



Plunkett
Foundation



CLARENCE HOUSE

On this special occasion, I wanted to send my warmest congratulations to the Plunkett Foundation on reaching its centenary. At a time when traditional businesses serving rural areas are facing the challenges of centralisation, changes to shopping habits, new technologies and the cost of providing genuinely local services, it is hugely encouraging to know that so many rural communities are taking matters into their own hands.

Community businesses not only provide vital services in rural areas, they also tackle a wider range of social problems, such as isolation, loneliness, access to employment and volunteering. The range of businesses established and run in this way is increasing all the time and now includes not just shops, pubs and cafes, but also woodlands and even a distillery.

I know from experience that the first step in setting up a community business is often the hardest – getting people involved and helping them to believe that a good idea can become a reality. So the support and practical advice that the Plunkett Foundation provides for communities embarking on this journey is absolutely crucial.

The fact that there are now 620 rural community businesses currently trading in the United Kingdom, and that the sector is growing at a rate of 40-50 businesses a year, shows that this is not just an isolated phenomenon. It is a thoroughly viable and well-tested means of delivering the essential services that underpin communities. And for those who are interested, there is plenty of advice to be found in the *Village Survival Guide*, recently produced by my Countryside Fund.

Strong, resilient rural communities are essential to the future of the British countryside and the Plunkett Foundation has a critical role to play in achieving this. Therefore, on the occasion of its centenary anniversary, nothing could give me greater pleasure than to wish the Plunkett Foundation a very 'happy birthday' indeed, and I much look forward to admiring your continued success and achievements in the years to come.



Cletwr Community Shop, Tre'r-ddol, Machynlleth, Wales.



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Contents

Introductions 02

Where we began 03

*Horace Plunkett –
A Man Ahead of His Time*

Our past 05

Our Present 07

Our future 11

Chairs 14



Introductions

Looking forward

'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there', as LP Hartley famously wrote, is so often true, but in the case of Sir Horace Plunkett his way of empowering and enabling communities to work together to their collective benefit is as relevant today as it was 100 years ago.

The environment and challenges may not be quite the same, but the imperative for communities to take action to address their needs remains and community business is a powerful tool for doing that. It is right to look back and to celebrate what has been achieved since Sir Horace put his vision into practice. But we must not rest on our laurels.

As His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales so rightly points out in his foreword, there are many challenges facing rural communities today and in the future. That is why this booklet is not just concerned with the past but also looks forward to Plunkett's priorities for the future.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to lead the Plunkett Foundation through its centenary year. I and my fellow trustees have nothing but admiration for all of those communities throughout the UK who have worked tirelessly to establish and run businesses in their localities. At Plunkett it is our aim to continue to maintain those established businesses and to help even more communities to achieve similar success in the future.

Margaret Clark CBE

Chair of Trustees, Plunkett Foundation

The Past, the Present and the Future

In order to know where you are going you have to know where you've been. This booklet has been published to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Plunkett Foundation. Whilst occasions such as this are an opportunity to look back and applaud the visionary work of our founder Sir Horace Plunkett, it is also a chance to look forward. After 100 years supporting community business to make rural life better, Plunkett has never been better placed than it is now to shape the opportunities of the future. The future will of course be equally as challenging as the past – and Plunkett will continue to be a friend and helping hand to communities across the UK as they face those challenges with optimism. We will nurture the green roots of community businesses to grow across the country. We will build on what has gone before, to raise our profile and increase the range and types of support we offer. And so, as we celebrate the Foundation's first 100 years – it is with a great sense of excitement that we embark upon the adventure of the next 100 years.

