

# Community and mutual ownership

## A historical review

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**This report surveys the history of 'community and mutual ownership' and considers the implications for policy and practice in this area.**

In recent years, policy-makers have identified community and mutual ownership as having a significant contribution to make to the economy, welfare and society more generally. A historical analysis of social change can inform contemporary understanding, policy and practice.

The report:

- adopts a broad definition of 'community and mutual' as a way of exploring the history of ownership;
- identifies five models: customary and common, community, co-operative and mutual, charitable, and municipal and state forms of ownership;
- argues that systematic and values-based approaches are needed to develop community and mutual ownership to respond to current social problems;
- notes that time is needed to develop democracy, membership and belonging, all factors that have been historically important to the success of community and mutual ownership.

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This report explores the history of ‘community and mutual ownership’ and draws out five historic models of ownership which are examined in turn. We use the concept of community and mutual ownership as an eclectic and exploratory device to uncover a range of different material over previous millennia. This report is organised into three substantive chapters: a historical overview (Chapter 2); models of community and mutual ownership (Chapter 3); and conclusions and implications for policy and practice (Chapter 4).

In the historical overview, we provide a brief outline of changing forms of ownership in general and pay specific attention to community and mutual examples. The chapter is divided into five key time periods: early societies; feudalism; early modern period; industrial capitalism and post-1945. Each of these phases gave rise to a distinctive array of communal forms of ownership.

**Early societies** were characterised by tribal and communal organisation in which ‘ownership’ of land, if it existed at all, was temporary and contingent and served collective needs. The Roman and Anglo-Saxon conquests of Britain indicated the importance of war in establishing ownership rights to land, which were distributed to loyal supporters. Private ownership developed slowly and examples of independent peasant farmers can be identified.

During the **feudal period**, often dated from the Norman invasion, land and property were owned by the King and his lords who ruled over estates. But relations were interdependent and peasants might be granted tracts of land on which they worked in return for loyalty to their lord. Peasants also had access to large areas of common and waste land which served a variety of needs. The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, precipitated by a punitive poll tax, was indicative of the broader ways in which peasants viewed feudal ownership as unjust and exploitative. Limitations on ownership were exerted by religious beliefs, which associated worldly wealth with sin,

by charitable impulses and by notions of a ‘just price’ for goods and services.

The **early modern period**, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, witnessed the breakdown of feudalism. Individual freedom and liberty were increasingly connected to the ownership of private property. The onset of enclosures was bitterly contested by those, such as the Diggers and True Levellers, who argued for the value of common and communal forms of ownership.

The rapid increase in land enclosure fuelled the development of **capitalism**. During the nineteenth century, industrial and urban development exerted great changes and stripped away older responsibilities inherent in ownership of the land. One response was the formation of mutual and co-operative organisations which expanded throughout the century. In addition, charitable impulses and organisations grew considerably in response to the harsh conditions faced by the poor. However, as inequality and social problems extended into the twentieth century, municipal and state ownership became increasingly prominent.

**Post-1945**, state ownership was viewed as a means of meeting common needs through universal welfare services and controlling the economy. It was to be undermined, especially during the 1980s, when many forms of public ownership were privatised, such as housing and nationalised industries. Although community and mutual organisations were also marginalised, more recent policy interests have focused on asset transfer to communities from public ownership and a role for the ‘third sector’ in public service delivery.

The widespread enclosure of ‘the commons’ and the growing concentration of ownership have been constant historical themes. But these have not always been linear processes nor have they been inevitable ones. Other historic possibilities have been available at specific times, and virtually all forms of community and mutual ownership from the past are still in existence and available for use today.

Chapter 3 of this report reflects on this long historical narrative by identifying five models of community and mutual ownership: common and customary; community; co-operative and mutual; charitable; and municipal and state ownership. Each of these is considered in turn.

**Common and customary ownership** was arguably an original form of ownership. Common land and group ‘rights in common’ were evident in feudal times and helped to facilitate economic survival, wider social networks and a sense of moral economy. The state actively supported the enclosure of the commons but began to protect common spaces, especially in the twentieth century. Significant vestiges of common land still remain in the form of village greens, public parks and the right to roam. Community land trusts and the Community Right to Buy in Scotland represent further attempts to enable communities, which may not have access to finance, to take control of land and assets.

**Community ownership** covers a wide range of initiatives that have frequently existed beneath the radar of public discussion. Over the last 500 years, examples have included communal living experiments carried out by religious sects, socialists and those seeking an alternative lifestyle. In the twentieth century, the settlement movement and development trusts worked to support deprived communities. The garden city, co-partnership and new town movements, initially at least, focused on community ownership of housing and public spaces. Smallholdings, allotments, village halls and community land occupation provide further continuing local examples of community ownership in which resources have also been held by individuals and families. Recently, communities have bought village shops, pubs, farms and other concerns through community share schemes. Community ownership remains an engine of inventiveness which feeds into the wider society.

**Co-operative and mutual ownership** flourished in the nineteenth century by meeting people’s basic needs relating to saving, insurance, food and housing through co-operative societies, friendly societies, building societies and other mutual enterprises. By the end of the nineteenth century, these had grown into highly significant businesses based on democratic member control

and federal structures. During the twentieth century, however, their role was to be undercut by the growth of state welfare as well as a loss of purpose in a more affluent context. Recent signs of renewal have been complemented by the growth of worker co-operatives, credit unions, football supporters’ trusts and the spread of mutual principles to a range of public services. Businesses such as The Co-operative and John Lewis show that community and mutual ownership can expand out of the small-scale ‘community’ space.

**Charitable** impulses are found throughout history and early examples of ownership include almshouses and hospitals. Charitable organisation was given legal recognition at the turn of the seventeenth century. The number and size of charities increased significantly in response to the Industrial Revolution, including voluntary and charitable hospitals. During the twentieth century the role of charities diminished as the state began to play a dominant role in welfare. Some charities were also criticised for holding a deficit view of beneficiaries. Since the 1980s, charities have played a significant role in contracting for welfare services. Charitable ownership is likely to multiply given that the charitable legal form carries tax advantages and that the impulse to ‘help others’ remains widely understood and practised.

**Municipal and state ownership** mainly developed from the late nineteenth century and was seeded within debates about organising for the common good. Early municipal experiments took place in the ownership of electricity, gas, sewers, transport, education and housing. Common ownership became a central objective for the political left, which crowded out other community ownership models. After 1945, significant nationalisation brought hospitals and businesses, which were viewed as natural monopolies, into state ownership. This lasted until the 1980s, when large-scale privatisations were initiated. Although state ownership has been criticised as being inefficient and unresponsive to community needs, it has been relatively effective in ensuring that public services are widely available. In addition to owning resources in its own right, the state also regulates all forms of ownership.

These models represent an initial sifting of historical material and it is unsurprising to find examples of both blurring and conflict between them. At a local level, community, co-operative and mutual forms of ownership have been interconnected but became more distinct in the context of growth and expansion. New forms of 'social enterprise', as arrivals on an already existing scene, have also cut across divisions.

In the long run, community and mutual ownership had the potential to make a significant contribution to contemporary society. It can be identified in all areas of the economy and society and has particular relevance to finance, rural and urban development, food, housing, public services, energy production and international development. 'Learning from history' is notoriously difficult and attempting to force the adoption of historical models would be short-sighted. However, historical analysis helps to identify issues that are pertinent to the current policy interest in extending community and mutual ownership. This report suggests that systematic approaches are needed if there is to be a staged growth of community and mutual ownership to respond to current social problems. The structural, social and subjective aspects of ownership must be recognised alongside a values-based approach to development. For community and mutual forms to succeed there needs to be recognition of the time taken to develop democracy membership and belonging and the tension inherent in state- or community-led approaches. In developing future policy and practice, however, there is the potential to adopt a structural and values-based approach that nurtures community and mutual ownership.

# 1 Introduction

Ownership is a concept with multiple meanings which have been bitterly contested throughout history. All forms of ownership are historically contingent and the outcome of human agency and struggle. Looking backwards in time helps us to realise that diverse forms of ownership have existed in the past, that history is dynamic and that new practices may yet emerge. Ownership is indelibly marked by the changing nature of human need, co-operation and conflict; as such it has been central to major historical transformations. Recurrent yet mutating debates have often revolved around the key distinctions between private and public, individual and common, natural and conventional forms of ownership.

This report aims to consider the role, contribution and significance of 'community and mutual ownership' in the past. It provides a historical overview of, and draws out implications and potential for, contemporary practice and policy. It asks:

- 1 Which models of community and mutual ownership can be identified and how have these developed?
- 2 How significant has each of these models been? What have been the reasons for their growth, achievements and limitations in practice?
- 3 What are the implications of these developments for contemporary policy-makers and practitioners?

'Community and mutual ownership' is a contemporary notion that is used as a way of exploring the past and highlighting an eclectic range of initiatives. Depending on the context, it may denote individual, collective and common ownership; private and public forms of ownership; and ownership that may be based in statute law or customary use rights. Community and mutual ownership has often tended towards dispersed or

common ownership of property, nurtured democracy and self-control, and fostered a sense of common benefit and social justice. We concentrate here on broad developments, placing changing forms of ownership within a general historical narrative. A diverse legacy of community and mutual ownership is traced and grouped into five 'models': common and customary; community; co-operative and mutual; charitable; and municipal and state ownership. Each of these forms has survived to the present day in one shape or another. In this way the report aims to connect a historical account to more recent preoccupations of policy-makers and practitioners without over-simplifying the past. The implications for our understanding and practice, as well as some of the contradictions and tensions revealed by community and mutual ownership, are drawn out. Case studies help to illuminate these issues through specific examples. This approach makes available a wide range of approaches to contemporary arenas of policy and practice while noting the dangers inherent in attempting to 'learn from history'.

The term 'community' has a diverse range of meanings. It usually refers collectively to people on the ground rather than rulers, government or elites and may be based on a geographical place or shared interests and characteristics. Community is frequently assumed to be 'tight-knit' although it may in fact be quite diffused. It tends to imply positive and warm human relationships as opposed to those found in public and business life. Communities are often divided so that the 'gay community', 'working-class community' and 'Brixton community', for example, will not only contain internal fault lines, but will also overlap. Community also carries considerable dangers of representation so that an arbitrary group of people owning and managing a resource might be claimed to represent the wider community.

