

# LAURIESTON CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

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**Geoff B Bailey**

The Laurieston Co-operative Society was established in 1871 and before long acquired a shop on the NE side of Mary Square. By March 1887 it had an annual turn-over of £14,254.

Year	No. of Members
1890	178
1891	187
1896	255
1899	258-272
1909	310
1911	328
1920	570
1923	590
1930	958
1938	972
1940	973
1941	985
1942	1031
1943	1113
1945	1255
1947	1521-1537
1948	1555



In 1890 the Laurieston Co-operative Society decided to extend its business by adding a bakehouse to its premises. In May 1896 the quarterly meeting voted to erect a new shop with dwelling above; a counter motion to have a hall above was not passed. In the following August it was suggested that the Society move over to only token sales, but this was considered too impracticable. Trade had considerably increased and in the month May-July 1899 some 208 sacks of flour had been used in the bakery; while in the fleshing department 21 bullocks, 17 sheep and 3 pigs had been slaughtered.



**Illus: The 1896 shop in Mary Square, Laurieston.**

In 1903 there was a proposal to introduce machinery into the bakery – in this respect Laurieston was behind many of its fellow societies. Indeed, it had been accustomed to doing many things at low cost and by means of a group effort. In February 1909 it was noted that “The

*present system of carting the society’s goods was very unsatisfactory. Every member who had a horse was entitled to a share of the work, and the consequence was that some of the goods were damaged before they reached the customers. The Society would be better served if they had a contract with one man for carting the society’s goods. After some discussion a member moved that all of the society’s carting arrangements be left in the hands of the committee.”*

Despite the apparent egalitarian approach to transport the staff structure was very authoritarian. In 1904 Esther Miller, who had been a drapery saleswoman at Laurieston Co-operative Society, threatened to sue the Society for the return of her deposit. When she had started work there she had been obliged to deposit £15 as security with the Society as a sign of good faith. Upon leaving, however, the manager refused to refund her the money and eventually she discovered that this was due to alleged deficiencies in the stock. There had clearly been no formal hearing and before it got to court the Society agreed to repay her money and costs.

The proposed construction of a public house, eventually to become known as the



**Illus: The Laurieston Co-operative store on the left, and the Tam Bain to its right.**

Tam Bain, caused the Society some anxiety as it was felt that it would lower the value of their property. The Society therefore objected to the transfer of a drinks licence to the premises. After many angry exchanges the owner of the public house was able to show the Committee that it was a substantial building with sufficient toilets and so on. Their objection was withdrawn.

## Laurieston Co-operative Society

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Milk was one of the main items sold in the shop and in 1915 the Society advertised for a supplier to provide 50 gallons of milk a day. This was a good steady contract, but unfortunately it was set up just as feed prices were rising. William Strang of Avonbank Farm was awarded the contract, but in 1918 he was found to have been watering down the milk that he was supplying the Laurieston Co-operative. By 1941 7,268 gallons of milk was being sold in a quarter, rising to 13,168 gallons in 1948.

In 1893 the Laurieston Co-operative Women's Guild was set up and for the next half century it became the focus of much of the social activities in the village. It helped to organise the Laurieston Co-op gala each year with the gala queen being crowned in the lower park. The Society always tried to ensure that the dividend was paid immediately before gala as for many families it was the highlight of the year.

An exciting incident happened in August 1930. About 10.45pm one evening the Falkirk Fire Brigade received a summons to attend an outbreak of fire at the Laurieston Co-operative store. The brigade was quickly on the scene, but their services were not required. A large wooden cask containing waste material had been left in the store overnight and had started to smoulder. An alert neighbour had noticed the smoke and raised the alarm. The caretaker was notified and threw the blazing barrel out onto the street. A large crowd gathered.

On the night of 15 August 1946 thieves broke into the Laurieston Co-operative store using a skylight. They were evidently in search of cash, but were unsuccessful in getting at it. Goods to the value of around a pound were stolen. The robbers were back in October, only this time they removed the safe on a barrow that they borrowed. The safe was taken 300yds to the football pitch where it was battered with hammers and chisels to no avail. It had only contained a few pounds. A few months later the safe at Camelon Co-operative was likewise captured, but so were the thieves.

After the Second World War the village expanded to the south-east. With the new housing at Langston it was agreed in 1951 to have a new branch there, though presumably it was little more than a hut. 1953 saw the introduction of a



**Illus: The new style Co-op.**

new mobile shop. This differed from the old vans in that the shopper could go inside it. The following year hire purchase facilities were introduced. The shop too was to be transformed – the grocery department become practically a new shop to meet modern hygiene standards. The hardware department was to be reconstructed and confined to the ground floor; the drapery and

## Laurieston Co-operative Society

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boot departments were altered and extended; new refrigeration was installed for the fleshing department and the bakery was updated. Only the dairy was untouched as it had recently been altered. The new-look shop opened in 1955 and is more or less the shop that still exists – though today there are no separate departments.