James Alcock

Chief Executive, Plunkett Foundation

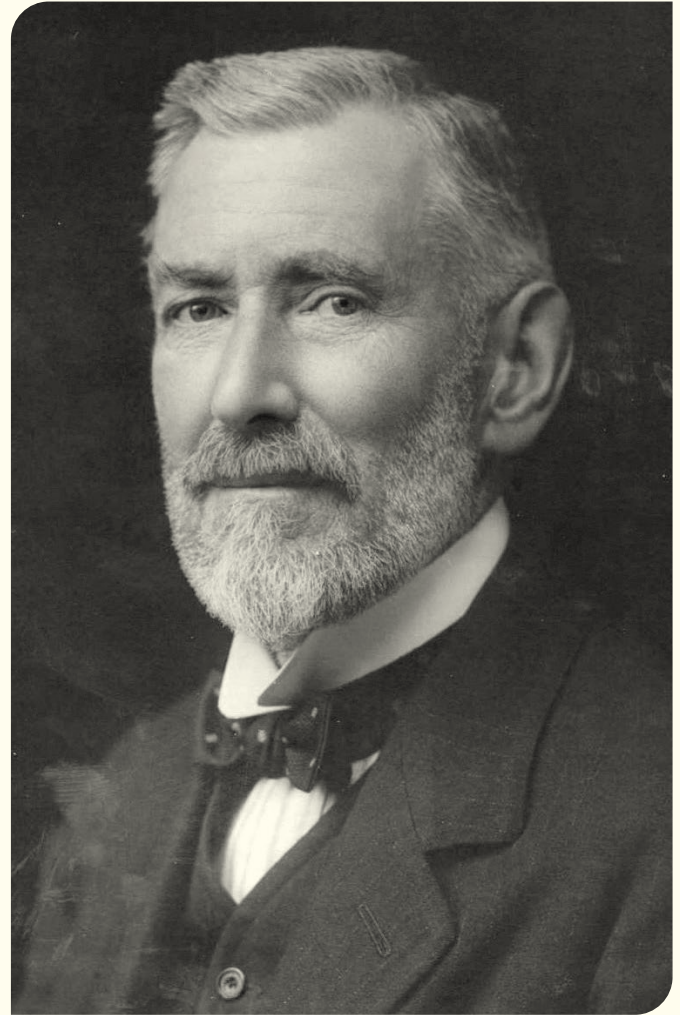
Where we began

Horace Plunkett - A Man Ahead of His Time

Horace Plunkett was an extraordinary figure: a combination of the idealist with the man of business; a poor public speaker and yet a great publicist; a man of strong family affections who never married; a man who drove his subordinates hard yet inspired in many a life-long devotion; an aristocrat who drew his metaphors from the cowboys on the Wyoming cattle-range. But beneath these superficial contradictions were attributes of courage, strength of character and a desire to serve.

Born in 1854, Horace was the third son of Lord Dunsany, an Anglo-Irish peer. After graduating from Oxford University, he spent ten years cattle ranching in the foothills of the American Rocky Mountains. He returned to Ireland on his father's death in 1889 to manage the family estate and quickly became obsessed with the problems concerning rural communities – still emerging from the mid-century famine and state of the agricultural economy, increasingly beset by competition from Europe and the US.

His first intervention was to create a community-owned store owned and controlled by his estate workers and tenant farmers at Dunsany Cross, Co. Meath. His second, which followed over 50 unsuccessful meetings persuading Irish farmers of the potential of co-operation, was to form a dairy co-operative at Ballyhahall, Co. Limerick in 1891.



Horace Plunkett Portrait.

Three years later, and as a direct result of his campaigning, there were 33 co-operative creameries and agricultural bodies. To support them, Horace founded the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (later renamed as ICOS). Four years later, there were 947 affiliated agricultural co-operatives and the agricultural economy in Ireland was transformed.



Dromohair creamery.

For most people this would have been a lifetime's work, but Plunkett's job was only half-done. As MP for Dublin South he pushed for reforms in Westminster which led to the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland (DATI) being established, with Horace as the vice-president at its head. For this, and his contribution to transforming the agricultural economy, he was created Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order in 1903, on the personal initiative of the King.

