

REDDING CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD.

Geoff B Bailey

The Redding Co-operative Society was formed in 1861 by twelve workmen (pioneers as they are often referred to) who invested what capital they could afford in it, though it was January 1862 before it was registered. The first premises belonging to the Redding Co-operative Society were erected on Newlands Road at Reddingmuirhead. It consisted of a combined drapery and grocery store. That building had been erected at a cost of something like £400. By 1869 the Society was in a financial crisis and unable to meet its debts. A loan of £180 was proffered by one of its members and many of the pioneers wrote off a proportion of their own capital. The debts were paid off and thereafter, under John Walker, the new managing secretary, expansion was rapid.



The first bakery was built in 1875 as an addition to the Reddingmuirhead premises; designed by A & W Black of Falkirk it contained two ovens. It was not long before another two ovens had to be added, and later two more, making six in all.

In 1875 there was only one branch in connection with the Society, which was at Blackbraes in rented accommodation, and the combined membership was 415, including a large number of miners. The sales for the year ending 1875 totalled £17,898. The members' capital amounted to £4,002 1s 8 1/2d, and the reserve fund of £451. By 1921 there were seven branches, with a combined membership of 3,614. The sales for 1920 totalled £456,888, the members' capital amounted to £141,611 15s 11d, and the reserve fund £5,459 2s 6d.

Illus 2: The Blackbraes branch of the Redding Co-operative Society at California with the church beyond.

Almost anything could be bought at the store and that included the working tools for the miners, such as picks, shovels, lamps, snap tins and so on. In January 1877 John Walker, the



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Society's secretary was fined for storing 300lbs of gunpowder there in excess of that allowed under the Explosives Act. By advertising for tenders in local newspapers prices were kept down. In January 1891, for example, tenders were invited to supply the Society with 8 tons of Regent potatoes weekly – such items always deriving from local farms at this period. When the debts on the Redding buildings had been paid off the Society decided to expand. On 21st February 1885 the memorial stone for the new Blackbraes Branch was laid and a time capsule bottle placed under it. The site was half a mile to the north of Blackbraes at California. It was a substantial building and the 1889 accounts state that the sum of £3,685 was spent on buildings. That year the Society also acquired a feu in Maddiston and appointed G Deas Page as the architect for the new branch there.



Illus 3: The Maddiston Branch on the left, looking north down Main Street.

The Maddiston Branch was opened in June 1890. According to the Falkirk Herald reporter the two-storey building gave "*an aspect of architectural ornamentation to the somewhat dull and uninviting village*" and was looked upon by the villagers with pride. It was built in the baronial style of architecture, with two gables facing the road. The ground floor was occupied as grocery and drapery departments, with large stores behind, while the centre of the upper flat was used as dwelling-houses, of room and kitchen. Two porches were built in front for access to the shops from a broad cement footpath. The building cost £1,500. An addition was also made to the Redding bakery premises of the Society, consisting of a bakehouse and cooling room.

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Illus 4: The staff in front of the Maddiston Branch – five men and three women. Note the external stair for access to the flats.



The Society was very concerned about social welfare and

acquired books for its own lending library. By 1890 this consisted of 800 volumes and new ones were to be bought for the younger readership. In April 1890 the committee discussed whether or not to build houses or to form a building Society. In end they agreed that all members with the rate of £30 in the Society should be advanced £60 at 5% with which to build their own house. The reserve fund of £260 was used in 1894 to provide credits to those members *“who might be in straitened circumstances owing to the cessation of work throughout the district, as almost without exception the members are miners”*. A donation of £20 was given for an ambulance waggon for the area in 1899 and over the years charities such as the Eye Hospital or the Lifeboat Institution received regular contributions. Finally, after years of agonising, in 1913 eight new dwellings were built by the Society in Waggon Road to designs by AN Malcolm, architect.

Members were also entitled to go on annual excursions using the now extensive railway network. In July 1888 they went to Glasgow to see the International Exhibition, and in July 1891 to Berwick-on-Tweed. An Education Committee was established for the Redding Co-operative Society and started a winter season of entertainments in 1900 with a concert, with the help of Grahamston & Bainsford Co-operative Society. This was followed a month later by a talk on the principles and benefits of Co-operation (I’m not sure we could sell that one today!). The Committee’s events became part of the fabric of life in the area.

