



Cooperatives and Visions; Radical history of Hebden Bridge

1. Introduction

This is the second of the radical routes trails, the first one being in Todmorden. This second trail describes the rise of the Cooperative movement in the town, the longest serving workers cooperative, the longest cotton workers strike, the women's movement, Emmeline Pankhurst addressed large crowds in the town square, the Labour movement rallies in Hardcastle crags, something of the early decent council housing .

This walks reveals something of the social and cultural life of the town, the early working class movement, the Clarion choirs, the Clarion cyclist clubs making their way to Hardcastle Crag. It shows how the valley developed working men's clubs and the Trade Union club that was the first to build a decent dance floor in the town.

2. The Cooperative Society

The society had the most impressive building in the town. The Cooperative movement goes back to the Chartist days. Hebden Bridge was a centre for Chartist activities in the 1840's. In 1848 a group of young men calling themselves the 'American society'. wanted to do something for the town. They formed the Cooperative Society, taking their lead from the Rochdale Pioneers who had established the Cooperative movement in Rochdale four years earlier. The Cooperative Hall has two date stones 1886 (when building commenced) and 1889 (when it was finished). There were two cooperative halls on the upper floor. It was the focal point for the town; not just for the Cooperative Society but also because of Nutclough Mill, a well known workers cooperative. In the 1960's the Cooperative society suffered from a case of fraud and the building closed. Perhaps more generally though, the Cooperative spirit has left its mark on the town.

3. Emmeline Pankhurst visits the Town

In 1907 Hebden Bridge Weavers were engaged in a long strike. At a Trades Council meeting on 28/1/1907 regarding the rights for women, but the meeting focused initially on the strike. Emmeline Pankhurst spoke to the crowds on the steps of Bridge Mill. (Innovations).

She said the following: I want to address you on the topic of the Weavers Strike which has been continuing for some weeks now. I realise that here in Hebden Bridge the time has come when you want something other than the quiet persuasive method to bring this dispute to an end.

There is a need for something of an aggressive kind if you are to bring this weary struggle to an end. From information I have gleaned I am convinced the weaver's of Hebden Bridge have a strong case. My experience of the Bolton Weaver's strike and elsewhere has taught me that if you do make your injustices known widely, public indignation will be aroused and you will win.

In Australia they have a legally constituted board of arbitration to settle such matters. This all came about through women's suffrage. When women get the vote they send a different type of men to Parliament with the result that trade disputes are settled by arbitration and strikes and lockouts are unknown.

If Labour representation in Parliament is necessary for men it is still more necessary for women, who are ground down and are the bottom dog always. This is why we agitate and make so much

noise. We demand the right of women to choose our representatives in Parliament. Do you think you can get a legal minimum wage out of members of Parliament who are masters themselves or connected with firms and employers?. You in Hebden Bridge have sent a Liberal to Parliament and Liberal says he is in favour of freedom and all kinds of things. Yes, he is for men, but not for women. Women are at present quite intelligent enough to pay their taxes but they are not considered intelligent enough to put a cross on a voting paper and place it in the ballot box.

My advice to the women of Hebden Bridge is to fight loyally in the strike and set to work to get the power that the men have got and do away with the need for strikes and lockouts.'

4. CWS

The CWS had a building in Valley road. On the top floor there were 50 employees making trousers. This closed in 1982. On the bottom floor there was about 50 looms employing 30 people weaving various fabrics. This closed later in 1986 due to cheap imports.

They had a good manager. Across the road at Valley road there was another building. There was a canteen for anyone who wanted their dinner, they ordered it for 12 o'clock. On the second floor there were social rooms , a snooker table and other facilities. They held a Christmas Dinner and dance every Christmas and racing days to Haydock. Nearly everyone in the area knew each other. Hebden Bridge would be packed with workers coming home at night but after Saturday morning it was empty.

5. Nutclough Mill

This was the longest lasting workers cooperative in England ; from 1870 – 1918 when it subsumed into the CWS operations. The mill finally closed as a mill in 1968. David Fletcher was instrumental in saving the building. He set up a preservation society (Pennine Heritage) and thought how to make it a heritage town.

