the Rational System of Society. Unlike the Social Community, the Social Land Community was formed to acquire land. It collected subscriptions, and also turned to trading to raise funds. It was later re-organised as the Community Friendly Society, in 1836.

Social United Interest Colonization Society

Formed in Birmingham in 1839, the Social United Interest Colonization Society drew its members from the Rational Society. Its aim was to establish a community in the United States, where it believed lower land prices offered a better chance of success.

Spa Fields

The Spa Fields community began in 1821, following a proposal by George Mudie. The community was based in shared houses in north London. Members lived together, sharing household duties and expenses, while continuing their previous trades. The community lasted until 1824. Mudie was one of the first theorists to develop Owen's ideas, and the community marks the beginning of an Owenite movement independent of Owen himself.

Tyldesley Co-operative Society

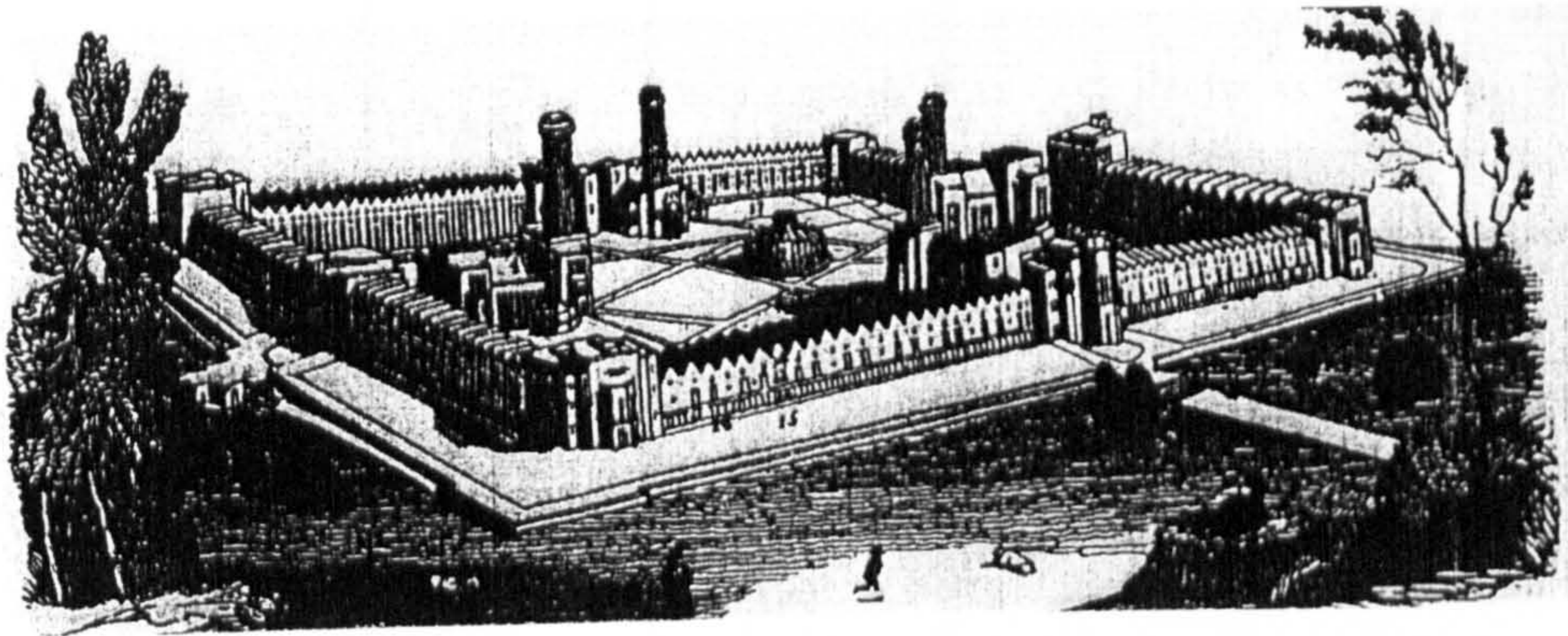
In 1838 a group from the Tyldesley Co-operative Society began a community on Chat Moss, west of Manchester. The community lasted until at least 1840, by which time there were eleven members.