Year	Excursion destination	Membership numbers
1862		12
1868		124
1885		600
1887		750
1888	International Exhibition, Glasgow	
1889		840-880
1890		915-961-1009
1891	Berwick-on-Tweed	1032-1155
1892		1186
1893		1275
1894	Glasgow & down the Clyde	1319-1341

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Year	Excursion destination	Membership numbers
1895	Ayr & Burns Monument	
1896	Perth	
1897		1557-1609
1898	Portobello	1632-1639
1899	Ayr	1669-1719-1752
1900	£32 loss on trip	1768-1777
1901	Oban	1885-1926
1902		1964
1903		2135
1904	Ayr (800 present)	2133
1905		2171
1908	Dunfermline	2483
1910		2513-2554

The Redding Co-operative Society also invested in other co-operatives, such as those at Glasgow and Paisley, making the movement stronger and self-fulfilling. It even invested in the short-lived Bo'ness Industrial Co-operative Pottery in Bo'ness.

In 1892 the Society discussed whether or not to establish a branch at Blackston and seem to have decided against it. The following year a new flesher's department opened at the Redding Branch and in the first quarter of business it slaughtered 68 bullocks and 57 sheep, besides calves and pigs. This increased to 83 bullocks and 70 sheep in following quarter.

In May 1895 the committee agreed to erect a store at Standburn and this started operating later that year. It had stiff competition from travelling van salesmen who had served the area for years and at one stage the head salesman was demoted to second man, before being reinstated at the insistence of the headmaster and population of the village.



Illus 5 & 6: Standburn Branch.

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The main store at Reddingmuirhead continued to be extended and altered. In January 1898 a large new grocery and drapery section was opened, designed by the Society's contract architect, James Strang. It had a large committee room and house above. Two new ovens and a shop augmented the bakery.



Illus 7 & 8: Main Street, Polmont Station, looking north with the Co-op on the bend.

In October 1901 two hundred members signed a petition asking for a branch to be established in the area of Polmont Station and Brightons which was rapidly expanding at the time. The possibility of running more vans to that area was discussed but it was agreed that premises should be built rather than rented. The memorial stone was laid on 24th May 1902 in the front wall of the upper flat at the new branch on the Main Street a little to the south of Polmont Station. A bottle containing various newspapers, the invitation card to the ceremony and the current balance sheet was placed behind it. The Redding Co-operative Society was now using the services of the SCWS architects in Glasgow and the new branch was designed by James Davidson – it was one of the largest shareholders in the Wholesale Society. The building had a polished ashlar frontage of 54ft to the main road in Renaissance style. It comprised grocery, drapery and boot departments on the ground floor, with dwelling houses above. The back premises were of brick in the form of saloons lighted from the roof. Welsh green slate was used for the roof. The total cost was around £2,000. Mason & brick work - Ramsay Bros, Falkirk; joiner work - William Walker, Polmont; slater and plaster work - D & P Maxwell; iron work - William Turner & Sons, Polmont; plumber work - D McNair, Falkirk. It was lighted by acetylene gas and formally opened for business on 10 December 1902.



Illus 9: The Polmont Station Branch.

Acetylene gas had been used by the North British Railway Company at Polmont Station and was considered for the Reddingmuirhead store. There were some 60 paraffin lamps already in use, providing a rather poor quality light, and requiring much maintenance. The SCWS architect recommended that the engine on the bakery be used to generate electricity and this was done, the electric light being inaugurated at the central premises in November 1902. It was a big success and the talk of the village – for a week. Improvements continued to be made at the other branches. That same year a fleshing department was created at Blackbraes and extensive alterations were made to the Standburn Branch to cope with increased trade there. This resulted in a separate drapery department at Standburn. However, the flashing department at Blackbraes did not perform as well as expected and in 1907 this part of the premises was leased to the Brethren as a gospel hall. The following year the Brethren opened their own hall around the corner in Princes Street.

The quarterly meetings of the Redding Co-operative Society were open to all members and in the period 1890-1910 were exceptionally well attended. They were also usually rowdy and report after report makes reference to this element. Here is a typical example – *“The Redding Co-operative Society long since carried off the palm amongst such local organisations for the interesting, amusing, and altogether entertaining character of its meetings, and when it is said that last week’s performance was up to the standard of any of its predecessors we do not convey the impression that the members of the audience were slavishly bound by the rules of debate, or that they spoke in gracefully modulated tones in expressing their opinions upon men and things. Rather the impression conveyed is that the nature of the proceedings were such as is best described by the*

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words of the report where it is stated that "for some time the meeting was a perfect pandemonium, and although there were four or five members on their feet speaking at one time, nothing could be heard in the noise." (Falkirk Herald 24 June 1903). On this occasion the committee resigned en bloc.

