

Lewis Hayes

SSLH Research report for 8th to the 11th of August 2016

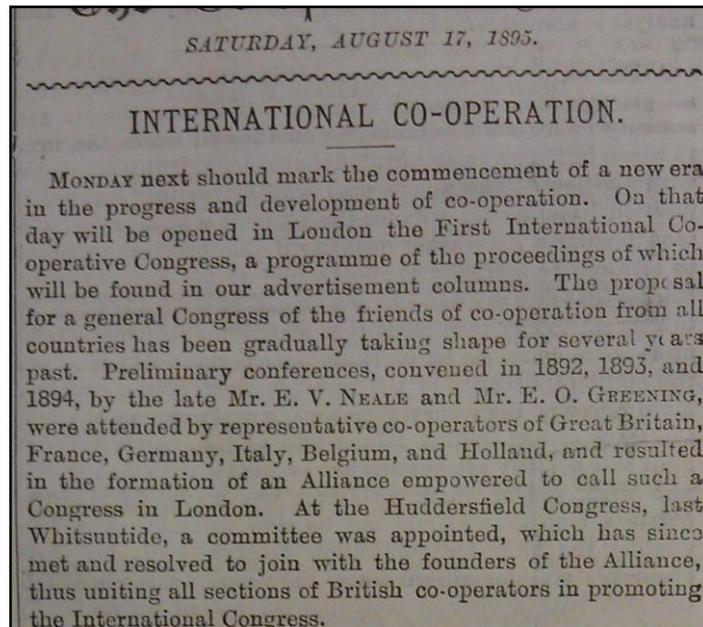
As the location of the first Rochdalian co-operative store, Manchester has always been regarded as the co-operative movement's heartland and this was no exception in regards to its archives. Located at Holyoake House in central Manchester, the British Co-operative Union was exceptionally diligent in maintaining the movement's enormous output of documentation. These archives contained a complete collection of papers retaining to its federal structures, individual societies and the work of key theoretical thinkers such as George J. Holyoake and Robert Owen himself. The Society for the Study of Labour History's grant of £200 allowed me to access a number of documents over a four day research trip that were not available anywhere else.

My dissertation was concerned with the transnational networks of the British co-operative movement from 1870 to 1920. In particular, I wished to understand the development of the international co-operative movement from the British perspective. Rochdale was not the first co-operative society but proved to be the most stable, which resulted in it being widely emulated. This, in conjunction with Britain's fundamental role in the establishment of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) in 1895, meant that London and Manchester acted as a hub for the wider international movement.

It is for these reasons, that the national congress reports of the British movement and the ICA congress reports at Holyoake House were invaluable sources for understanding the international aspects of the movement. The congress reports give us detailed accounts of the Co-operative Festivals, which were significant networking events. For example, the ICA's inaugural 1895 congress report puts the attendance figure for that year's festival at 36,000.

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The ICA congress reports were useful when used in combination with Holyoake House's collection of the *Co-operative News*. Together, they helped build an understanding of what these large social events meant to co-operators and how they facilitated cross national ties. On May 18th 1885 the *Co-operative News* reports Edward Owen Greening's view that "this exhibition is the outward and visible sign of the onward progress of the principles we are celebrating today". Greening was a driving force of the ICA, and his wide-ranging role in the movement was highlighted in his well catalogued personal papers. As a leading figure in the foundation of the annual festival, these papers helped to uncover the large amount of groundwork he had done before the ICA's formation. Much of his correspondence included practical pamphlets on the establishment of co-operatives and demonstrates the role a strong network of personal ties played in the formation of the international movement.



Left: A small extract from the *Cooperative News* on the founding of the International Cooperative Alliance in 1895. The piece demonstrates the foundational work done by E. O. Greening and Edward Vansittart Neale in forming the ICA.

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