'Mutual' has a generic meaning in terms of reciprocal, common and interdependent relations between people. A more specialised meaning refers to mutual organisations that are owned by members who are also the beneficiaries. For example, in a fully mutual housing co-operative

all tenants would be members and all members would be tenants. The two meanings may overlap, as in cases where a mutual ethos and purpose pervades an organisation but might not meet a narrow definition of mutuality.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) the term 'ownership' stretches back to the late sixteenth century although 'own' and 'owner' are much older terms. The most common definition of ownership refers to 'proprietaryship, dominion; legal right of possession' (*OED*). Early definitions of 'own' include the extension of having 'control or direction' over a person or thing; in other words, ownership is connected to the control of a resource. Ownership has extended over tangible things such as land and buildings as well as over people in slave-based societies. The extent of things that can be owned has greatly expanded over time and now includes copyright and patents, DNA, community knowledge and hypertext links. In addition, a more recent innovation derived from the United States in the 1970s and 1980s when religious and educational groups developed a notion of 'owning' a problem or issue, such as a child's development or homelessness. Many community groups also express strong feelings of ownership over their organisations. These shifting emphases reflect a tendency inherent in the idea of ownership to extend beyond the specific, legal issues into wider relationships. Indeed, subjective meanings, feelings and emotions are often closely tied into the notion of ownership. James O. Grunebaum defines ownership as 'a right constituted relationship, or set of relationships, between persons with respect to things' (Grunebaum, 1987, p. 4).

These meanings have also been expressed in renewed contemporary debates on community and mutual ownership. *The Quirk Review* (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007) highlighted the potential for community ownership and led to the establishment of government funding for asset transfer. Reviews of charitable and voluntary organisations highlighted a growing international interest in the notion of a 'third sector', illustrated by the establishment of the government Office of the Third Sector (World Bank, 2000; Cabinet Office and Her Majesty's Treasury, 2007). The renewal of co-operative

and mutual organisations has been stimulated by the production of a set of values and principles enshrined in a 'Statement of Co-operative Identity' as well as the application of mutual ideas and practices to a range of welfare services and public activity (MacPherson, 1995; Hargreaves, 1999; Rodgers, 1999; Birchall, 2001; Co-operative Commission, 2001; Commission on Co-operative and Mutual Housing, 2009). The recent growth of 'social enterprise' represents a further concern with forms of ownership which blend trading with social and environmental purposes (Borzaga and Defourny, 2001; Department of Trade and Industry, 2002; Paton, 2003; Pearce, 2003; Nyssens, 2006; GKH, Johnson and Spear, 2006). While ownership has been a central issue underlying these developments, it has not always attracted the attention of researchers (Hansmann, 1996; Hargreaves, Mills and Mitchie, 2001). This may be starting to change. The Commission on Ownership, sitting from 2010–11 and chaired by Will Hutton, has been set up to explore the meaning and importance of ownership in Britain and to consider changes that might be made. It has been supported by Mutuo and Co-operative Financial Services and will further fuel debates on the value of community and mutual ownership.

The embrace of a 'third sector' by policy-makers has bundled together a variety of community and mutual forms which are increasingly being presented as a solution to a wide variety of problems – the desire to nurture and support a vibrant civil society, to improve public services, to meet targets and to improve economic competitiveness, for example. The major political parties have all intimated that community and mutual organisations should have a greater role to play in the economy and public services. On the left, the abandonment of Clause IV of the constitution of the Labour Party has opened up a re-engagement with alternatives to the state as a vehicle for the 'common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange'. On the right there has been a growing recognition that public services might be complemented by mutual forms of employee ownership. The credit crunch of 2008 and the ensuing recession has added urgency to these arguments.

Understanding the past can contribute to this agenda by raising awareness of previous experiments and initiatives in community ownership and in attempts to support them. The renewed interest in communities taking a greater control of assets is helping to stimulate a dialogue between the present and the past (Leadbeater and Christie, 1999; Hirst, 2001; Yeo, 2002; Wilson and Woodin, 2003; Wyler, 2009; Aiken, 2010; Leadbeater, 2010).

## Methodology

This report represents a literature review complemented by interviews and some documentary and archival research. We searched various bibliographic databases, including the British Library, Copac and Athens, to identify key texts and documents and identified a number of primary sources relevant to our research. In addition, activists and researchers with an involvement in the recent history of community and mutual forms of ownership were interviewed and consulted and are listed in the acknowledgements.

What follows is a picture in the making. Given the timescale and scope of this project it is necessarily a broad and general study which identifies overall themes and issues. It cannot hope to offer a complete historiography and the Reference section is indicative rather than comprehensive. It does not provide detail on all historical caveats and nuances; as such there are omissions. The models outlined in Chapter 3 represent an initial sifting of the material and seek to shed light on the overall historical picture and its resonance for policy-makers and practitioners today.

## 2 Historical overview

Ownership has not been a universal presence, but arose through historical development. The specific forms it has taken have constantly changed throughout history and this is likely to continue into the future. The development and justification of ownership has revolved around a number of central issues, including 'Rights, needs, labouring capacities, divine injunction, efficiency, harmony, liberty and justice' (Reeve, 1986, p. 75). Many of these historical explanations still resonate today and connect to our concern with 'community and mutual ownership'. Here we chart the historical development of community and mutual ownership in relation to other, often more dominant, forms of ownership. Locating this history within mainstream historical development avoids the danger of marginalising it.

Historical debates about human existence have been tied to contested notions of ownership over the land and its resources. Understandings of ownership and belonging have become central to debates on the changing human condition. Many religions, which themselves appropriated ideas from pagans, have an idea of a 'golden age' pre-dating modern ideas of ownership. The Bible claimed that God gave the world to humanity in general. Whether or not this Garden of Eden constituted an early form of collective ownership, in which everything was held in common, has been the cause of much disagreement. Ownership had to develop over time – according to this view it was neither natural nor a given aspect of human existence. Such ideas have provided sustenance for visionaries keen to re-make practices of ownership, from radical initiatives of the seventeenth century to contemporary community land trust schemes. Other biblical references have also bolstered these claims, such as that found in Leviticus 25, which invoked the 'jubilee' whereby, every 50 years, land was re-distributed back to its original dispersed owners, thus helping to avoid the dangers of large concentrations of ownership (Chase, 1990). Critics of this view have argued that such religiously inspired claims

do not signify common stewardship or a form of 'primitive communism' but serve a mythical function based on collective longing. They have pointed to territoriality among animals, identified forms of ownership in all human societies and claimed that (private) property is a universal force (Pipes, 1999, p. 5). But in arguing for the essential continuity of private property, the definition of ownership is being broadened considerably, almost to the level of being meaningless.

### Early history

Ownership over land, personal possessions, tools and weapons was closely tied to the development of early population groups. The introduction of agriculture, as opposed to hunter-gatherer societies, is often taken to be a moment in which ownership of specific areas of land evolved. This was not necessarily a distinct 'stage' of development in early Britain and agriculture existed alongside hunting, gathering and other activities. Mining for flints, as well as the building of sacred sites, burial grounds and temples, suggest the existence of laws and possibly an early priesthood which established rights of ownership over these sites. Hill forts, such as that at Cissbury Ring near Worthing, point to the importance of invasion and war in establishing and re-establishing ownership over land. Tribal ownership was widespread, with private ownership being limited to personal possessions such as tools, clothes and weapons. Land might be allotted for individual or family use but ownership would be temporary and tied into specific collective purposes, balancing individual, family and social needs. Celtic organisation was often quite hierarchical, and the ownership of cattle could confer status, but, again, there was a very restricted sense in which 'ownership' was exerted over the land. Celtic communities cultivated small fields and lynchets well into Roman times (for example, Morton, 1938; Denman, 1958; Kiernan, 1976; Cunliffe, 1988, 2005).

In the early years of the first millennium, the expanding Roman Empire affirmed the importance of conquest to the development of ownership rights. In theory, emperors appropriated land which was then leased back to tenants or given to loyal subjects and soldiers in the Roman army. This enabled taxes to be levied and helped the empire to establish control over vast geographical areas. Ownership could be bestowed as a favour to ensure obedience and authority and a means to generate an income. As the empire waned, these rights of ownership and control were increasingly challenged by those at the margins of the empire (Cunliffe, 1988; Salway, 2000).

The gradual emergence of more complex communities that traded with one another gave rise to a division of labour and merchants began to amass wealth. In time, a new 'ruling class' would organise a militia to protect their property, and rules would be developed to justify this ownership. Land itself increasingly became a private commodity that could be inherited, bought and sold, although examples of common land and collective production would endure. In this way the right to bear arms, secure justice and protect property were interrelated in their development. The origin of the state was, indeed, closely related to these roles and represented a response to emergent class relations (Engels, 1942).

From the middle of the fifth century, with the breakdown of the Roman Empire, Angle and Saxon invaders laid waste to many settlements and formed kingdoms in which clan ownership developed. Uncleared common lands existed alongside cultivated arable fields, some farmed by the free peasant, or 'ceorl', who was most prominent in the sixth and seventh centuries. 'Hides' of land could be owned individually but also worked co-operatively by sharing oxen and ploughing open fields. At a time when populations were dispersed across the countryside, co-operative arrangements could help to meet common needs. Ownership of land increased as monarchs began to distribute 'manors' to their supporters and to the Church following the conversion to Christianity from AD 597. Early monasteries were established so that clerics could develop their work in the countryside and these would later expand into much more

powerful land-owning organisations. By the tenth century, groups of dependent tenants were a feature of many estates. Prior to the Norman Conquest in 1066, England had been unified under a single monarch with rights of property increasingly protected. An expansion of population and trade stimulated the development of towns (Campbell, John and Wormald, 1991; Pipes, 1999; Blair, 2000, 2003; Hindley, 2006).