Part of the commotion had been caused by the dismissal of two employees in the fleshing department and similar trouble arose on several occasions. Staff terms and conditions were peculiar. Salesmen not meeting performance targets were dismissed without any hearing. Yet promotion depended upon the duration of service rather than aptitude. What had started as an amateur group had to become more professional and in 1904 chartered accountants were used for the first time to audit the accounts. John Walker had retired in 1900 after 31 years as managing secretary and was replaced by Archibald Smart. That length of service might be considered trivial when compared with the record of H Struthers, head salesman at Standburn Branch, who retired in 1946 after 56 ½ years with the Co-operative! Women, of course, had their own separate roles. When a military tribunal in the First World War took some of the Society's bakers for the armed services its chairman suggested that they employ women, but the manager was absolutely adamant that they were not up to the task.

Another branch was erected for those members at Shieldhill and Cross, Bentend, Barleyside, Summerhouse and West Shieldhill at the west end of the Main Street in Shieldhill and opened in the summer of 1904.



Illus 10: The Shieldhill Branch with (from left to right) drapery, grocery and licensed trade/tobacco departments.



Illus 11: Inside the Shieldhill Branch.

In 1912 the Redding Co-operative Society agreed to place a branch at Linlithgow Bridge. Plans were again drawn up by AN Malcolm of Falkirk and stone for the façade secured from Brightons Quarry. The site was in Mill Road, on the east side of the River Avon and so in Linlithgowshire.

Building work started in January 1913 on the grocery department which was to be 60 x 20ft in plan; a drapery department 50 x 20ft; and a covered court 32 x 24ft with a loading platform, oil store, and offices. A boot repairing shop was also included. Two dwellings over the front part of the main buildings each had a parlour, kitchen bedroom, bathroom, and scullery. The simple stone front with hollow brick gable and back walls cost c£2,188. The contractors were: mason & brick work, John Gardner, Falkirk; joiner work, James Johnston, Polmont; slater and plaster work, David Thomson, Redding; plumber work, Matthew Auchincloss, Polmont. The memorial stone was laid on 15 March along with a bottle containing coins, newspapers, financial reports, etc. Mr Brown, president, was presented with a silver trowel. The branch opened for business on 14 October.



Illus 12: The Glen Village Branch.

Shortly afterwards a branch opened at Glen Village, though it closed for the duration of the First World War due shortage of staff. In 1916 the Society was

refused exemption for its vanmen. At the time it was running four horse-drawn vans and it was pointed out that if they purchased a motor van it could do the work of at least three of them with only a single employee. All of the men returning from the army were treated as though they were still on the employment roll. Those with severe wounds were found appropriate tasks.

The Red House

The increase in membership and the demand for higher standards and lower production costs led to the design of a new bakery on the site of the old one, with a smaller separate butcher's department. The foundation stone was laid in February 1921 by Thomas Cummings, Chairman of the Society, with a suitably inscribed handsome silver trowel presented to him by the contractors. Archibald Smart, manager of the Society, first placed a bottle containing a number of mementoes into the cavity in the stone. Mr Smart was the oldest servant in the Society's employ, and in the coming July would have a record of fifty years' service to his credit. The contents included balance sheets of the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society, and the Redding Co-operative Society, copies of the "Falkirk Herald", "The Scotsman" and the "Glasgow Herald", photographs of the Chairman, manager, directors and head salesmen of the Society, and the contractors, current "tokens" of each branch, and current coins of the realm. Planning permission had been obtained in October 1919.

Progress was slow due to shortages of materials and labour. It was opened in December 1921. The architects, H Wilson and D Tait, Grangemouth, provided a silver key as a souvenir of the occasion. The Key was inscribed – "Presented to T. Cumming, Esq., on the occasion of his opening the new premises of Redding Co-operative Society. 24th December, 1921." The key was then used to open the main door.

