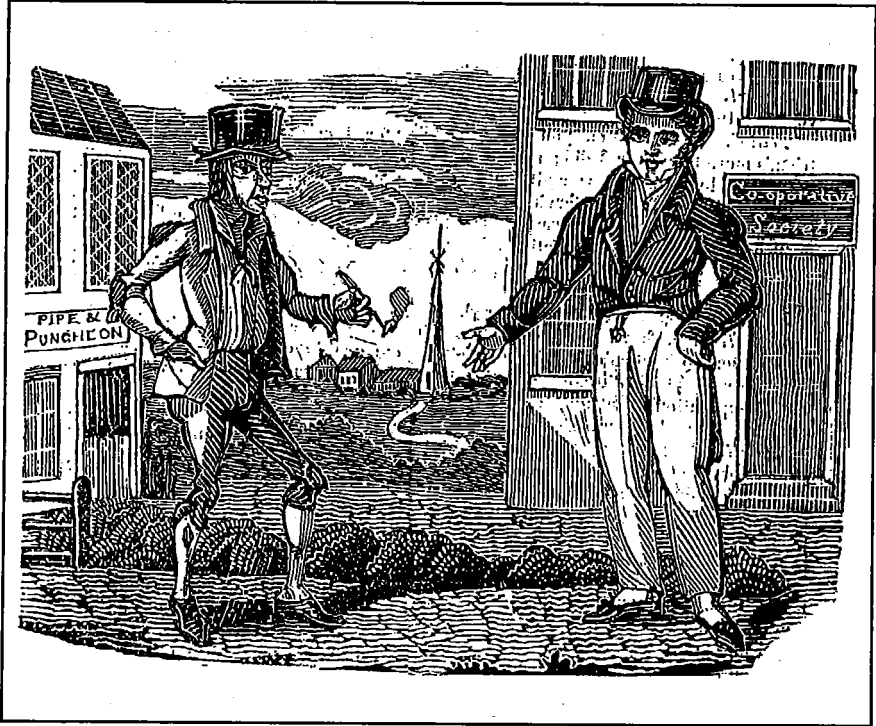


A Rare Heritage Print



The Co-operative Store in 1830

Engraved for The Associate and Co-operative Mirror, No. 10, London 1830.

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“Look here upon this picture . . .”

The Co-operative Store: 1830

– Professor J.G. Corina

This is the earliest-known illustration of a Co-operative store in the history of any industrial nation. George IV, the notorious spendthrift son of George III, was still on the throne. The authoritarian Duke of Wellington was Prime Minister. Yet economic liberty for everyone is in the air. There is a quaint Georgian charm, almost a caricature of gentrification, in the prosperous figure of the Byron-trousered, curly-haired Co-operator, Jack Tellall; the New Working Man. He is fashionably dressed in good church-going linen, strangulating collar, curly-brim hat, watch and fob; sporting a Co-op-tailored woollen tailcoat and natty shoes. Tom Seekout, not yet a Co-operative convert, is shamefully emerging from the nearest pub, emaciated and clay pipe-addicted, underemployed, conspicuous in tattered stockings, vulgar broad-ribbed corduroy breeches, a torn fustian jacket and a disgraceful hat.

Beneath the illustration, is printed a further message of hope for deprived Tom. Robert Owen has just returned from Mexico with the Presidential promise of (oil-rich) borderlands running from Texas to California for the migrant Co-operative Commonwealth. Texas would remain the dreamland of infant Co-operative community endeavour, even during the early years of the demonstrably-successful, store-based, Rochdale Pioneers; a land especially attracting the Anglophile French Co-operator, Étienne Cabet, and the romantic Icarian colonists during 1844-8.

Doorway to Prosperity and Community

To most Georgian Co-operators, after 1827, the heralded British highway to economic prosperity and ‘incipient community’ would start at the modest doorway into their local Co-operative store. Up to 500 Co-operative societies were promoted nationwide between 1828-32, providing essential food purchases for up to 200,000 labouring-household individuals at the zenith of the young movement. Most fell into abeyance, including the Rochdale society (1830-32), to arise like a phoenix under the Victorian inspiration of the model Pioneers Equitable Society. The woodcut-style copper line engraving, depicting an archetype Co-operative store, was commissioned for the cover of *The Associate and Co-operative Mirror*, No. 10, London, 1830, specifically to illustrate the opening instalment of *The Co-operator’s Catechism*. Originally published in the less-militant *British Co-operator* (1830), *The Co-operator’s Catechism*, a popular recruiting-sheet dialogue, was written by Allen Davenport (1775-1846), shoemaker and member of

the First London Co-operative Manufacturing Community, which included printers and platemakers.

A Rare Record

Crude and cartoonlike in craftsmanship, this Georgian line engraving is historically important as the *earliest visual* record of a Co-operative shop. It is extremely rare. An original leaf, displaying the unique drawing, remains rarer than a leaf from the (priceless) Guttenberg Bible. Only two copies are thought to have survived. The engraving provenance is unknown. The standard clearly falls far short of that of the greatest Co-operative engraver, the painter William Mulready (an active London Co-op member in 1830), who designed the world-famous Penny Post envelopes of 1839. The print was mockingly described by George Jacob Holyoake in *A History of Co-operation* (1906), without noting the store's precedence over Rochdale's 1844 'dividend-based' Toad Lane shop, or spotting the odd shop inscription. Close inspection, however, suggests an idiosyncratic spelling in the store sign. The unique term 'Co-oporative' is an unresolved puzzle: an alternative spelling, misprint, maleducation, a burin (tool) error or a quirk?

Professor Corina, who provided this illustration and commentary, studied Oxford economics on a Co-operative society scholarship. A Research Fellow of New College, a Fellow and Tutor of St. Peter's College and Oxford University lecturer in Economics, he was an Oxford don for some twenty-five years; later holding major Professorships and consultancies at international Universities. He returned to Oxford as a Senior Fellow and is now Research Professor at Thames Valley University, writing up the life of Robert Owen.