## Feudalism

With the Norman invasion William the Conqueror appropriated all land which was to be held by tenants on feudal terms. He ordered the compilation of what came to be called the Domesday Book in order to survey the extent and value of ownership for the purposes of tax collection: it was claimed that 'there was no single hide nor a yard of land, nor indeed one ox nor one cow nor one pig which was left out' – including land, buildings, woodland, animals, machinery and fishing waters. In future years this would give rise to arguments about a 'Norman Yoke' which shattered the image of a wide-ranging Anglo-Saxon distribution of ownership and concentrated it in the hands of William's lords. This claim would inspire radical ideas right into the nineteenth century (Hill, 1958; Domesday Book Online, 2010).

As ownership was vested in lords, a feudal system developed. Feudalism covers a wide variety of practices over a long time span but, for the majority of the population, the crucial experience revolved around the power of the lord over his estate. In order for lands to be exploited effectively, a measure of unequal reciprocity had to develop. Although lords might exert absolute and arbitrary power, they also depended upon effectively harnessing the labour and skills of their dependent peasants. These interdependent relations enabled the poor to extract gains, for instance, in the form of land which they could work for themselves in return for labouring on estate and Church property. By the thirteenth century, there had been some development of individual landed property and Norman rulers would gradually become subject to the powers of property-owning commoners. The entanglements and arguments which resulted from disputes over

ownership were closely related to the development of common law and the proliferation of a legal profession (Schlatter, 1951; Macfarlane, 1978).

The Church became a powerful institution which owned considerable amounts of land and property. Although clerics served their lords, Christian doctrine helped to establish a set of social expectations and constraints in relation to the rights and responsibilities of property ownership, which involved both stewardship and accountability to divine authority. Gratian's *Decretum*, a highly significant twelfth-century legal document, held that the origins of private property arose from sin and iniquity. Christians used the idea of original communal property, given by God to all, in justifying charitable acts and giving alms to the poor. Charitable ownership of such assets as land and buildings was established, usually as a result of endowments made by wealthy individuals. Such bequests were often the result of a desire to prove one's personal worth to God and to fulfil one's Christian duty to help the poor but may have served more earthly and prosaic interests as well. The education and care of those 'in need' were key motivations that resulted in charitable ownership of hospitals, almshouses and schools. The case for charity was also integrated into daily life. Augustine developed the notion of the 'just price' in the sixth century, but it would not become prominent for another 500 years, when it was credited to Albertus Magnus and St Thomas Aquinas. There were many interpretations of a fair exchange but the idea in part depended upon enabling the poor to live reasonably within a given social hierarchy. Ownership brought social duties and responsibilities so that prices could be agreed according to labour and other necessary costs that were associated with the

## Case study: Guilds

Medieval craft guilds are generally considered to have developed in England during the twelfth century. They established norms and standards in terms of prices, employment, apprenticeships and sickness benefits, and

also carried out charitable work. Membership of a guild could confer significant benefits. The more wealthy merchant guilds attempted to limit excessive taxation and control commerce and trade, by ensuring that a travelling merchant was not dispossessed of his goods by local leaders. Some English merchant guilds developed into local government, and guild members became involved in civic affairs. Guilds came to dominate manufacturing, marketing and trade in many areas. Larger guilds also owned property that still exists today as in the guildhalls that can be found in places such as Windsor and Cambridge.

Many guilds were deeply religious and members viewed them as a collective vehicle for salvation and eternal redemption. For example, the livery companies of London, started in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were a means of helping members through the perceived dangers of purgatory. Alongside work, religion and politics, guilds also fulfilled a fraternal function and were involved in religious festivals and social occasions. Guilds could serve as a form of extended family, especially after the Black Death, which decimated many families.

Guilds would endure into the nineteenth century, although by then they had declined considerably. In the late eighteenth century the political economist Adam Smith had complained of their 'usurped privileges' and argued that they inhibited 'free competition' (Smith, 1776, p. 227). Critics of industrial capitalism would also come to question the way in which guilds embedded finely graded hierarchical relationships and managed labour markets to the detriment of their subordinates. In a changing social and economic context guilds could also become inward looking and focused on fighting other guilds for a declining territory – a problem that would be faced by some mutual organisations in the twentieth century (Thrupp, 1942, 1989; Richardson, 2008).

production of a given commodity. The right of the poor to subsistence in times of famine was widely accepted and, in some cases, this even justified the poor appropriating what they needed. Medieval guilds would also attempt to control production and trade through a range of regulatory mechanisms (de Roover, 1958; Claeys, 1987).

Religious sects were to challenge what they perceived to be watered-down Christianity. They demanded a return to the original state of common property; for example, across Europe, Manicheans, Albigensians, Vaudois and Lollards each propagated this idea. The Lollards, under the sway of the ideas of the Oxford theologian John Wyclif (1324–84), challenged the perceived extravagance of church wealth and argued that ‘dominion is of grace’ and that power should reside with God rather than in worldly goods which the Church was seen to be amassing. The distribution of his vernacular Bible would enable wider constituencies to participate in such debates and ‘poor priests’ were sent out to preach this popular message although, after a failed rebellion in 1414, the Lollards were forced to organise through informal underground networks.

The ideas of the Lollards had also been influential during the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, which was not just a response to the punitive poll tax but was fought more generally around issues of ownership and control. After the Black Death (1348–50) peasants had benefited from the shortage of labour and improved conditions resulted. But many feared the loss of land granted to them and resented having to work on Church land. They reacted against being tied to particular estates: some attempted to move in search of better conditions, thus potentially upsetting the feudal balance. Rebels demanded the end of serfdom, the confiscation of Church land and the removal of wage and other restrictions on labourers. In their demonstrations, under Wat Tyler and John Ball, they purposely destroyed land registers and protested against serfdom, tithes and game laws. Demonstrators were active across much of southern England including Cambridgeshire, Essex, Herefordshire, Kent, Norfolk, Somerset and Suffolk. Ultimately, the uprising was quashed by the full force of the

King, the leaders were executed and feudal powers were re-established. But the Peasants’ Revolt was indicative of widespread anger at the underlying relations and distribution of land ownership. It signalled a gradual ‘freeing’ of peasants which would, in time, mark the slow demise of the feudal system.

In the process of the breakdown of feudal relationships, ideas about ownership of the land and other natural resources would continue to surface in various guises. With the decline of feudalism came the increasing enclosure and ‘improvement’ of land for private purposes, which became an enduring area of contention. For example, Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) drew attention to the injustices of land enclosures which stole the people’s wealth and argued that private property was the cause of sin. More held that land should be common property and believed that, ‘... where nothing is private ... [men] seriously concern themselves with public affairs ... where everything belongs to everybody ... the individual will lack nothing for his private use ... Though no man has anything, yet all are rich’ (p. 238). Such ideas also fed into continuing rebellions against the enclosure of common land, such as that led by Robert Kett in 1549 when the city of Norwich was captured. Kett claimed that peasants were imprisoned by the dual forces of land ownership and state authority, stating that:

*Rivers of riches ran into the coffers of your landlords, while you are pair’d to the quick, and fed upon pease and oats like beasts. You are fleeced by these landlords for their private benefit, and as well kept under by the public burdens of State wherein while the richer sort favour themselves, ye are gnawn to the very bones.* (Kett 1549)

While Kett’s rebellion was put down and the leaders killed, it reflected a widespread dissatisfaction at the concentration of wealth in the hands of the rich at the expense of peasant proprietorship and the common ownership of land (Hilton and Ashton, 1984; Hanawalt, 1986; Fletcher and MacCulloch 1997; Hilton, 2003; Wood, 2007).

## Early modern period

New ideas about ownership emerged with the Reformation. The dissolution of monasteries in the sixteenth century marked a decline in property ownership by the Church and its redistribution to landlords. Gradually, medieval constraints on property ownership were modified, for example, in arguments that augmenting the wealth of the community as a whole could confer social and political benefits. In the years following the English Civil War, property was again redistributed to landlords and notions of private property became more prominent. The growth of trade and larger settlements and increasing circulation of money accompanied the concentration of ownership of resources (Schlatter, 1951).

The tumultuous economic, religious and political contexts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, prior to the English Civil War, generated further radical ideas and practices relating to collective and common ownership. The Levellers became inspired with constitutional ideas and challenged the inequality of ownership in the Putney Debates of 1647. Although they wished to 'set all things straight', private property and 'natural rights' were still defended. Others would push this position further. The Anabaptist Ranter Abiezer Coppe looked forward to the overthrow of all forms of hierarchy and property. Ranters were highly spiritual and aimed to connect with God by forming a direct communion with the people. Other well-known examples were the Diggers and True Levellers who favoured common property. They had served in Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army, an experience which led Gerrard Winstanley, a cloth merchant, and others, to question emerging forms of ownership. Winstanley argued that the land had been created by God as a 'common treasury' and was not to be used for the benefit of private individuals. In 1649, at St George's Hill in Surrey, a small group symbolically occupied the land and proceeded to grow crops. They hoped to establish a model that might generate further experiments and ultimately transform society. Their actions were copied and adapted in many other settlements and their writings established an enduring vision that the land should be available for common use.

In *A Declaration from the Poor oppressed People of England, Directed To all that call themselves, or are called, Lords of Manors, through this Nation*, Winstanley complained that land had been appropriated through violence and theft:

*... the earth was not made purposely for you, to be Lords of it, and we to be your Slaves, Servants, and Beggars... For the power of inclosing Land, and owning Propriety, was brought into the Creation by your Ancestors by the Sword; which first did murder their fellow Creatures, Men, and after plunder or steal away their Land, and left this Land successively to you, their Children.* (Winstanley, 1649)

In *The Law of Freedom in a Platform* (1652), Winstanley would propose a community based upon a combination of individual and collective production. In the immediate aftermath of the English Revolution, however, there was a reaction against these ideas and persecution forced radical groups underground (Hill, 1975).