United Advancement Society

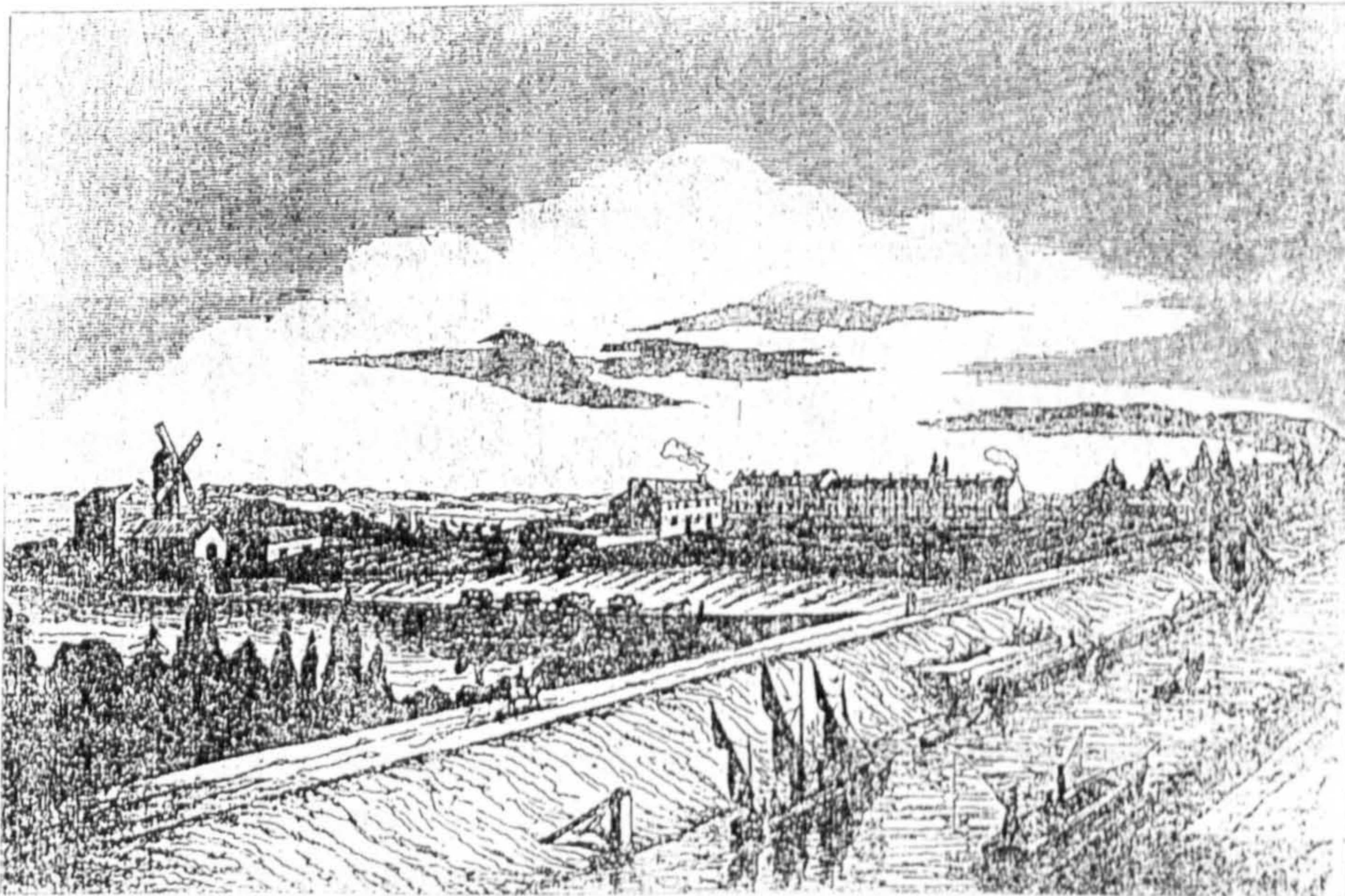
The United Advancement Society was established in 1838 by James Hill, proprietor of the radical Wisbech newspaper, the *Star in the East*. The society aimed to purchase land. Its ultimate goal was to form a community on its land. Until then it was to sell the produce from its land to increase its funds. It also adopted trading, not to generate a profit, but to provide short-term benefits to its members. Similar societies were established in Peterborough and March, and were considered elsewhere. The Wisbech society secured an estate in 1839, but its activity declined soon after. It appears to have collapsed in 1840.

