

Nelson ILP Clarion House Centenary

Roger Brown

This article is dedicated to all those early Socialist pioneers in the Nelson area who had the vision to build the Clarion House. The very title of the building indicates the far-sighted nature of their concept and in its Centenary Year it is apt and fitting that our celebration coincides with the 'International Year of Co-operatives.'

The Co-operative movement is holding several events to celebrate its roots in the North of England. The global expo in Manchester in late October will bring together international supporters of Co-operatives, Fair Trade and ethical business. Furthermore, it would appear that we are, as the Con-Dem Coalition Government say, 'all in this together' and that we need to build 'the big society.' We feel that, perhaps, somebody should tell Dave and Nick that their Government is somewhat out of date, as Socialists have been doing just this for over a hundred years, and what is more doing it for the correct reasons – for the general public good, not as a prelude to cuts in public spending and services.

The word Clarion means to proclaim loudly, clearly and inspirationally. Their call was the call of freedom, fellowship and the call for a Socialist Commonwealth. They envisaged the Clarion House as their instrument; ringing out, proclaiming their message in a literal, not an allegorical or metaphori-

essary to carry out this activity, including to repair, renovate, restore and rebuild any building on the land. In practice the Land Society is managed by ILP, Labour Party, Co-op Party, Trade Union members and other non-aligned Socialists. We would imagine that the political consensus is somewhere to the left of 'Old Labour.'

We take no reward and the assets cannot be disbursed to the members; should we have to wind up, the assets would have to be passed to a likeminded organisation. We arrange occasional events with a Socialist theme and we display Socialist memorabilia and welcome Socialist and single-issue groups using the Clarion for events and for dropping off contemporary literature which we make available to visitors. Our most important role is to provide a meeting point and focus for like-minded people.

Not all of our visitors are Socialists, but quite often the visitors ask us "What is it all about?" and we are more than happy to tell them, as this fulfils the other aspect of the Clarion Movement: that of spreading the word of Socialism at every opportunity and by example.

For further information on our Centenary later this year, consult our website (<http://www.clarionhouse.org.uk/>) and Facebook page.



cal sense. They built it in a place of recognised natural beauty in the fervent hope that the rest of the world (for Socialism knows no boundaries) would come to resemble it and become a place of beauty too; not only physical beauty, but also a moral and social beauty. This was no accident, no coincidence. It was planned in the hope that others would take it as a model of how society as a whole ought to be organised. Visitors could come and witness how people – lots of people – were prepared to devote their lives to the Clarion movement for no personal gain, other than the knowledge that they would leave the world a slightly better place than when they entered it.

The Clarion is a vision of the future, a vision of a Socialist society, a commonwealth, based on co-operation and fellowship, not conflict and material greed. And the Clarion, as the name implies, was to be the instrument by which their message would be spread. The message by which the world would unite under one banner, abandon blinkered self-interest and material gain, and thus live in peace and harmony.

The Clarion is run and maintained as a non-profit making co-operative, with any excess money to be used for spreading the word of Socialism. The Clarion House is effectively held in trust by the Nelson Independent Labour Party Land Society. By definition, we are broadly committed to the principles of the ILP founder members and to the promotion and contemporary expression of Clarion and ILP traditions.

Our main objective is to preserve for public benefit the Clarion House, which is situated in Newchurch-in-Pendle and comprises of 1.5 acres of land, the tea-rooms, wildlife corridor, pond and adventure playground, and to do all things nec-

The current Clarion House on Jinny Lane, Newchurch-in-Pendle (far right picture) was Inaugurated in 1912, but it was not the first. The first was a tiny rented cottage in Thorneyholme Square, which lies between Happy Valley and Barley. This first Clarion House was opened in 1899 (far left). This venue soon became too small as its popularity spread and a larger property was needed. The second Clarion House, called Nabs Farm (second from the left), also rented, was acquired and was also on Jinny Lane and opened in 1903.

That the current Clarion House is not rented, but owned by Nelson Independent Labour Party Land Society, is a testament to the albeit, self educated, but independent-minded and capable founders that they were going to be no man's chattel and tenant but free and in total control of the property. These early Socialist pioneers who barely any had any recognised schooling and who spent 60 hours per week (without overtime!) in mills and down the pit, had a vision – they gave their vision substance, they gave their vision a name. This article is dedicated to them and to the Clarion House movement that their vision may continue a little longer. They are why, that during the late nineteenth century groups of independent minded local Socialists formed together into various societies dedicated to improving the overall health and well-being of the local workers. These societies took many forms; such as rambling, camping, reading, mutual improvement, cycling clubs and the Co-operative Holiday Association of Colne.