Theories of property and ownership were also developed in the seventeenth century, notably by John Locke, now considered a classic liberal thinker. His *Second Treatise of Government*, published in 1690, grappled with Christian notions of ownership of land and, although he claimed that God gave the earth to humanity in common, he downplayed social obligations and defended secular notions of private individual ownership which he conceived of as a 'natural right'. The origins of property lay in the labour of humans in making land and other resources productive. Exclusive ownership was considered to be necessary to the production of wealth. Originally, the accumulation of property had been limited by the amount that an individual could utilise productively:

*As much as anyone can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much by his labour he may fix a property in. Whatever is beyond this, is more than his share.* (Locke, 1988, p. 290)

'Enough and as good' property was to be available for others. This became increasingly

less possible with the concentration of ownership and Locke recognised the growing role of the state as a necessary evil to defend property rights: 'The great and *chief end*, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the *Preservation of their Property*' (Locke, 1988, pp. 350–1). These ideas on ownership were closely connected to the development of 'freedom'. Ownership of property came to be associated not only with possession but also those 'inalienable rights' with which people were 'naturally endowed', including one's life and liberty. Both radicals and conservatives would draw sustenance from these claims in future years.

Notwithstanding these changes, historical continuities were evident in informal traditions and customary experiences. After the seventeenth century, ideas of 'fair price' were increasingly marginalised, but persisted at a subterranean level and occasionally surfaced in times of famine. For example, E. P. Thompson identified a notion of 'moral economy' in eighteenth-century agrarian society, when rural labourers exercised certain rights and invoked notions of fairness. When faced with economic hardship, some farmers attempted to sell their produce abroad, but were prevented by groups who seized the produce and sold it at a fair price in the local market, returning the income to the farmer. Implicitly and explicitly such practices operated as a critique of emerging capitalist relations. Thompson also speculated that the moral economy continued to resonate in working-class organisations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and was lingered on for years in the bowels of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (Thompson, 1971, p. 136; 1975, 1976).

## Industrial revolution and capitalism

During the nineteenth century, ownership would be transformed with the development of an industrial capitalist society. Capitalism developed over many centuries and was predicated upon the break-up of feudal relations that had been dominated by the Church and landowners. The emergence of 'free' individuals who traded in a marketplace and developed new forms of factory production was achieved in a piecemeal fashion.

Certainly there was an active agrarian capitalism in operation by the eighteenth century, a period which also saw the early growth of industrial and urban spaces that would expand significantly over the following century. In the process, landed wealth fused with capitalist ownership to create new social formations. For centuries, colonial exploits had provided considerable capital to invest in infrastructure, agriculture and new forms of production such as textiles.

The enclosures of common land, which dated back to the medieval period, had greatly accelerated in the eighteenth century, and would be supported by acts of Parliament. Harnessing technical inventions and new forms of power, particularly steam, facilitated economic production and social relationships based on waged labour. Labourers would experience continuing bouts of deskilling and dispossession as some 'cottage' industries, notably weaving, were replaced by factory production. The spread of capitalist ownership was matched by a re-organisation of welfare, graphically evidenced by the 1834 Poor Law which abolished outdoor relief and instituted a draconian welfare regime based on workhouses (Thompson, 1968; Hobsbawm, 1969).

The introduction of capitalist social relations was a complex and continuously evolving process that would re-configure the nature of ownership and cause major social and economic dislocation. Indeed, the resulting social relationships could appear as a flagrant breach of personal and social expectations to those whose lives were being turned upside down. Radical and working-class movements emerged in response to this new situation and identified ownership as a pivotal issue. Land remained a crucial factor for many critics of industrialism. The influential radical schoolmaster, Thomas Spence, argued that making '...all the land ... the common stock or property of the parish' would render landlords extinct and transform them 'from nests of worthless devouring drones to families of wealthy active citizens' (Spence, 1982; Chase, 1988). By contrast the journalist and radical conservative campaigner, William Cobbett, eulogised a traditional image of the small, independent yeoman farmer but also viewed private property in contingent and partial terms. If families found

themselves destitute through no fault of their own, Cobbett argued for a return of 'the law of nature' in which 'men possess things in common' (Cobbett, 1829, letter 1). This was the moment when the French Revolution was impacting across Europe and it stimulated radical proposals as well as conservative reactions in relation to ownership. From these beginnings, a long set of contested debates about the nature of industrialism would develop (Williams, 1958; Thompson 1968).

Similar doubts occupied the mind of Robert Owen, an enlightened capitalist-turned-socialist who helped to establish communities on the land in Britain and America in the early nineteenth century. 'Villages of co-operation' were to provide a model for the re-making of human relations based on communal ownership. Although short-lived ventures, as with other such experiments of the early nineteenth century, these communities contributed to a radical ferment of ideas and practices that questioned prevailing ideas about ownership. Owenism not only looked to the past as a source of ideas but also embraced a sense of the potential that was being unleashed by new forms of power and social organisation. Harsh criticisms of the way in which industrialism was developing were accompanied by a recognition that new possibilities were emerging (Harrison, 1969; Claeys, 1987, 1989).

In fact, the first half of the nineteenth century was marked by a myriad of social and political experiments by marginalised communities searching for solutions to the economic and social crises they faced. In the late 1830s, a number of initiatives fused into the Chartist movement which fought for democratic political reform while retaining ideas of access to the land. The latter impulse found expression in the Chartist Land Plan, that aimed to settle individuals and families on smallholdings. Although political solutions were blocked, as the Chartists found to their cost, social and economic avenues gradually became available as successful forms of collective self-help were established to meet needs and assuage the effects of poverty, unemployment and exploitation. Co-operative and mutual associations pioneered new structures of ownership based on pooling individual shares that could be paid gradually over a period of time. These democratic local societies

were run by grounded visionaries who connected the detail of economic and organisational development to wider visions of economic and social change. Friendly societies enabled the poor to contribute to funeral, unemployment or sickness expenses, while co-operatives distributed unadulterated food at fair prices and building societies made it possible for a group of people to build themselves houses. Trade unions also emerged in the early nineteenth century, developing from a position of illegality but achieving a level of respectability by the middle of the century. Taken together, these forms of union enabled members to pool financial resources, property and labour. In doing so, they began the process of humanising harsh lives and fraught social relations. Such societies were initially most successful in the industrialising towns and cities where, after 1850, more regular forms of employment would develop. Mutual enterprises experienced almost uninterrupted growth so that, by the end of the century, the co-operative movement could be described as a 'state within a state'. Working men's clubs had also been formed across the country, many of which federated into the Club and Institute Union, formed by Revd Henry Solly

### Case study: Early growth of co-operative societies

From the late eighteenth century there were many experiments in co-operative production, consumption and agriculture. But it was not until 1844 that the first successful model was created by the Rochdale Pioneers when a group of weavers began selling unadulterated food in contrast to other shopkeepers who, for example, regularly added chalk to flour. The dividend enabled profits to be returned to members according to their purchases. In this way they established a stable organisation which aligned self-interest with common purposes and collective growth. Co-operatives thus built trust among their members. In some co-operatives, women were able to join in their own right and the Pioneers would pay the dividend to women. The attention to detail also connected to

larger purposes and visions. For example, the Objects of the Pioneers stated their aim to 're-arrange the powers of production, distribution, education, and government, or in other words to establish a self-supporting home colony of united interests'. Self-help and social change went hand-in-hand. They devoted 2½ per cent of their profits to educational purposes including libraries, reading rooms, classes and laboratories. Co-operative development was to depend on the education of members themselves – this was their key resource. Leaders were elected democratically by members; irrespective of shareholdings, all had only one vote. In this way, power in co-operatives was shifted from capital, which received fixed returns, to members who wielded collective control.

After the mid-nineteenth century, co-operative and mutual enterprises would expand exponentially; by the early twentieth century there were 1,500 independent co-operative societies. As a whole the 'co-op' became Britain's most popular retailer, backed up by a lifelong loyalty among members. Nor had the hopes of widespread social and economic transformation dissipated; these movements gave rise to confident claims that all institutions, the whole of society, could be re-made along democratic co-operative lines in which the consumers owned and controlled resources. The co-op utilised a branch structure and developed a vertically integrated chain of businesses to great effect. It developed a highly innovative business organisation engaged in production with a chain of factories, transport networks – including international shipping – wholesaling through the Co-operative Wholesale Society, banking through the Co-operative Bank, insurance through the Co-operative Insurance Society, agriculture and other business operations. This was achieved through aggregating the buying power of individual consumers into societies that in turn federated with one another – for example, Scotland had its own wholesale society. At the base of this structure was the individual member who shopped at the co-op.

in 1862. Their early philanthropic aims included education and political representation, and they eschewed alcohol. This gradually changed as clubs evolved into social organisations (Cole, 1944; Price, 1958; Bonner, 1961; Gosden, 1961, 1973; Birchall, 1994; Cordery, 2003; Chase, 2007).

In addition to self-help, charitable means of 'helping others' also grew significantly. In the eighteenth century, voluntary hospitals were established and frequently operated as charitable organisations. During the nineteenth century, the number of charities multiplied in the face of increased levels of visible hardship. Reforming the character of the working classes in order to foster independence and respectability became a growing preoccupation of the churches and local elites, whose philanthropy rewarded the 'deserving poor' and served as a means of regulating labour. However, the way in which charitable work was carried out on the ground could vary considerably. Charity offered middle-class women, in particular, a way of engaging with public activity, and it has been estimated that, by the end of the nineteenth century, half a million women were regularly involved in some form of charitable work. Some charities developed through a branch structure and derived income from subscriptions and donations (Owen, 1965; Alvey, 1995).

The problems of industrial capitalism increased in scale as the century progressed. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a growing concern about the moral and social effects of what Arnold Toynbee termed the 'industrial revolution'. Poverty, inequality and exploitation all exercised an increasing number of concerned middle-class commentators. They met the burgeoning working-class movement with a mixture of fear and respect. From the 1880s, social concerns were exacerbated by the development of militant trade unionism and openly socialist movements, which further questioned structures of ownership. The gradual enfranchisement of wider sections of the population, from 1867, had led to calls to 'educate our new masters', a phase commonly attributed to Robert Lowe. Moreover, the voluntary impulse was to come under increasing scrutiny in the early twentieth century. Critics would argue that the voluntary effort of charitable organisations was inadequate

to address the needs of the poor, who were also not always in a position to make the required financial contribution to mutual organisations.

