

## BONNYBRIDGE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD

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**Geoff B Bailey**



The Bonnybridge Co-operative Society had its beginning at a public meeting on 6 April 1863 in the Lecture Hall of the Columbian Stove Works. There was a large attendance and many of the village's patrons attended. William Ure and James Smith both spoke out in favour of co-operation. At the end of the meeting it was agreed to form a Co-operative Society for Bonnybridge to provide the people in the district with provisions at a fair rate and that the capital necessary would be raised in £1 shares. Shares to the amount of £75 were subscribed on the night.

Before long a small shop was rented and stocked. The Society started with 40 members and a capital of £150.

Year	No. of members
1863	40
1866	50
1879	195
1884	285
1891	521
1893	580
1899	713
1906	1,002

In 1866 a Building Fund was set up so that the Society could erect its own store. Land was acquired on the south side of the Main Street (opposite the site of the later Social Club) and the new building opened in March 1868.



**Illus 2: The first Co-operative store can be seen on the right just before the slightly protruding white gable.**

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The Society had been having trouble obtaining good bread and on 1 November 1873 it started a joint venture with the Denny and Dunipace Co-operative Society and the Longcroft Co-operative Society for its supply. The bread was baked at Denny. Bonnybridge withdrew from the venture ten years later. In 1883 the Society decided to construct a bakery at their premises in the Main Street. It was completed in June 1884 at a cost of around £400. A further £32 was then spent sinking a well under the bakery floor. A drapery department was also



added that year. Land adjacent to the shop became available in 1886 and the Society took the opportunity to buy it. It was two years before they started building work there. The new extension consisted of one single and two double shops with houses above and included the Co-operative Hall – the whole costing over £1,500.

**Illus 3: Bonnybridge Co-operative Store, Main Street, Bonnybridge.**

It seems that up until 1889 the Society did not own a horse. The following year it had to lease ground for the horse and a van and at the end of September 1890 began construction of stables, a van shed and a dwelling on a piece of ground on the east side of the later Bonnybridge Social Club.

As demand increased and technology improved the Society renewed its investments. On 4 April 1896 it opened a new bakery on the opposite side of the street from its existing one. As well as a bakery and a bread house with a



**Illus 4: The butcher's department and bread shop on the north side of Main Street, Bonnybridge.**

cooling room, the buildings included a butcher's shop. Enamelled tiles were used inside for hygiene. The cost was put at c£2,000 and the two-storey structure had freestone facades with brick gables and backs. The upper floor was occupied by two dwellings of three rooms each, intended for employees. A few years later, in 1901 a slaughterhouse was added to the portfolio.

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The Society was now in a position to open branches elsewhere in the district and in June 1902 it agreed to have one at High Bonnybridge. A suitable feu was obtained from Oswald and Hall, paper manufacturers, and the branch shop was opened on 7 February 1903 near to Broomhill Primary School. The following month a telephone connection was made between the main premises and the branch. The Committee then agreed to a second branch – at Dennyloanhead. It opened on 11 March 1905.



**Illus 5: High Bonnybridge looking NE from the railway bridge with a brickworks on the site of St Helen's Church. The white building in the distance is the Co-op.**

A tailoring department had been added to the main store in June 1903. The entire store at Bonnybridge was fitted with electric lighting by September 1906. The electricity was supplied by the Central Power Co just a couple of miles along the road to the east and also powered machinery in the bakehouse and butcher's department.

In 1905 the Society had taken over the Gateside Dairy from Archibald Cuthill, but it does not seem to have operated it for long. In 1908 two cloakrooms were fitted at the Co-operative Hall which was now much in use for social gatherings. A back-shop was also added at High Bonnybridge that year.

The Committee of the Society turned its attention to its social role. In August 1911 funds were sufficient to allow it to consider commissioning dwellings to improve the accommodation available. Land was acquired at Peathill and by June 1912 Unitas Terrace was completely occupied, with a dairy at one corner.