The philosophy of these movements was a simple and intelligent one, in that, it was not so much a lack of physical exercise which was affecting people's health, they had enough

of this at work and at home; it was their exposure to the whole industrial environment. Even up to the mid 1960s, before the almost total demise of weaving and the introduction of the Clean Air Act, one could, from the top of Pendle Hill, look down onto Colne, Nelson, Brierfield and Burnley and not see anything of these towns. They were invisible under the mantle of great, grey clouds. Yet, this could be the only cloud visible; the sky would be crystal clear. In fact one could, by looking in the other direction, see Blackpool Tower, over forty miles distant, but you could not see Nelson only four miles away.

The Clarion House celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1962 where the main speaker was Sidney Silverman, MP for Nelson and Colne. He warned against the tendency to sentimentalise the past and pointed out what a terrible half-century the Clarion had witnessed. Moreover, who thought that in 1912 twenty million lives would be uselessly thrown away in a mere four years, or that half a generation later there would be yet another, vaster, world-wide massacre of the innocents; or that a bare dozen years after that catastrophe, the world would be on the brink of another, this time truly a 'War to end all Wars' because it would be a war to end everything.



A group photograph taken outside the Clarion House during the fiftieth birthday celebrations in 1962; Sidney Silverman is sixth from the right (courtesy Clarion House)

It has been the tragedy of Socialism to have witnessed all this, to have known how it came about and yet been powerless to prevent it. But it has been its glory, Silverman pointed out, to have left the 'Clarion Call' sounding out throughout the world and the light burning and to have sustained its passionate sanity. In the fight for social justice many cowards have flinched, many traitors have sneered. Some still flinch, some still sneer, but the Red Flag still flies!

Today the ILP is trying, amid the changed conditions of the modern world, to be true to the ideas of those pioneers. Wilfred Ingham recalled the early Socialist ideals of the ILP, which were aimed, fundamentally, at changing the basis of society from production for profit to production for use. The Socialism to which they dedicated their lives meant bringing into being a classless society in which all the wealth and means of production are owned and controlled by the community and where profit, privilege and the inequalities inseparable from them shall become part of mankind's unhappy history. In such a society there would be no motive for war and no cause to waste the country's resources in armament production. Their objective would be to bring about a world in which brotherhood and co-operation replace international rivalry and war.

The Red Flag flew again in 1982 when the Clarion celebrated its seventieth birthday. The celebrations were organised by Stan and Iveson and by Gilbert and Elsie Kinder. A barbecue was laid on for the guests and the main guest speaker was Bob Edwards MP, veteran of the Spanish Civil War and an old ILP



A group photograph taken outside the Clarion House during the 70th birthday celebrations in 1982 (courtesy Clarion House)

stalwart. The former Nelson and Colne MP Doug Hoyle and his wife Pauline were present. Another guest was Louise Ellman, leader of Lancashire County Council. There were also leading representatives from the Co-op Party, local trade unions such as Burnley, Nelson, Rossendale and District Textile Workers' Union, leading members of the local Labour Party and members of the ILP from all over the country. The event aroused interest at the BBC at Manchester who sent a crew over to film it for *Look North West*. At this event Stan Iveson's commitment to the Clarion movement was recognised by the national ILP when he was presented with an illuminated address by his fellow longstanding comrade Gilbert Kinder. Both Stan and Gilbert were conscientious objectors during the Second World War and both went to prison for their beliefs. Stan explained just what the matter of conscience was that he and Gilbert lost their freedom for. He explained that he was not a pacifist nor was the ILP a pacifist movement, though many members were of that persuasion. How could he be a pacifist when he had supported the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War? He raised funds and took in some Spanish refugees. No, the issue of conscience was not necessarily the fight against Fascism but Compulsion. That is, denying people their freedom to choose and forcing young men and women to fight against their will via conscription.

If you require further information about the early days of Nelson ILP and the Clarion House, a CD can be purchased from the Clarion House and a limited number of Clarion House Centenary Badges will be on sale. We look forward to welcoming you to the Clarion House.

I am grateful to John Boardman for his assistance with the article illustrations [Ed.].



Gilbert Kinder presenting an illuminated address to Stan Iveson for 50 years' service in the ILP during the 70th Anniversary in 1982 (courtesy Clarion House)