New developments in ownership would become apparent in the twentieth century. Capitalism had expanded significantly through the proliferation of the joint-stock company. Control and ownership of industry were becoming separate in large integrated companies (Berle and Means, 1968; Gamble and Kelly, 1996). In the place of owners, managers were appointed to run companies. Their primary focus became the extraction of value for shareholders, and investments were increasingly made on financial grounds alone. In addition, the greatly expanding imperialist state imposed British ownership over considerable swathes of the globe as part of the late-nineteenth-century 'scramble for Africa' and other colonial adventures.

Mounting social problems and the poor health of working people, exposed during the Boer War (1899–1902), contributed to a growing body of opinion which supported greater state action. In politics, the Liberal governments after 1906 introduced social insurance, pensions, school meals and other welfare measures; these represented a shift from the liberal individualism of the nineteenth century to a sense of collectivism and 'new liberalism' of the early twentieth. Although these reforms did not intentionally inhibit voluntary effort, this was, in part, the effect they had, and community and mutual modes of thought and practice would be gradually marginalised. Welfare legislation also connected to lively debates about the role of the state among socialists: in opposition to the revolutionary thinking of groups such as the Social Democratic Federation, the 'Fabians' had adopted a more incremental mode of change and became interested in efficiency and planning in social and economic life (Harris, 1993). But this was actively debated by co-operators as well as anarchists, such as Peter Kropotkin, who were wary of encroaching state action (Kropotkin, 1987/1902).

Moreover, the industrial workplace was also a strongly contested field during the inter-war years, epitomised by the 1926 General Strike, and one aspect of this was a resurgence of interest in workers' control of industry. For

example, translating the medieval system of guilds to modern conditions became a preoccupation of the National Guilds League, formed in 1915. Guild socialists argued for a greater level of workers' control of industry through trade-based guilds, as outlined in books by G. D. H. Cole, including *Self-Government in Industry* (1917) and *Guild Socialism Restated* (1920). In addition, the distribution of land ownership continued to exercise Liberals in the early twentieth century. For example, Winston Churchill, as a Liberal, would propose taxes on the 'unearned increment' of landed wealth where the owner simply sat on derelict or unused land but benefited from the uplift in value created by others:

*A portion, in some cases the whole, of every benefit which is laboriously acquired by the community is represented in the land value, and finds its way automatically into the landlord's pocket.* (Churchill, 1909)

Churchill here picked up on a common theme – that absolute rights of ownership should be limited according to public need and the common good. This approach sought to divorce ownership of land from ownership of other forms of activity such as housing. It fed into a number of continuing small-scale experiments on the land, some of which were supported with legislation. Notably, co-partnership and the garden city movement attempted to bring investment and membership together in the construction of new housing (Buder, 1990; Meacham, 1999).

Despite the constraints on these ideals, co-operative and voluntary principles were extended to many new areas of life. In education, the Workers' Educational Association was established by a former co-operative employee, Albert Mansbridge, as a mutual network of learners who regulated themselves democratically and gained state funding for university-level seminar groups. Residential colleges were established for working people, most notably Ruskin College, as well as labour colleges which offered more politicised forms of adult education. Although leisure became increasingly commercialised and professionalised, musical, theatrical and sports clubs would proliferate across the country. The

co-op would also organise cultural groups and venture into film, theatre and even pageants that filled Wembley Stadium. However, this profusion of voluntary, charitable and co-operative activity was not to be incorporated into initiatives relating to ownership in the aftermath of the Second World War (Williams 1977; Roberts, 2003; Wilson and Woodin, 2003; Woodin, 2007).

## Post-1945

The context of the Second World War and the widespread impetus for significant social democratic transformation to address the 'five giants' of 'Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness', dominated debates about post-war society. William Beveridge's *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942) is typically presented as a key document leading to the 'welfare state', a phrase which came into widespread use after 1945. Beveridge was a liberal who advocated that services should provide a 'national minimum' but also actively supported voluntarism and did not foresee the role that state would come to play. One of three 'guiding principles', heavily gendered, was that 'social security must be achieved by co-operation between the state and the individual':

*The State should not stifle incentive, opportunity, responsibility; in establishing a national minimum it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than that minimum for himself and his family.* (Beveridge, 1942, pp. 6–7)

The state was to be the central player in the reconstruction of the post-war world. The years after 1945 until the 1970s are often referred to as a period of political 'consensus' in terms of managing a mixed economy through both state and private means. There had been growing calls to regulate and plan capitalism during the inter-war years but now ownership solutions came to the fore in order to help avoid economic depression and provide universal services. Labour governments established social services and the National Health Service, which had the effect of taking voluntary hospitals into state ownership. As a result, state welfare

agencies took on many of the roles previously played by charities – this was one answer to the unevenness and lack of co-ordination within the voluntary system which had depended upon legacies and donations as opposed to a universal contributory system (Abel-Smith, 1964; Gorsky and Mohan, 2001; Judt, 2007).

The nationalisation of 'natural monopolies' was also a feature of the post-1945 period and led to state control of what would later come to be called 'the commanding heights' of the economy, for instance, telecommunications, railways, electricity, water and gas, although other sectors, such as the steel industry, would be the cause of ongoing division and debate. This was referred to as 'common ownership' on behalf of the people as a whole. Nationalised industries were to be run in the 'public interest' and, in many cases, came to be perceived as 'public services' rather than businesses. Indeed, many of these industries would struggle in the face of the dismantling of the empire and the growing power of America and other European nations such as France and Germany. In some cases the state took on what were failing industries and, for a number of years, it was argued by sympathisers that they were being run efficiently. Critics on the right tended to emphasise that they represented an unfair form of competition for private industry which, if given the chance, would operate them more productively. Certain sections of the left also came to argue that this form of nationalisation was too centrally driven and merely mimicked capitalist industry rather than developing popular participation (Robson, 1960; Sked and Cook, 1993).

Further challenges and opportunities for community and mutual ownership would become apparent as the post-war consensus came under strain in the late 1960s and 1970s. Critics from both left and right questioned the post-war settlement. Major inroads against absolute poverty had been made but, by the late 1960s, it was being 're-discovered' in new guises. The radicalised generation of the late 1960s developed an interest in the idea of alternatives and libertarian experiments which would have a widespread influence in the coming years. Feminist groups pursued a number of social, self-help and political objectives, such as alternative living experiments

and childcare co-operatives, based on a mixture of social engagement and an expanding sense of personal expression and entitlement. Self-help was often connected to extracting benefits from the state and transforming public services along more democratic and accountable lines. The idea of being 'in and against the state' became popular and a 'vision of democratic forms of social ownership' flared up in the imaginations of activists, for example, devolving resources and power from welfare services to staff and the public – ideas that would briefly find a home in the radical years of the Greater London Council during the 1980s (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980; Rowbotham, 1983; Wainwright, 2003).

The 1960s and 1970s also witnessed the growth of environmental ideas and 'green' movements concerned to conserve and protect the world's natural resources such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. The *Limits to Growth*, commissioned by the Club of Rome in the early 1970s, argued that increasing levels of population would exhaust the world's finite resources. It would not be possible to produce limitless wealth. This represented a fundamental challenge to the assumptions of capitalist accumulation and creation of wealth. It focused attention on systematic and global approaches as well as longer-term historical trends that have become a familiar part of contemporary debates on climate change. The approach would challenge many post-enlightenment assumptions on ownership which placed human activity in sharp contrast to nature.

However, these concerns would not command widespread attention for decades. The political trend to the right in the 1980s re-focused upon other issues and reflected a number of shifts in relation to ownership. State 'common ownership' was undermined by the privatisation of utilities such as trains, telecommunications, gas and electricity which were sold off at a discount and dissipated into individual and institutional share ownership. For a time the idea of a 'share-owning democracy' received attention and a greater number of people became shareholders, although this was a short-lived phenomenon as the shares tended to be bought up by institutional investors. Margaret Thatcher's governments were also keen

to lift restraints on the ownership of private capital and 'roll back the frontiers of the state' in order to encourage competition and deregulation across society. This facilitated the further 'financialisation' of British capitalism and encouraged financial capital to play a greater role. At the same time regulatory activity was increasing in scope through the strategic use of 'quangos'. As state activity was reconfigured, the debate between 'public' and 'private' was often not subtle enough to capture the complexities of 'a strong state and a free market' (Gamble, 1994; Hutton, 1995).

These developments also contributed to a process of globalisation in which powerful transnational corporations would actively influence governments to pursue neo-liberal market policies and reduce the 'social wage' and public benefits which were perceived to be a drain on resources. From 1989, mutual organisations received a critical blow with the demutualisation of many building societies. At the same time, public service hierarchical organisations have increasingly concerned themselves with the efficient 'delivery' of services in order to meet targets, maximise efficiency and gain investment. In the process the social purpose and ability of the public to influence those services has become a hotly contested issue. Certain geographical locations have suffered more than others and it is often in those areas most affected that 'community ownership' may be seen as a panacea to a range of problems that have causes elsewhere.

## Conclusion

Contemporary forms of ownership took a long time to develop. Each historical phase outlined above reveals a wide array of community and mutual ownership:

- Collective and common ownership was widespread in many early societies, including tribal organisation and the communal use of land. The meaning of 'ownership' here implied a temporary right of access and use rather than absolute control or an authority to ignore wider communal needs. Appropriation, war and invasion by Romans and Anglo-Saxons helped to establish rights of ownership. Legal

ownership of land and resources that could be traded and inherited would emerge over time, yet, in some historical instances, ownership could remain diffused and widespread. A particular type of communal ownership evolved in monasteries under the framework of the Church. Overall, considerable variations in land ownership persisted for centuries.