Towards the end of Sir Horace's life, he became concerned about the scale of mergers and acquisitions within his own co-operative movement, and the extent to which they were genuinely providing benefits to those they were set up to serve. He suggested that to be successful, co-operatives needed to remain owned and controlled by the communities in which they were established.

With that mission in mind, Sir Horace founded the 'Plunkett Foundation', to which he referred as his 'Foundation for Rural Life'. He rooted the vision of the Foundation in a slogan he had been using for many years: "Better farming, better business, better living".

Beyond his co-operative endeavours, Sir Horace lived an extraordinary life. He crossed the Atlantic multiple times and made key connections with politicians, philanthropists and academics. He was reported to have played a critical role in securing America's participation in the First World War. He was deeply involved in Irish politics at the time of the Home Rule and Independence, but managed to offend both sides. This eventually resulted in his home being attacked and burned down. He had the misfortune of being near the Dublin General Post Office during the 1916 Easter Rising and was grazed by a bullet aimed at his companion. He was obsessed with technology and was famed for owning the first motor car in Ireland and learning to fly at the age of 70.



Plunkett representatives at an international co-operative meeting.

Our past

Our First Five Years (1919 – 1923)

Initially based at Plunkett House in Merrion Square, Dublin, along with ICOS, our first few years were limited to promoting courses and studies on co-operative and rural sociology subjects in England and Ireland.

The Turning Point (1924)

Having always intended to be international, the 1924 Empire Exhibition held at Wembley was the ideal opportunity to prepare a survey of agricultural co-operation in the British Empire and organise a conference of co-operators. The 170 participants of this conference - from most parts of the Empire - found the experience of meeting and comparing notes new and stimulating and so before parting, called for Plunkett Foundation to become a “clearing house of information on agricultural co-operation in the English-speaking world”.

It was at this point that we moved into 10 Doughty Street in London, along with the Co-operative Reference Library (Horace’s private collection, which we still retain today), and a permanent staff were appointed.

The Next Chapter *(1924-1980s)*

From 1927, the Empire Marketing Board funded us to undertake investigations of agricultural co-operation in Commonwealth countries. This, together with our world survey of co-operative law gave Plunkett some claim to be an authority on co-operative legislation and we were regularly consulted on the drafting of new enactments by Commonwealth countries.

The co-operative library subsequently grew to include our own publications, such as the annual Yearbook of Agricultural Co-operatives, and those of others. Our headquarters attracted visitors from all over the world, and our staff were represented at many international meetings and congresses.

Early in the 1930s we undertook detailed surveys of agricultural co-operation in the British Isles and held conferences which led to a national body, the Agricultural Co-operative Managers Association (ACMA), being established with Plunkett providing secretarial support. From the late 1940s and 1950s, students and officials from Commonwealth countries attended our briefings on the organisation of co-operatives, undertaking study tours and making use of the library in addition to the development of overseas visits, lectures, and participation in conferences and reports. This progressed into a formal co-operative business correspondence course in the 1950s and soon led to a broader range of overseas training courses.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th Century Plunkett was a leading voice in the international world of co-operative farming. The Foundation advised governments on legislation as well as being a centre of expertise, information and training for the sector.



Margaret Digby

Margaret Digby was the globetrotting public face of the Plunkett Foundation for much of the last century.

She began her association with Plunkett as a researcher working for Horace in 1927 and in 1934 she became Plunkett's secretary, a position she held for 33 years.

With her global knowledge of co-operation unsurpassed, Margaret Digby was an influential and respected woman across the world in an era heavily dominated by men.

Our present

Towards the end of the 20th Century, a new challenge was on the rise – the decline of rural services in the UK – and Plunkett was well-positioned to respond. The Foundation quickly put into place advisory support programmes for communities looking to overcome these challenges, and which stimulated community ownership of shops, pubs, farms, energy and transport initiatives.