APPENDIX B. ILLUSTRATIONS

B. 1. Robert Owen's ideal community¹



B. 2. The Manea Fen community²

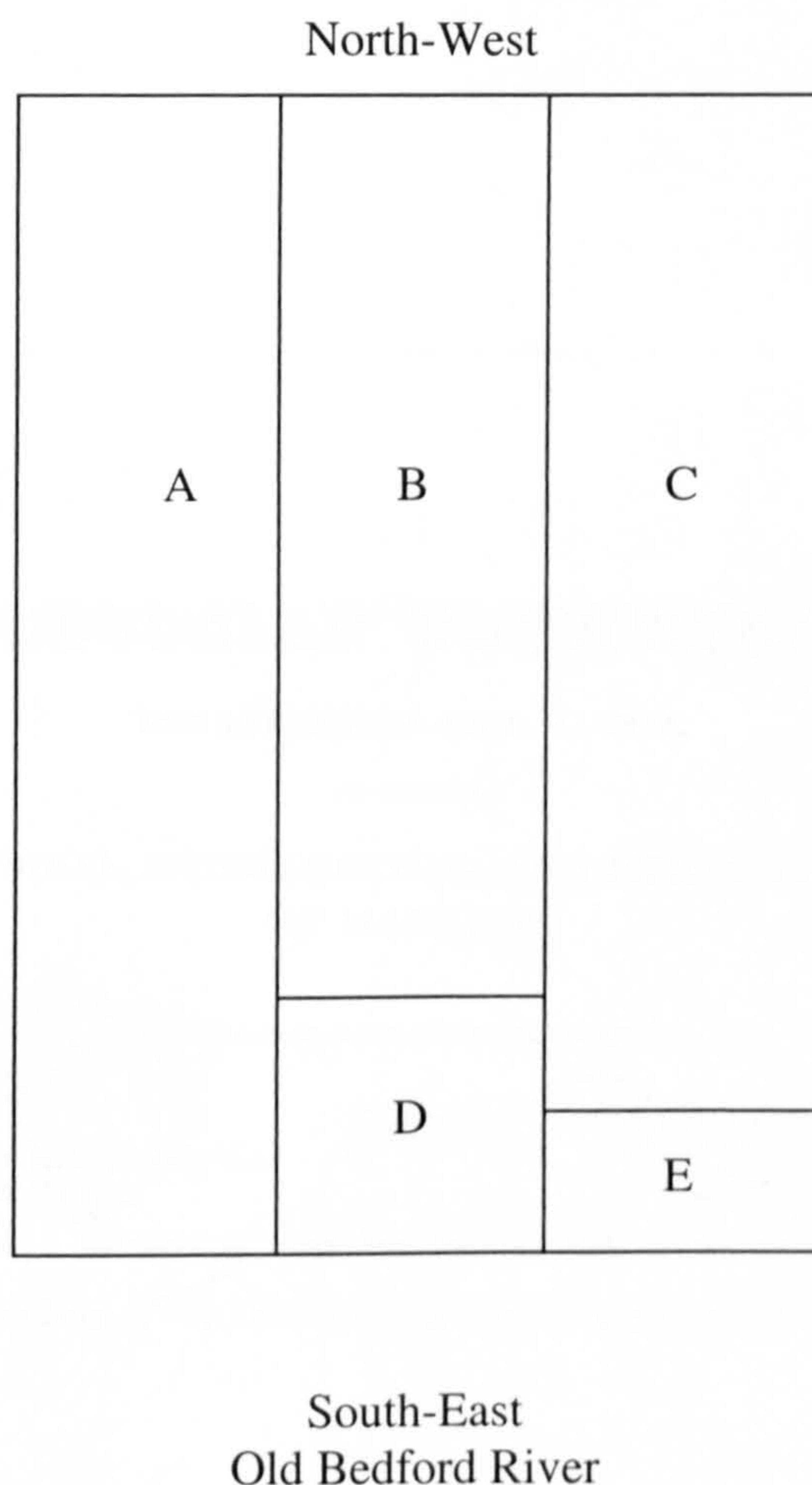


¹ *Crisis*, II. 15. 20 April 1833

² included with the *Working Bee* in 1840

B. 3. Plan of the Manea Fen estate³

(not to scale)



Key:

A. Lot 18 No. 21. 50 acres purchased from Naylor Dalton in April 1837 for £800.

B. Westmore North Lot 8 No. 21. 50 acres purchased from John Dalton in April 1837 for £600.

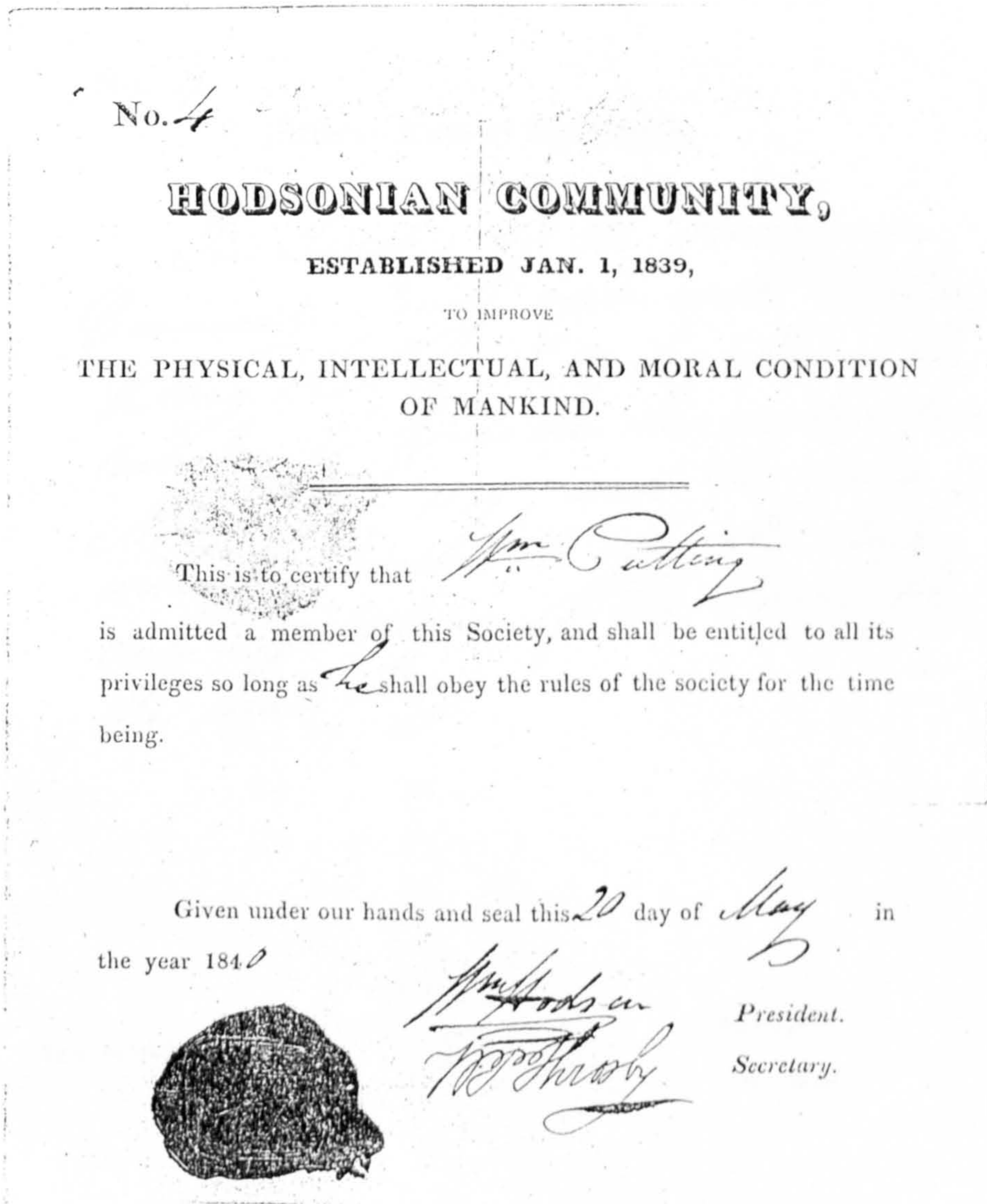
C. Westmore North Lot 3 No. 21. 50 acres purchased from Naylor Dalton in April 1838 for £780.