- The theory of feudal relations hid many complexities of ownership and belonging. The dominion of the lord over his estate was tempered by the availability of common and peasant-cultivated tracts of land as well as by notions of stewardship, charity and responsibility to the poor. The poor themselves also challenged what they perceived to be inequitable forms of ownership and increased their freedom of movement and ownership of land where possible – at times this erupted into open rebellion.
- During the early modern period, ideas of freedom and property went hand in hand with the gradual enclosure of common land as well as radical proposals for common and widely distributed ownership of land.
- The spread of capitalism and industrialism was based on the ownership of capital that could be invested in industrial and other speculative concerns. One response to the harsh conditions that ensued was the growth of autonomous charitable and mutual organisations, many of which utilised the ownership of capital and land for collective and mutual benefit. This represented an application of the notion of ‘the commons’ to a changed historical context. However, as the scale of social problems grew, calls for state intervention would become more prominent by the early twentieth century.
- The role of charitable and co-operative forms of ownership was to be undercut, especially after 1945 with the development of ‘common ownership’ and ‘public services’ as a way of meeting social and economic needs. But, from the 1970s, the faith in ‘public ownership’

would itself be undermined by criticisms that the state was unresponsive to public needs and an ineffective manager of resources. The continuing growth of community and mutual ownership in a number of areas was marginal to mainstream developments but has received a growing recognition in a number of areas.

By the twenty-first century, social and economic changes had created a situation where public services had been stripped back while the dominance of the capitalist firm had been enhanced. In the pursuit of shareholder value, other concerns and priorities have been disregarded. Even a company such as Cadbury, with a long local history in the West Midlands, succumbed to a hostile take-over bid – the fiduciary duty to shareholders conflicting directly with a long-term sense of social responsibility to employees and communities. Structures of ownership may not always be visible or significant, yet, at particular historical moments, they are crucial.

The concentration of land ownership and of other assets has been a constant historical theme. Through conquest, war, enclosure and capital accumulation, common forms of ownership were gradually whittled away until relatively few people controlled the vast majority of resources. The long-term consequences of this are not yet clear. The reduction in spaces and resources commonly available, and the prescription of ‘the commons’, is an indicator of growing inequality which has lessened the capacity available for improving society as a whole. In addition, the contraction of the commons has now extended across international borders and inequality between countries has become marked. But it is a process that may be unsustainable in the long term. Unless the accumulation of ownership is halted, then further collapses, on a much greater scale than the recent credit crunch, may be expected in the future. There are some signs of a realisation that alternative forms of ownership offer a way out of this impasse (Gates, 1998; Jackson, 2009; Blond, 2009; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Mulgan, 2010). A limited number of companies have transformed themselves into community interest companies, of which there

are approximately 900 with a turnover of £300m (NCVO, 2009). Recent proposals have even suggested that all companies might eventually transform themselves into social enterprises (Blond, 2009) and it has been advocated that:

*It's not only the right thing to do morally, it's also a good thing to do for business. You have incredible intelligence from people at all different levels of an organisation and if you can really build their loyalty and their motivation for the benefit of the company, then you will have a market advantage...* (Holbrook, 2010)

Although this development is not likely to occur in the short term, history does offer resources for hope and understanding.

This report presents some broad-based historical changes in the nature of community and mutual ownership. But it would be a mistake to see this as inevitable at all stages, whether negatively, as with the inexorable destruction of the commons or, more positively, with the rise of parliamentary democracy. Indeed, if we focus on any particular period of history it is possible to identify countervailing forces to the dominant developments outlined above. In addition, there is currently a wariness of grand schemes of unrestrained capitalism and state-directed socialism, both of which have paid limited attention to popular participation and ownership. The contemporary historical juncture is marked by a search for alternatives that can combine democratic control, economic efficiency and social justice. This is no small task. The next section of this report identifies a means for the wider dissemination and discussion of these historical transformations in relation to current debates on community and mutual ownership.

# 3 Models of community and mutual ownership

The diversity and long history of ownership mean that community and mutual forms cannot be charted in a straightforward way. As already stated, it is not a neat category with crystal clear meaning but rather a mechanism to identify the broad historical terrain of ownership. Based on the foregoing historical narrative, we outline five models of ownership which might be characterised as ‘community and mutual’ in one sense or another: common and customary; community; co-operative and mutual; charitable; and municipal and state ownership. Some of these models bundle together a wide range of

ideas and practices which are still in constant flux. Each of them is summarised in Table 1.

## Common and customary ownership

The existence of common land is in some ways a residual category of ownership which relates back to a manorial and feudal organisation of society. In the sense of common implying ‘no ownership’, it could also be considered an original form from which other variants of ownership derived. ‘Rights in common’ have been held by groups of people, in some cases benefiting

Table 1. Models of community and mutual ownership

	Form of ownership	Purpose/drivers	Scale	Control and democracy	Timeline
<b>Common and customary ownership</b>	May be ‘common’ with no owners and rights in common established by custom or law. Assets owned by individuals/groups but which allow wider access and use, e.g. parks, village greens, national parks	Access to land, use rights to land owned by others. Economic and social purposes. Contemporary forms from late c19 to provide access to common heritage and recreation. Strong feelings of ownership	Essential to the livelihood of the bulk of the population for centuries. Much reduced since c18. Still current, e.g. national and public parks, 2,300 sq miles of common land (England and Wales 2007)	Legal ownership often separate from use rights which were established through practice and precedent. Now regulated by law. Volunteers may have a role in managing	Dates from early human existence, especially manorial organisation. Residual form of ownership but still significant. Recent changes in ‘right to roam’
<b>Community ownership</b>	Eclectic. Small-scale local ownership e.g. allotments, as well as larger-scale projects, e.g. development trusts. Range of community initiatives, e.g. Owenites, Chartists, settlements. Also short-lived and individual ownership in particular contexts	Self-help groups, community development, alternative living and regeneration. May meet specific individual and/or collective needs as well as acting as alternatives	Community groups by far the most numerous form of organisation but generally small-scale. c21: over 600,000 informal organisations	Informal control, often by small groups within communities. Participation in community development and charities	Long history of informal groupings which met for social, political, self-help reasons. Communal living from early population groups to the present

*Continued on p. 24*

<b>Co-operative and mutual ownership</b>	Aggregated individual ownership in collective, voluntary and democratic, e.g. consumer, worker, housing and agricultural co-ops; building and friendly societies; football supporters' trusts, employee ownership	Self-help, meeting members' needs, based on values, e.g. co-operative statement of identity. Some distribution of dividends to members and/or collective purposes	Highly significant from late c19 and early c20. By 1940s membership of friendly societies about 14m and co-ops 8m. Total mutual membership 59m and over 23m individuals (2009)	Direct member control in smaller societies; larger mutuals with professional staff and representative democracy. Members may be workers, farmers, consumers, tenants and others	Older and larger organisations from c19 as well as many newer forms. Legal recognition from mid-c19. Decline in c20 but recent renewal
<b>Charitable ownership</b>	Ownership by charitable or voluntary organisation, often with asset lock. May be on behalf of a wider community and related to a particular issue or related to parent business, e.g. charities, foundation, welfare and educational initiatives	To support those in need. Religious, altruistic and social drivers. Increasingly being re-defined by the participation of beneficiaries themselves. Service provision and self-help. Philanthropy diversifying	Widespread form utilised by voluntary groups. Charitable status also popular because of tax situation. 171,000 general charities (2007)	Range from informal, small groups to structured and professional charities. Separation of trustees and beneficiaries (and staff). May involve deliberative democracy and participation	Long history – charity organised informally for millennia. Charity law from c16/c17
<b>Municipal and state ownership</b>	Local/central state ownership, e.g. public services, nationalised industries. Regulation of other forms of ownership	Deliver services, e.g. security, defence. Universalism and common good. State-run industry and utilities in c20	Significant areas include health, education, security, defence. Regulatory and legal role in relation to all forms of ownership	Indirect public control through periodic elections. State regulation and/or direct control. Scope for further democratic control and participation of users/public	Municipal experiments from late c19; growth of state services and nationalisation after 1945. Recent retreat from direct ownership.

from land that might be owned by others. For centuries, common land helped to facilitate economic survival and social networks through fairs, markets and other events. At times these relations surrounding ownership constituted a moral economy in which socially beneficial expectations about the use of property for common benefit were pervasive. These rights were not always enshrined in statute law and a constant battle of attrition took place over their boundaries, with many rival claims being pursued. The limited availability of land and resources meant that groups had to compete and co-operate in using it.

The prevailing historical transformation, for at least the last 500 years, has been the encroachment of direct private ownership over areas of once-common and 'waste' land. Parcelling up land into private ownership and

denying wider access left a deep scar in the mentality of the 'people' throughout history. The sense of injustice resulting from enclosure was considerable and fed into alternative practices, notably during the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century enclosure movement and highland clearances in Scotland are still seen as examples of illegitimate expropriation which reverberate widely. Allotments were intended to compensate for the loss of common land although only a limited amount would be made available for this purpose (Hill, 1975; Neeson, 1993; Mingay, 1997).

During the late nineteenth century, an interest in common land emerged from a number of sources. Henry George advocated replacing taxation with a single tax on land values which might help to make land 'common property' (George, 1880). Octavia

Hill, a social reformer, artist and teacher, was a co-founder of the National Trust in 1895 and supported the protection of historic buildings and open spaces so that they might be available to all: she asserted the common good over individual benefit. Enclosures of remaining common land in her own day added urgency to her cause as did fears about 'the short-sighted cupidity of one generation of rural commoners' who might receive a 'few coals at Christmas ... in lieu of Common rights':

*One quarter of the land in England is owned by only seven hundred and ten persons ... is there to pass away from our people the sense that they have any share in the soil of their native England? I think the sense of owning some spaces of it in common may be healthier for them than even the possession of small bits by individuals and certainly it now seems more feasible.*

(Hill, 1877, pp. 13–15)

The state had directly facilitated the enclosure of the commons but also came to play a wider role in the recognition and regulation of common land. Hill's proposals fed into this development, as did those of the Land Nationalisation Society established by Alfred Russel Wallace and others in 1881 following his pamphlet, *How to Nationalise the Land*. This argued that the land should be held by the state in trust for the people (Land Nationalisation Society, 1892).