David states - The story of 5 Fustian cutters, 6 got together (one died before they opened). They felt they were tired of being on piece rates for money. They were paid so much for a piece of cloth. Money was uncertain and life was uncertain. They wanted more security over their own lives. They wanted to set up a Cooperative business. They bought the mill in 1873, a new mill built in 1870, much smaller than the present day building. The building was extended twice in the 1880s and 1890s to the size it is today.

Initially it was powered by a waterwheel with water coming down Ibbotwood Clough through Nutclough woods. Later they converted to steam and the water tower was built to do this to ensure continuous water flow.

The millworkers' cottages of Nutclough terrace were built in two phases, Nos 1-7 some time between 1875 and 1890, and Nos 9-31 by about 1898, on the cliff above the mill. In 1983, the crescent of cottages adjoining the mill were saved from demolition.

In 1918 the Mill was subsumed into the CWS, now a very powerful organisation. There was much controversy at the time. The Mill had done well during the war and was highly profitable and there were concerns about workers share of the profits under CWS. However the Mill appeared powerless to resist the takeover.

The town plumbed the depths in 1965 when 33 factories closed. Nutclough Mill closed in 1966 -67. We managed to get it listed as a building of historic interest in September 1974. The council owned the building and it was due for demolition. They gave it to Pennine Heritage for a token £1.00. They then had to work out a way of managing it.

6. Birchcliffe Cemetery

Joseph Greenwood's grave 1833 – 1924 was rediscovered in 2013, lying on it's side. He was one of the founders of the cooperative Nutclough Mill. He was its manager until his retirement in 1909 (aged 76?). He played a leading role in the national cooperative movement and indeed the

International Cooperative Alliance where he was treasurer for 10 years. He was a long standing member of the HBUDC. He took a keen interest in working class education and his name is on the foundation stone of Riverside School.

Jesse Grey 1854 – 1912 His father was the Baptist minister who moved to HB when Jesse was a boy. Joseph Greenwood appointed him the Nutclough first secretary when he was about 20. He moved on to the Cooperative Union in 1884 initially as assistant general secretary and from 1891- 1911 as general secretary. In 1881 he stated 'Cooperation has other ends in view and a means gained by distribution ought to be used as a stepping stone to something higher and nobler, that is raising the masses of the people from a state of low grovelling dependence on the Capitalist by showing them that there is a power within themselves – that of labour without which power on capital could earn any dividend'.

7. Club Houses

The burial society was founded at the Hare and Hounds public house and the funds were left with Henry Greenwood the Inn keeper. They decided as a group to build these houses and bought the land and had them built. The funds and the rents from them went to pay sick pay and burial money to the members.

Built 1824 – 1825 the first part of the terrace had a joiners with cotes below, little storage areas, then three cottages. Then the terrace rises to the end and the hall part of it used to be a loom chamber that ran all the way through. This was where hand loom weavers worked in a shared space. By later in the century, hand loom weavers moved into the factories and the space became a community facility and continued to be owned by the burial society. It became known as the 'Club Room', and quoting from Joseph Greenwoods memoir in 1840 !! 'The Sunday School was held at the club houses. It was decorated with evergreens. There were small reading books on political subjects. These with the bible were read in the classes and the leaders made speeches.'

When the Methodist Chapel on Walker Lane was built in 1872 the loom chamber club room went out of use and eventually it was broken up and added to the cottages. In 1877 there was an auction in the clubroom and all the members signed away their ownership of the club houses.

When you turn left at the end of the terrace you will see some little steps and a doorway. These were an alternative way leading up to the clubrooms. The other way was through little internal doorways from one cottage to the next.

8 The Blue Pig An example of an old working men's club. The club joined the CIU in 1907 (working men's club and institute union) which itself had been founded in the 19th Century. This club was open before the affiliation but the exact date is not known. The club is run by volunteers – good beer, no television, no one-armed bandits, no fancy meals.

At the time of the affiliation there were 4 working mills in the valley. However the building is of an old type construction with the roof timbers being rough cut trees. The building possibly pre-dated the mills. It has been run entirely by volunteers for the last 20 odd years. It cemented its role as a community club when it gave full rights to women, the same day that the MCC retained their ban on women members (date ?). The club allowed men to drink in peace away from their Methodist wives and the Temperance society.

