

C.E.O. of Kendal Co-op and Magistrate

James Richardson was born in 1902 and interviewed in 1993

I applied for a post with the Kendal Co-op straight from School. The man who interviewed me said "If you come to us with a view to management you'll have to go into all the departments that we may send you for experience so that you'll know what it is like working in a shop as well as being on the clerical side." So that is what I did.

I started in Finkle Street. 21 Finkle Street was the main grocery department. From there I went to the shop in Highgate. Then they had me go to the Bakery behind 83 Stricklandgate. I went there for a month but I was no wiser I didn't do any practical work I was just a sort of interested spectator. Of course all these shops are now closed. Then I went into the office in Waterloo House Finkle Street.

While in the office I took the secretarial examinations through the Co-operative Union and their Education Department and in 1926 I was asked to become Chief Executive Officer a position I held for 41 years, until I retired.

When I first took over as an official we had grocery shops in Finkle Street, Stricklandgate, Highgate, Wildman Street, outlying branches in Staveley, Burneside, Milnthorpe, Endmoor and Kirkby Lonsdale. There were also three or four grocery travelling shops on various Kendal estates. In 1924 Waterloo House was bought for about £4,000 and that was not closed until the late 1970s. The café and sweet department were opened in Stramongate in the 1930s.

We had a staff of about 180 people then. But during the war we had many temporary staff. In fact after the war I realised that we had about 600 part-time employees to help keep the establishment going.

In the late 1950s it was decided to buy land in Stricklandgate opposite the Market Square which extended up the Rose and Crown and White Lion Yards. After we had demolished the properties it was realised that we would not have sufficient funds (£200,000 to £250,000) to do what we wanted and we negotiated with the CWS in Manchester who were interested and we sold the land to them for the price we had paid and they started the supermarket which closed several years later.

In 1934 I was approached by the then Chairman of the Magistrates Court Committee saying I had been suggested as a magistrate for the Kendal Borough Bench and in December of that year I received a letter from the Lord Chancellor's Office stating that I had been appointed. At the age of 32 I was the youngest magistrate in the area. It appeared that the Kendal Bench met at 11.00am on Monday and Friday. There was no rota and the procedure appeared to be that the appointed magistrates went to the retiring room and on several occasions, which is contrary to what happens today, they could be told by the clerk that there was no court sitting as there was no cases to be heard that day. My main interest on the Bench was with the juvenile Panel. Dr Riddell, a local general practitioner was Chairman and in 1947 he was appointed High Sheriff for Westmorland and I took over the Chairmanship from him which lasted until 1960. Regarding sentencing policy we were not given a great deal of guidance and the fines that were inflicted differed between so many courts and caused much concern. Eventually we were informed of what would be a reasonable fine for certain cases but I must say that each case heard the question of fine was considered in great detail. There was no set penalty.

A very amusing case happened on one occasion. A small boy had been charged with stealing two bantams from the Vicar of the Parish Church, Rev Bertram Jones, who apparently interested in the breeding of bantams. This boy had taken two and when I asked him why he

had taken them he said, "Well I didn't intend to steal them. I only took them so that I could breed and then I would return them."

The Rev Bertram Jones said to me "Well if you tell him not to do this sort of thing again, I will take him home and give him two bantams from which he can breed. What he little realises is that the two he took were two bantam cocks!" The boy returned the two he had originally taken, and the Reverend supplied him with two suitable bantams.

The Kendal and District Housing Association, in which I was involved, came about through another Quaker, Harold Wilson of Isaac Braithwaite's. It was started mainly by Quakers and a few interested people in Kendal to develop housing for working people. This would be about 1924. Houses were built on Underley, White Stiles and Sandylands. We sold houses to the tenants at reduced prices. We found that in some cases these houses were bought at a very low figure, retained for a short while and then sold at a handsome profit. We felt this should cease and we finally agreed to hand over to Kendal Town Council the houses remaining on Sandylands at no charge. We had built quite a lot of houses on Sandylands as well as White Stiles and Underley. It was a very useful contribution to the housing situation in Kendal.

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