The drastic decline in common land has given rise to continuing concerns to preserve what is left. It is apparent that this residual presence is nevertheless significant. Public parks, the national parks and many common spaces still exist in Britain, in addition to approximately 5,000 town and village greens in 2006. In total, there are approximately 2,300 square miles of common land in England and Wales. In many areas, concerned local people battle to get collectively used land re-designated as a village green in order to protect it from the ambitions of developers and secure its future use. In addition, in the year 2000, the 'right to roam' was introduced and it has been announced that public access will, in time, be granted to the whole British coastline. The state has been especially prominent in designating and managing larger areas of land such as

## Case study: The National Trust

The National Trust was founded in 1895 by the philanthropists Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley. Conservation was a major fin de siècle theme, which also found expression in the establishment of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877), the National Footpaths Preservation Society (1884), and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (1889). The organisation saw itself as a trustee for land and property made over to the nation for the use and enjoyment of its citizens. Octavia Hill had been the leading figure in a campaign to save London's Parliament Hill from property developers, and she believed that the same spirit of support 'would save many a lovely view or old ruin or manor-house from destruction and [preserve them] for the everlasting delight of thousands of the people of these islands' (Hill, 1894). The National Trust's initial acquisitions were a cliff overlooking the sea at Barmouth, north Wales, and several ancient and medieval remains. *The Times* commented with satisfaction that:

*The constitution of the National Trust is such as to render its purchases secure to the public for ever, and to place them even outside the control of municipal administration. No trees can be cut down except by legitimate forestry, no buildings can be erected, no hideous advertisements for tooth powder or cigarettes can disfigure the fair face of nature.* (The Times, 1901)

A National Trust Act of 1907, expertly drafted by Sir Robert Hunter, clarified the legal process and was followed by further legislation in 1937 which enabled the Trust to accept the gift of country houses, which, if accompanied with endowments in land or capital, would be free of tax. Such arrangements were beneficial to owners

facing difficulties in meeting the running costs for their estates and by relatives of former owners, now facing death duties.

By the mid-twentieth century, the National Trust had become a major landowner, benefiting from the munificence of a then-dwindling class of rich donors. Its interests now extended to sites dating from the industrial age, including mills and locomotive lines, as well as exercising protection over a number of entire villages. With these responsibilities came criticisms that the Trust was sometimes behaving more like a Whitehall department than a charity incorporated by Act of Parliament.

The significant growth in National Trust membership, from 226,200 in 1970 to 500,000 in 1975 and one million in 1981, accompanied a more commercial strategy. The Trust promoted sales of souvenirs, holiday lettings and consultancy work that provided a springboard for sustainability. The current membership totals around 3.5 million and visitor figures have been boosted by many further high-profile land and property acquisitions, including the Victorian Tyntesfield Estate in Somerset (2002) and the Liverpool childhood homes of former Beatles' band members John Lennon and Paul McCartney (2002). The Trust now cares for over 612,000 acres of land in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. A similar organisation, the National Trust of Scotland, has operated since 1931.

the national parks, coastline and other assets (Cabinet Office, 2010). Intervening in a distorted land market on behalf of those who do not have access to finance has been a further significant development. Recently, the Community Right to Buy in Scotland has given small communities, who register an interest, first refusal on the sale of land in order to bring it under community control in certain circumstances. Community land trusts have created a new form of common ownership upon which a range of activities, such as housing and workspaces, may take place (Worpole and Greenhalgh, 1995; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2006; Clayden, 2007).

The 'enclosure of the commons' has been a persistent historical development. Common land was eroded as part of agricultural 'improvements', sometimes to create landed estates for hunting and other social reasons. However, the residual status of common land should not blind us to the fact that it remains highly significant, both in terms of the amount of land over which some form of common ownership exists, as well as the subjective feelings of ownership connected to that land. It also offers the potential to nurture a sense of the common good by locking in the ownership and value of land for community benefit. In many of these historical examples, rights of common have been held over privately owned land, an indication of the contingent and provisional nature of ownership, as well as the ways in which ownership and use could be separated in order to enhance a notion of the common good. This perspective might be applied to all forms of property and ownership in order to scrutinise whether there should be limitations on the ways in which an asset can be used or be made available to a broader constituency. Building a sense of community ownership over resources could help to release new ideas and practices about how they might be put to best use.

## Community ownership

Community ownership is our most eclectic category of ownership, which encompasses a wide variety of informal groupings that merge into other models of ownership as well as the domestic and private sphere. Certainly at a local level, common, co-operative and mutual, and charitable ownership can be hard to distinguish. Community ownership includes the formation of new communities, initiatives located within geographical communities and communities of interest. Community ownership may refer to common and collective forms of ownership, as proposed in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), as well as widespread individual ownership, as in James Harrington's *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656). Both aimed to avoid the dangers of a single class of men controlling resources to which others had little access. This oscillation between individual and collective ownership is a recurrent theme.

Continuing examples of communal living have been a feature of human existence. Practical concerns for survival, the desire to live a 'good religious life' and broader impulses for social change have all motivated community living. For example, tribal populations lived communally with high levels of reciprocity. Within early monasteries Benedictine Rule contributed to communal forms of ownership which forbade personal ownership of possessions, bodies and even personal choices. Early Christian sects also established communities where they were able to devote themselves to God and live without the burdens of individual property ownership. The seventeenth century saw the establishment of new approaches and demands for communal living in the Digger communities that sprang up across south-east England during the seventeenth century.

In the nineteenth century, socialists would emphasise the development of more equal human relationships, based on common and dispersed patterns of ownership. Robert Owen and the Owenites established a number of 'villages of co-operation' as a means of collectively re-making and humanising society. Communities were established at Orbiston in Scotland, New Harmony in the USA, Queenwood in Hampshire as well as Ralahine (1831–33) in Ireland, where tenant farmers established successful democratic committees until the estate was lost to pay for gambling debts. In Owen's 'New Moral World' the social environment would form the basis for fairer human relationships. Communities struggled to live up to these high expectations and suffered from the paternalistic overtones of wealthy investors and donors as well as the difficulty in equalising relationships between men and women (Harrison, 1969; Garnett, 1972; Taylor, 1983; Claeys, 1989).

At a similar time the Chartists, a working-class movement which fought for democratic political change, established a land plan by which members subscribed capital through small regular payments with a view to settling on the land. Smallholdings were distributed democratically by lottery, irrespective of the amount of capital subscribed. However, it was closed in 1851 in the face of legal barriers and complaints that subscribers were being exploited. Over four

years, the National Land Company had 70,000 shareholders who provided the capital to buy over 1,000 acres with approximately 250 plots on five estates (Yeo, 1982; Chase, 1996).

Moreover, communities were set up for artistic, mystical, idealistic and practical reasons in order to pursue social purposes and alternative lifestyles. John Ruskin's St George's Fund, established in 1871, bought land that could be used for affordable housing and to help revive flagging rural industry. A number of initiatives took place, including one on the hills above Sheffield, which started as an allotment scheme but turned into a land colony, recalled by the socialist Edward Carpenter:

*about a dozen ... men calling themselves Communists, mostly great talkers, had joined together with the idea of establishing themselves on the land.*

While many of these experiments proved short-lived, they have helped to sustain an interest in more collective ways of living. A contemporary example includes Laurieston Hall community in Scotland (Bunker, Coates and How, 1990; Coates, 2001; Whitefield, 2004).

The interest in community building fed into the settlement movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To some extent these were charitable initiatives but also reflected a frustration with the limitations of charity. University settlements were established in such areas as the East End of London and Manchester in order to 'assert fellowship with the poor' and move away from 'old forms of benevolence' that 'were often patronising in character' and, when run on sectarian lines, fostered a 'party bitterness' (Barnett, 1898). These early conscious attempts at social mixing were partially successful and established forms of dialogue across social divides which have persisted to the present day. They also led to the formation of the federal body Bassac and stimulated the creation of settlements across the world (Freeman, 2002; Parker, 2009).

The early twentieth century witnessed the spread of co-operative ideas to community housing schemes. The way in which the co-operative movement helped to generate examples of community ownership illustrates how the historical

## Case study: Laurieston Hall – building a community

In spite of the difficulties of gaining access to the land, communities have been established in recent history. For example, during the 1960s and 1970s many collectives and co-operatives experimented with alternative ways of living. Laurieston Hall community was established in 1972 at Castle Douglas in Scotland. The Hall was bought by three members and eventually re-mortgaged so that all members could participate equally. They have experimented with communal domestic arrangements as well as co-operative living in smaller units. Agreement through consensus has given way to delegated decision-making with sub-groups based on trust and shared understanding. As far as possible they generate their own power and grow their own food, although the main source of income derives from catering for groups who visit for events and meetings. Members work on the community for half the week and may also work elsewhere. The mortgage is long paid off and the success of the group means that it is relatively stable with a low turnover of members, so the average age tends to be creeping upwards as a result.

(Coates, 2001; Whitefield, 2004)

models outlined here overlap somewhat. Ebenezer Howard initiated the garden city movement, symbolised by his book *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), which outlined the need to plan 'garden cities' by bringing together the best of town and country. Garden cities were developed in locations such as Letchworth, Hampstead, Bourneville, New Earswick and Port Sunlight, where communities were designed on a human scale and industry, public buildings and housing were zoned in a manner that sought to re-connect nature with the built environment (Buder, 1990; Meacham, 1999; Hardy, 2000).

The co-partnership movement, which brought together external investment and worker participation, also extended into housing with the formation of Ealing Tenants in 1901 and, in 1907, the Co-partnership Tenants' Housing Council. Between

1901 and 1912, 14 societies were formed in Brentham, Hampstead, Letchworth and elsewhere, and 6,595 dwellings were built for a population of about 35,000 people. Although collective identity grew in many societies, the fact that voting rights were allocated according to share ownership meant that private investors would eventually recoup the rising house values and were happy to see properties sold on the open market. Only in a few places, such as Keswick and Manchester, did tenants eventually gain control (Birchall, 1988).