9. The Hardcastle Crags Gathering place The late 19th Century was a time of gathering for the Labour movement particularly on Whit Monday – a red letter day for socialists where demonstrations took place all over the country.

In 1896 it was reported in the Hebden Bridge Times that the Yorkshire Independent Labour Party held their demonstration in Hardcastle Crags. The gathering was a monster with people coming from all parts of Yorkshire and towns in Lancashire. From early morning until dusk the roads were thronged with people.

At 3pm the socialists gave their speeches and a tremendous crowd gathered to hear the addresses. Addressed by Miss Caroline Martin and Mr Keir Hardie, both well known exponents of the Labour movement. Singing by Clarion choirs preceded the speeches. It was said from the Lives and Letters of Caroline Martyn:

‘Then from a dais-like, heath –clad rock around which the choristers had stood, arose our Carrie Martyn. Truly no Diana of old was ever more godlike than she, as she stood before the background of waving green, and with the wind gently moving her flowing gown into graceful folds, spoke from her noble heart words of burning fervour and truth, which it were well that the whole world upon that day should hear and heed.’

This was one of the last speeches Caroline Martin gave. Later in the same year, 13th July she was in Dundee and she reported in her diary that she felt faint and ill. At aged 29 her body was laid to rest at 4pm on Friday 24th July 1896

In 2002 the National street Choirs held their festival picnic in the Craggs and sang a song about Caroline Martin composed by Andrew Bibby.

10. Fustian Weavers Strike

The workers from local mills (aside from Nutclough Mill who were paid a better rate of pay) were on strike for 2 years between 1906 - 1908. Hebden Bridge competed both with Bury and Oldham to sell Fustian and Hebden Bridge was more successful because they were paid a lower wage. The workers went on strike to gain parity with these neighbouring towns. It was eventually successful in raising the wages of the Fustian weavers but not to the level of Bury and Oldham. It was the longest industrial dispute in the Cotton industry. Strikes of long duration are often the result of trade union weakness as well as trade union strength. It brought out a substantial number of weavers but as the strike continued workers were brought in from elsewhere – known as ‘knobstick Labour’. Nutclough was not involved. They were instrumental in bringing trade unionism to the area. Mill workers set up a cooperative mill at Eaves but they were never as successful as at Nutclough and they closed after a few years.

11. Eaves Estate

The idea of a garden estate first emerged from the failed Fustian weavers strike and the Cooperative Mills at Eaves. In 1907 it was stated that the site was ‘fitted to become an Arcadia and to ring with song and happiness. It has its church St James at Mytholm, it’s factory, it’s streams, it’s rocky cliffs, it’s woods and meadows and some day it will have it’s cottage homes, a garden village where it’s people will live lives free from carping care, free from lockout or strike, happy in their own surroundings on their own hillside’.

The estate itself was built in the 1920’s. Initially after the first world war there was some moves to try to establish the estate but the money ran out (and the abolition of the Addison Housing Act of 1919 was abolished).

In 1924 the first Labour government was elected and Housing Minister John Wheatley brought in the Wheatley Housing Act which increased the subsidy available to local authorities. It was with money from that Act that Eaves estate was built in a series of stages over the next few years. The houses are airy and light. They have gardens. It had its own recreation ground with a wave machine and all sorts of equipment. Over a period of time the estate was sold off, actually before Thatcher started the great sales. Now there are very few social houses left on the estate.

12. The Trades Club

The Trade Union club was built in 1923 from the penny subscriptions on the unionists in the area.

The area had a substantial labour force and needed office space for people to pay their subscriptions and to draw benefits. They needed a place where branches could meet and a place big

enough to hold big meetings and a social space. It was built with a sprung dance floor. As factories closed and union membership declined the club was taken over in the early 80's by the Hebden Bridge and Luddenden Foot District Labour party who appointed a building management committee to run it. It is affiliated to the National Union of Labour and Socialist clubs and built into the constitution are certain principles of anti racism, anti sexism and the principle of common ownership thereby maintaining the heritage of the past.