A key turning point for Plunkett was the merger with the Village Retail Services Association (ViRSA) – an organisation set up to support village shops– followed by the launch of the highly successful Village Core Programme which pioneered the use of community shares, grants and loans and supported over 200 new community shops to open within six years. Together, this launched Plunkett’s support for community shops, which consisted of an advice line, network of business advisers, events and membership benefits, and evolved quickly to shape Plunkett’s core UK frontline service for all forms of community business.

Sally Soady

The Angler’s Rest, Bamford

“When the Post Office said it wasn’t viable we concluded we had to buy the pub in order to save both the pub and the Post Office. Now people who are looking at ways to buy pubs will come to us because they have heard our story. I’ve got a huge amount out of it, because there is a lot we have learned that we can pass on to help others. It is a two way process. We consulted other pubs who were ahead of us, and they passed on advice.”

Charlotte Hollins

Co-founder of Fordhall Community Farm,
and the Plunkett Centenary Fellow

“We can’t stop diversifying because the needs of our community are diverse and the different possibilities of using the land to meet these needs is endless! Fordhall has a wonderful team of incredibly passionate and creative people who come up with ideas and make inspiring things happen - we want to maximise the community potential of this beautiful space we are so fortunate to have.”

Today, Plunkett has a well-established Community Business team at the heart of its operations, and provides a core service of advice and support to rural communities at all stages of setting up and running a community business, in all parts of the UK. The team operate an advice line, online forums, a suite of tools and resources, specialist business advice and training. The staff based in Woodstock, Oxfordshire, are supported by a growing network of seasoned mentors with experience of running community businesses as well as specialist advisers with technical knowledge and expertise. Plunkett is particularly well regarded for its expertise concerning Community Benefit Societies - the legal structure adopted by the majority of community businesses - and in its promotion and technical support of community share issues, a primary mechanism for raising investment for community businesses and ensuring they are democratic at their heart.



Ilmington Community Shop, Warwickshire

Pamela Betts

Hampstead Norreys Community Shop & Café

“It has evolved to become a real community hub. The shop is more than just shopping. The shop is well supported and the difference to the community is amazing. There was no shop here for many years and there was no life to the place in those years. You might just see someone going to post a letter and that was it.

We’ve got to know each other better. People learn what each other’s interests are. We have become a much more integrated village.”

As Plunkett marks its first 100 years it works with a network of a thousand rural communities – with 600 trading businesses and 400 in the pipeline across the UK. Today community businesses have an average survival rate of 96%. The longevity of the community business sector means that more community groups are inspired to use the model to tackle whatever their individual challenge might be. Community businesses are proving to be diverse, flexible and resilient.

Julian Ross

The Old Crown Co-operative, Heskett Newmarket

“I realised that if it was going to happen someone needed to stand up and make it happen. Fifty people came to the first meeting and I thought I was going to be laughed out of the room but they turned out to be very enthusiastic to the idea.”

Above all else, what continues to inspire Plunkett and all those associated with the Foundation in the 21st Century is the difference community businesses make to people’s lives. It is impossible to overstate the positive impact of a community rising up to help itself, in the way that Horace Plunkett had envisioned a century ago. Take a village shop and Post Office for example – when such a service is taken into the hands of community ownership it is common for that shop to expand and offer much more. Shops will always be meeting places - but often community shops now include cafés, spaces for local groups to hold meetings, farmers markets, local food festivals and more. Shops have been known to host lunch groups for the elderly, homework spaces for the young and events as diverse as gardening clubs and drama classes. A similar kaleidoscope of happenings can be seen in woodlands, pubs, farms and many other community-owned and run businesses.



Hampstead Norreys Community Shop & Café, West Berkshire.

Community businesses are also playing an active role in enhancing wellbeing. From the provision of prescription collection services to offering space for health and wellbeing appointments such as chiropody. Some businesses have been partnering with local health services to enhance what they offer. Community businesses are undeniably improving people's quality of life and enabling many residents to stay in their communities for longer. There is an overwhelmingly warm reaction across rural areas to the arrival of these community businesses and all they offer.