D. 8 acres, part of Westmore North Lot 8 No. 21. Conveyed to Trustees on 9 July, 1839. Returned to Hodson on 5 February, 1841.

E. 2 acres, part of Westmore North Lot 3 No. 21. Conveyed to Trustees on 9 July, 1839. Returned to Hodson on 5 February, 1841.

³ Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R90/7 Deeds of Colony Farm

B. 4. William Cutting's membership certificate for the Manea Fen community, front page⁴



⁴ Cambridgeshire County Record Office: R91/46 Papers relating to the Crump-Cutting family

B. 5. William Cutting's membership certificate for the Manea Fen community, inside page⁵

No. 4

Memorandum of Agreement.

The Directors of the Hobsonian Community Society agree with William Cutting that he shall be allowed the number of hours he has worked from March 30th 1839, and he agrees with the Directors to obey the Rules and Regulations of the Society for the time being

Signed on behalf of the Society;

W. Hodgson

President.

J. W. H. H. H.

Secretary.

⁵ *ibid.*

ABBREVIATIONS

AACAN	Association of All Classes of All Nations
BAPCK	British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge
HO	Home Office
NUWC	National Union of the Working Classes
PRO	Public Record Office
ROCC	Robert Owen Correspondence Collection

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Public Record Office, Kew:

HO 45/92 - Letter, William Hodson to Lord Normanby, 11 January
1841

Public Record Office, Family Records Centre:

HO 107/2472/8 - Population census, Garnlwyd farm (1851)
Registrar General's Index of Births and Marriages

Wisbech and Fenland Museum:

Papers relating to the Hodsonian Community of Manea Fen

Contemporary printed material:

Periodicals:

Associate (1829)

[continued as] *Associate, and Co-operative Mirror* (1829)

British Co-operator (1830)

Carpenter's Political Letters and Pamphlets (1830-1831)
Christian Socialist (1850-1851)
Co-operative Magazine and Monthly Herald (1826-1829)
 [continued as] *London Co-operative Magazine* (1830)
Co-operator (1828-1830, reprinted as T. W. Mercer, *Dr. William King and
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Cosmopolite (1832-1833)
Crisis (1832-1834)
Herald of Progress (1845-1846)
Herald of Redemption (1847)
 [continued as] *Herald of Co-operation, and Organ of the
 Redemption Society* (1847-1848)
Howitt's Journal (1847-1848)
Journal of Association (1852)
Lancashire Co-operator (1831)
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