Great care had been taken in arranging the component parts to greatly reduce working costs, increase output, and to produce a healthy building and satisfactory conditions for the bakers. The large bakery department contained two Scotch ovens and five large draw-plate steam ovens, with a proving chamber between, lit overhead by cupolas. All the flues of these ovens were graded, and led to one chimney stalk, 50 feet high. The machinery consisted of a stirrer, temporing tank, two kneaders, tublifts, chaffer, biscuit brake, cake machine, pie moulders, etc. Special provision was made for the baking of confectionery, there being a special decorator's room, spice store, and washing-up room. Off the bakery were the scullery and barm room. Near the entrance was the men's room with lavatory accommodation. To the rear of the building were situated the fuel house and the main stokehole running the whole length of the building, to enable the ovens to be stoked from the rear so that no dust should penetrate to the bakery itself. Above the bakery was a flour loft with accommodation for many months' supply of flour, and here was a sifting and blending plant, with the necessary hoppers. The flour was delivered to a covered unloading shed, and then hoisted to the loft by an electric hoist. The bakery was capable of an output of over 200 sacks of flour per week.



Illus 13: Bakery van with pneumatic wheels and unusual driver, c1925.

To the east of the bakery was a large bread room for the storage and despatching of goods – with its own covered loading shed. Adjoining there was also a women’s department for the baking of oat-cakes, scones, etc., with the necessary girls’ rooms. The baker’s shop had direct communication with the bread room, and was fitted out with oak counters, shelving, cases, etc.

The fleshing department, adjoining the bakery, consisted of a large and commodious shop, with workshop behind, refrigeration, pickling room, engine room, and loading shed. In the flesher’s department trolleys were fixed on the roof for running carcasses direct to the shop and refrigerator. A sausage making machine was also installed. The whole of this department was tiled throughout with appropriate decoration, and had marble and tiled counters.

The plant for the whole of the building was driven by individual motors, the power being obtained from the Scottish Central Electric Power Company’s main. Special provision was made for ventilation by electric fans. A large Cochrane boiler in the boiler-house was used to heat all of the building by steam and to supply the necessary hot water through a Royles Calorifier. The whole interior of the building was lined with enamelled bricks and the floors were of reinforced concrete for fireproofing.



Illus 14: The Red House in 2019 looking south-east.

The building is large and imposing, and the outside finished with terra cotta or engineering bricks with freestone dressings. Three gables face onto the main road, with an inserted stone depicting the clasped-hands trade emblem in the central one. It has been described as “industrial baroque”.

The building cost nearly £40,000. The following is a list of contractors: - digger, mason, mason and brick work, Hardie and Son, Bo’ness; joiner work, James Johnstone, Polmont; plumber work, George Campbell, Camelon; plaster and cement work, T McGregor and Sons, Laurieston; slater work, Robert Fraser, Polmont; painter work, William Edgar and Sons, Polmont; glazier work, Daniel O’May, Falkirk; iron and steel work, Redpath, Brown, and Co, Glasgow; asphalt work, The Limmer and Trinidad Lake Asphalt Co, Glasgow; electric work, David Crosland, Falkirk; steam heating work, James Combe and Son, Glasgow; ovens, James Cruickshank, Edinburgh; bakery plant machinery, D Thomson Ltd, Edinburgh; refrigerating plant, Ernest West and Beynon Ltd, London; fleshing department plant, Peter Swan and Sons, Edinburgh.



Illus 15: The Red House looking west towards Shieldhill.

A serious fire at the Shieldhill branch in October 1924 caused the entire grocery department to be lost. It was only with much effort that the fire brigade saved the drapery department. The branch manager & his family had been in the flat above the latter. Despite £5,000 worth of damage the shop was fixed for Christmas. When the people of Rumford asked for their own Store in 1924 their request was initially politely turned down. A small shop was eventually installed. The Redding Co-operative Society continued to respond to some of the demands of its members. In December 1939 its president, James Forrester JP, declared the Whitecross Branch open. H Wilson, architect.

The Second World War had a huge impact on supplies and manpower and the Society hunkered down to work through it. Early in 1941 it introduced a three-day week for deliveries in order to save on fuel and labour as part of the war effort. However by June it found that its neighbouring Co-ops simply moved in to these areas on the days they were off and so had to reinstate the 6-day service. The Redding Co-operative Society wanted to discuss the overlapping of work with Laurieston Co-op, again to save resources for the war. The Board of the Laurieston Co-op suggested that the solution was probably amalgamation, which had already been discussed on and off over the last twenty years. After several meetings terms were readily agreed and the union took place in 1942.