In the Jubilee year in 1913 the Bonnybridge Co-operative Society's portfolio stood thus:

- 3  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres of land.
- Central premises in Main St, Bonnybridge – grocery, boot, drapery, fruit, hardware & tailoring departments.
- Across the road from the central premises – fleshing department, bakery and bakery shop, stables for 10 horses.
- Two bread vans, two butcher vans, a fruit van, a coal lorry & a coal cart.
- Along from the stables was the slaughterhouse and piggery (closed 1922).
- Dennyloanhead Branch – grocery & drapery departments.
- High Bonnybridge Branch – grocery & drapery departments.

After the First World War a lot of surplus army equipment was placed on the market. In 1921 an army hut was acquired and erected at Greenhill to form the basis of a third branch. A motor lorry was also bought for the longer runs. That year the Society also discussed the possibility of extending its range of activities by buying Harris's Picture House and running it as a cinema. In the end it was agreed not to, but land adjacent to the cinema was bought from Mr Harris. It

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was used as the site of a new bakery which opened on 1 September 1923 at a cost, exclusive of machinery, of £7,000.

In 1927 it was agreed to use the land between the bakery and the High Street for a much larger and grander store costing £10,000. This was opened on 22 June 1929. It is a tall two-storey building with a polished red sandstone ashlar



**Illus 6-8: The 1929 central Co-operative Store, High Street, Bonnybridge.**



façade consisting of a pedimented west end, a 4 bay section, a "centrepiece" and another 4-bay section, the balancing east "range" was never built. The ground floor consisted of large glass fronted shop fronts, contrasting with the first floor with its smaller rectangular windows separated by panelled pilasters and capped with a simple entablature. The pediment contains a carved wreath encircling the shaking hand motif of the co-operative movement and doric columns divide the first floor at this point into three recessed windows set within pilasters. The centrepiece is highlighted by the use of channelled masonry, Romanesque windows, a raised entablature and a segmented hooded aedicule set on brackets. The architect was William Mercer. The Co-operative Hall at the old premises was renovated and the shops there converted into housing.

The Bonnybridge Co-operative Society arranged social events for its members and for the community. As well as the usual annual excursions and soirees there was an Education Committee. A choir was formed and continued until 1933. In 1905 the Society organised a gala day which continued up until 1967 with a break during the Second World War. In 1901 a Women's Guild was formed and held regular meetings in the Co-operative Hall.

Bucking the trend the Bonnybridge Society still considered new branches and in October 1955 a new shop was opened at the Thornton Housing Scheme at a cost of £15,000. It had a grocery self-service, fruit, confectionery and fleshing departments. Then in January 1961 a self-service branch opened at the junction of Ure Crescent and Wheatlands Avenue. It cost £12,000.



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The High Bonnybridge Branch went to self-service in 1956. However, elsewhere decline had set in. The bakery closed on 11 January 1960. The Greenhill Branch, always small, closed in February 1961 with the closure of the nearby creosote works. In 1962 all of the buildings belonging to the Society on the south side of the Main Street, including the hall, were demolished. It was only in March 1962 that the Bonnybridge Society disposed of its last horse. That horse, named "Jocky", and its master, Davie Neilson, were well known in the village as they made their daily rounds with milk, rolls and bread.

There was still chance of a revival and in 1961 the Society started selling alcohol. In November that year work began on renovating and converting the old bakery into a suite of shops comprising furnishing, hardware and footwear. The shops opened on 13 December 1962 and a new fleshing department was opened at the same place in July 1963. A chemist's shop also began operating in 1964, but closed in 1979 due to difficulties in finding dispensing chemists. The dairy department had also closed in 1966.

On 19 January 1965, after several abortive attempts, the Bonnybridge Co-operative Society finally took over the assets of the Longcroft Co-operative Society. In April 1979 the Longcroft premises were renewed and the floorspace doubled.

By finally buying the former cinema in Bonnybridge in 1980, and immediately demolishing it, the Co-operative was able to enhance the parking at its central store, which is now part of Scotmid.

### Bibliography

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