Martin Booth

The George & Dragon, Hudswell

“It is certainly a more friendly and cohesive community than it was before. A village without a meeting place is a less cohesive place. Today the pub has also made our community a much more economically vibrant place through the many people it attracts.”

Then there are the life-enriching stories of the teams and individuals who have got involved in the effort to establish a community business in their area. In many cases they have not just witnessed the changes to their community, but also the positive impact on their own lives. Volunteering in a community business can open up a wealth of opportunities to learn, build new and lasting friendships and to find a whole new set of skills and purposes. Such life-changing stories are increasingly commonplace, and are among the many ways in which community businesses tackle the loneliness and isolation which can be the consequences of the erosion of rural services.



The community-owned GlenWyvis Distillery, Upper Dochcarty, Scotland.

Tony Castleton

Halstock Shop, Dorset

“The shop has changed the village immensely, it is the real centre of the community actually. In many ways it is the centre of the village. If the village didn't have the shop I would say it would be like a desert watering hole without the water.”

Our future



The Anglers Rest, Bamford, Derbyshire.

Whilst celebrating the journey Plunkett has made, our prime concern is to continue to play our part in improving rural lives. We will do this by helping more communities to develop and open new community businesses and to ensure those already trading have the support they need to thrive.

We will increase awareness of the real potential of the community business model and the importance of extending its accessibility and support in all rural parts of the UK. We will build on what has been achieved in so many areas already and increase the social impact community businesses have for those living in the rural communities. We will focus, in particular, on tackling the problems of poverty, poor health, isolation and loneliness.

Our key aims in the coming years are:

To be the Go-to-Place

Our Community Business team aims to build on its position as the go-to-place for rural communities needing practical support for setting up or running a wide range of community businesses. We will expand our provision of high quality advice, aimed at making rural communities positive places to live and work. Achieving these aims will mean an investment in our people and advisers, working in even greater collaboration with national partners and locally-based organisations. We will introduce new forms of support, such as establishing a Training Hub to provide specialist on-line and face-to-face training.

To champion community business

We will further develop our understanding our members' needs and will use our voice to represent and champion the issues faced by rural communities. Our Engagement team will lead the way in promoting, communicating and awareness raising - consulting our members and key partners and influencing policy.

To create an information hub

We will reconnect with our heritage as a clearing house for information on all forms of rural community business by establishing an Information Hub to gather and share intelligence on the rural community business sector and to help to improve access to resources and expertise for communities setting up and running community businesses. We will also make greater use of our own data and will work with other organisations, such as universities and government departments, to produce and publish research and information, such as our annual Better Business reports.

The next few years will be some of the most important in the Foundation's history as we help rural communities to address and tackle the many challenges they face, not least the impacts of climate change. To do this, Plunkett will continue to grow its presence nationally and strengthen its role as the champion of rural community business and as a source of help and support. Plunkett will continue to be the long-term friend to prospective and existing community businesses, ensuring that our founder's ideal of "better business" really does lead to "better living".



The Maybush Inn, Great Oakly, Essex.

Chairs

Sir Daniel Hall	1919-1934
C.R. Fay	1934-1946
James McFayden	1946-1947
Sir Malcolm Darling	1947-1958
Sir Arthur Richmond	1958-1962
The Earl of Listowel	1962-1972
Lord Walston	1972-1976
Sir Roger Falk	1976-1979
J.A.E Morley	1979-1984
P.R. Dodds	1984-1990
Philip Bolam	1990 -1997
Prof. D. Bateman	1997-1998
W. Eric Wilson	1997-2000
David Button	2000-2006
Peter Couchman	2006-2008
Susan Knox	2008-2010
Peter Cleasby	2010-2013
Margaret Clark	2013-2020



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