The return to peace saw further small-scale expansion. For the Redding Co-operative Society small temporary one-person shops were considered economically feasible. In September 1948 a new shop opened at Old Polmont near to the Post Office. It had taken several years to construct due to materials shortages. A similar story occurred at Westquarter Village where a temporary branch was built in 1940. A much larger was the new store for Westquarter had to wait until after the war. It was designed by Wilson & Wilson architects in a typical style of the period and lay on the Redding Main Road. The Westquarter branch opened in October 1956 and the first one hundred customers were treated to a gift worth 5s. Business got off to a good start.



Illus: The Westquarter Branch with the village behind.

This is David Leask's description of the Maddiston Branch of the Co-op from his youth:

"The Jack and Hunter families lived in two flats above the shop; the head of both families were employed by the Co-operative society. The store was the biggest and most important shop in the village and had a grocery department and a drapery department. The grocery was managed by Harry Struthers, a very efficient man from Pannie (now the Whitesideloan area of Brightons). Easton McFarlane was the cashier and Cornelius (Corny) Bryce worked at the counter. All the dry goods came in bulk and were weighed out into thick brown paper bags of all sizes. Butter and cheese came in barrels and were unpacked in the back shop and then brought through and measured out to the customer's requirements. If the customer wanted a ham end for soup their name was put on a list and when that name came up, that was the day they made soup. Many of the old measures such as chappins, pecks and fourpit were still in general usage in the thirties.

The first thing to notice on entering was the sawdust on the floor and the counters arranged all round in the shape of a horseshoe. On the left was a row of benches where the customers waited until their turn came up under the wag at wa' clock. After the "getting the messages" customers went to the cashiers office and paid on a white line (for tick) or a yellow line (for cash). Either way the cashier gave the customer a "flimsy" (a small yellow or white piece of paper) with the customer's number and the amount spent on it.

The weans were sent to the store for all manner of things and the School Board minute book is scattered with references to children being kept off school to be sent to the store (especially during times of shortage) to wait in the queues (sometimes for a full morning) for whatever had come in. A jeely jar could be exchanged for sweets but most jeely jars were kept at home by mothers making their own jeely or jam (a 1lb jar was worth a ha'penny, a 2lb jar was worth one penny).

Jean McFarlane and Mrs Gilroy ran the drapery; here one could buy clothes for all the family's needs, from head to toe and from the cradle to the grave – and the co-op would see that you were properly put into that grave too!

Not only could clothes be bought but furniture, ornaments, curtains, and if they did not have it in stock (as with some large items) they'd order it for

you. There was a mutuality club, which allowed the customer to get goods and pay them up through the weeks.

The store had to cater for all needs and if a miner needed a new pick or shovel it was the store that supplied them (shovels came in sizes one to twelve: 10 was the coalman's shovel; 12 the carter's), carbide for the lamps, the lamps themselves, pit buits, tackety or sparable, pee-weeps (pit vests), moleskins, the list goes on – the store supplied them all."



Illus 16: Left to right – Maddiston Co-op, Maddiston Inn, Salvation Army Hall. Note the re-alignment of the main road.

Jessie Young also remembered the Redding Store:

"There were two big wooden counters in the Grocery Department. There was one of these bacon slicers on one - and a butter pat. I think they had a mould for butter as well. That was the side with the most custom. I can't really remember much about the other side. There was a Redding Co-op grocery van that came round Wallacestone every week.

The butcher was Matt Myles. He used to come round Wallacestone once a week with his van too. The butcher shop had tiles on the wall – white with blue pictures of animals such as cows. There was a counter at the left hand side as you went into the shop; sawdust on the floor. There were big hooks on the wall with carcasses hanging off them. Office in the back shop.

The drapery was where my hairdressers (Principals) are now. When I was a girl, we used to joke that the drapery slogan should have been, "We'll order it for you". They very rarely had what was required in stock but, so that my mother could get it added to her Dividend or take advantage of her "divvi" money, we always ordered things from the Drapery."

In 1967 the Redding Co-operative Society moved with the times and introduced self-service facilities at the Maddiston and Shieldhill stores. It was a huge break with the past. The following year, 1968, Redding Co-operative Society amalgamated with the Falkirk United Co-operative Society.

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