After 1945, given the widespread destruction of urban residential areas, housing became a pressing issue. Following the 1946 New Towns Act, the expansion of Harlow, Peterlee, Milton Keynes and other towns would draw upon the earlier example of the garden cities in bringing together a range of interests. Initially, most housing and public assets, including shopping centres, were owned by local development corporations but, in many cases, ownership then passed to local government and eventually to private individuals and business. Colin Ward noted how such developments marginalised potential co-operative solutions:

*I vividly remember from the 1970s a visit from the chairman of one of the New Towns who sought my advice on the organisational details of tenant co-operatives, because he wanted to spare his corporation's tenants from the bureaucratic neglect that he knew would await them once ownership had been transferred to the local authority. His hopes came to nothing.*

(Ward, 1993, p. 103)

In the post-war world, on the whole, energies became focused on council houses built by the local state. Indeed, council housing had developed from the late nineteenth century but expanded after 1945, particularly under the Conservative governments of the 1950s. Co-ownership housing experiments were established from the 1960s, by which partial owner occupiers could claim tax relief and thus benefit from an alternative to renting. It tended to be a top-down initiative with extremely limited member development and little sense of ownership or meaningful participation in governance: '... it was often easier for both parties to lapse back into the mind-set of landlord and

tenant rather than to do the work of creating a new identity as co-owner and managing agent' (Conaty et al., 2003, p. 19). Even though a wave of successful housing co-operatives was established in the 1970s, it failed to attract the sustained support of governments that were keen to encourage individual private ownership.

The ensuing decades would witness a surge of interest in community development, notably development trusts (Wyler, 2009). An early twentieth-century predecessor was the Brynmawr experiment in 1930s south Wales, where two Quakers established community enterprises. Indeed, work camps had been established in many areas to carry out socially useful labour during the depressed inter-war period (Field, 2009). In 1935 the Quaker Land Settlement Association began to acquire land for market gardening, to be hired out to unemployed workers and was to continue in existence until 1982. During the 1970s and 1980s community development initiatives also fed a growing concern that communities should lead efforts at regeneration through acquiring assets and enterprise. For instance, the Coin Street community campaign led to the transformation of a derelict 13-acre site in south London into a 'mixed use neighbourhood' with co-operative homes, shops, galleries, restaurants, a park, sports facilities, family services and learning opportunities. Steve Wyler of the Development Trusts Association has also noted that community ownership can frequently 'transform the relationship with the local council', resulting in a growth of confidence and transfer of power: 'the approach need no longer be simply adversarial, or cap in hand, but rather becomes a negotiation around common goals, based on bringing something to the table' (Wyler, 2010). Development trusts reveal a range of ownership and governance options, in some cases involving member control and, in others, the participation of users and beneficiaries in the design of buildings and community resources. Today the Development Trusts Association boasts over 450 development trusts with a combined income over £260m and £490m of assets in community ownership. Sister organisations have also been established in Scotland and Wales (Peel and Bailey, 2003; Wyler, 2009, 2010).

Closely related are Community Land Trusts (CLTs) which have enabled communities to acquire assets and hold them in perpetuity for local benefit, providing housing, workspaces, allotments and other uses. Users of buildings and services pay rent but the value of the land and subsidies are locked in to community benefit. In part, these ideas were developed by Walter Segal, who championed self-build housing after 1945. In the early 1990s, CLTs were revived in Britain by crofters in Scotland who bought land collectively from absentee landlords, such as occurred on the Isle of Eigg. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 created the potential for Scottish communities to own resources under the Community Right to Buy initiative and, in 2008, a Community Land Trust Fund was established to facilitate community ownership. Though progress has not been as great as originally hoped for, it has been claimed that almost two-thirds of the western Islands and Highlands of Scotland are now under community ownership (Wyler, 2010; see also Wightman, 1996, 2009; Wightman *et al.*, 2003; Wightman and Perman, 2005).

Community land occupation developed not only in planned ways but through squatting, entrepreneurial and other ad hoc activity. After the First World War, 'plotlanders' built smallholdings in a number of areas, often located on marginal strips of land, which facilitated cheap holidays and provided a means of livelihood. For a mixture of speculative and visionary reasons, land was bought and sold off in plots. Plotlands were developed in the wake of agricultural decline dating back to the 1870s and the increase in colonial imports, as well as the growth of leisure time and available transport networks. A number of communities were established, mainly in south-east England, in such places as Canvey Island, Jaywick Sands and Dungeness. Many plotlanders had limited services and so organised them collectively. The unfinished nature of these estates generated considerable disquiet, especially within local authorities which attempted to undermine them. Councils gained increased powers under the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and were able to force many of the plotlands out of existence, although some, such as those at Laindon Hills in

Essex, persisted into the 1980s (Hardy and Ward, 1984; Ward, 1993, 2002; Crouch and Ward, 1997).

Beneath the radar of such visible community action, there have been a myriad of smaller instances of alternative communities and collective forms of ownership. Authors such as Colin Ward have illustrated how individuals and friends have utilised small spaces and a range of resources to build houses and grow food on smallholdings and allotments which offered a limited independence. These initiatives might lead to the development of community- and familial-based informal support networks organised around sharing and bartering. For example, in the nineteenth century, the growth of capitalist ownership had been a gradual development and, by the 1850s, much industry remained small scale (Samuel, 1977), while a 'ribbon' pattern of urban development made it possible to establish smallholdings or at least keep a pig in one's back yard. This provided a source of food and income as well as a link between rural and urban lives (Crouch and Ward, 1997).

Legislation could facilitate micro examples of community ownership. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 enabled county councils to provide smallholdings and allotments for rent. The 1919 Land Settlements (Facilities) Act was intended to provide smallholdings for returning servicemen, but the scheme ended in 1926 having failed to meet the needs of families, many of which found the holdings too small. Over time, local authorities would be forced to make provision for allotments and the 1925 Allotments Act stipulated that the Secretary of State must give permission before such land can be sold off by local government. From a high point of 1.4 million plots in 1943 the number declined to 500,000 in the 1970s and 297,000 in 1997. However, given the recent interest in allotments, along with the realisation of the importance of reducing food miles and increasing access to fresh food, this number might be expected to increase in coming years.

These localised initiatives have persisted on a relatively widespread scale although they are hard to detect in the historical record, given their private and domestic nature. Village halls, community centres and church halls all represent a further highly significant and ubiquitous form

of community ownership. In addition, the idea of communities buying shares in social and environmental businesses is opening up a new and significant avenue for community ownership. Examples include Fordhall Farm Community Land Initiative in Shropshire which raised over £500,000 by selling shares to people interested in seeing the farm continue as a going concern and as an educational and environmental resource. Local initiatives such as this have attracted people nationally and internationally who have bought shares out of a sense of connection to the area and a commitment to the ideals being expressed in practical ways. Energy co-operatives and community-owned wind farms are also being developed. The 'transition towns' movement has attempted to generate local solutions based on self-sufficiency and autonomy as a way of addressing the twin problems of climate change and the depletion of oil reserves. This promises to be a significant growth point and has encouraged local groups to think more systematically about the potential for sustainable development (Hopkins, 2008). In the wider rural economy, community ownership has enabled local residents to club together to save local shops, post offices and other services from closure. The Plunkett Foundation lists over 230 community-owned shops.

Clearly, community ownership is a diverse and potentially expanding area of activity. Autonomous community organisations and networks, which have arisen organically from the needs and concerns of local people, can be a highly effective way of meeting needs while also experimenting with new ideas and approaches. Community organising has done more than simply deliver social benefits through direct action. By fostering participation, individuals have also been empowered to pursue a range of educational, social and economic options that might not otherwise have been available. However, community ownership reveals a number of dilemmas. The contested nature of 'community' means that it may be used to refer to quite different levels of organisation, including informal networks and individuals as well as professional service delivery agencies which may come to be seen as 'representative' of a wider constituency. Today it is estimated that there are approximately 600,000 informal organisations and 104,000 sports

clubs, some of which may own or be involved in the ownership of resources (NCVO, 2009).

'Capacity' is often presented as a problem for community groups and the pressure to 'scale up' may present considerable barriers, especially in terms of the power of professional staff and bureaucratic agencies at the expense of community activists. In the past, growth has been fostered through federation and secondary networks which play a supporting function, such as the Development Trusts Association, National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Employee Ownership Association and Co-operativesUK, each of which offer various models of growth. But equally the question of capacity must be asked of funding agencies and local authorities: are they adequately flexible and skilled to create an enabling framework for community ownership? In some cases, relatively low levels of resources made available to communities can help to unlock creativity and inventiveness in meeting common needs. In other cases more sustained support and guidance may be appropriate. By contrast, over-regulation and a fear of experimentation by funding agencies – risk-averseness – can lead to unfulfilled potential.

## Co-operative and mutual ownership

Co-operative and mutual organisations are voluntary, democratic and autonomous enterprises, established to meet the needs of members who might comprise consumers in a consumer co-operative, tenants in a housing co-operative, farmers in an agricultural co-operative, and savers/borrowers in a building society or friendly society. The notion of collective self-help is crucial to co-operatives and mutuals.

Mutual projects can be identified in Roman times and beyond. Medieval guilds have also been classified as examples of co-operative organisations. However, as we understand them today, co-operative and mutual enterprises started to proliferate in the early nineteenth century, partly as a response to the emergent forces of industrialisation. Friendly societies were able to offer members access to saving, burial costs and support in times of unemployment and sickness. In 1844 the Rochdale Pioneers established the first successful consumer co-operative model based

upon selling 'unadulterated' food and distributing a dividend on purchases to members. Building societies helped members to build houses and provided savings accounts. Furthermore, feelings of ownership were expressed through the ethos of these bodies which emphasised low subscriptions, democratic member control and participation in the business. As a result, great loyalty and trust emerged, partly by virtue of the fact that early mutual enterprises were educational and social centres. Meeting members' needs could also be connected to ideas of re-organising society along mutual and co-operative lines.

From the 1830s and 1840s these societies stabilised and expanded their operations. They championed innovative business forms based upon federal and branch structures as well as, in the case of the co-op, vertically integrated operations including banking, insurance, production, agriculture and retailing. Among the friendly societies large affiliated orders emerged with a central office, districts and lodges: the Oddfellows, Foresters, Rechabites and Druids were all prominent. It has been estimated that there were 925,000 members of friendly societies in 1815, a figure which grew to about four million by 1872 and, by 1892, approximately 80 per cent of the seven million male industrial workers were members. Similarly, most early building societies had been 'terminating' once they had housed their members. From the 1840s the permanent building society came into being which offered savings accounts and, by 1860, there were over 2,750 societies in existence.

Co-operative and mutual enterprises would expand continuously throughout the nineteenth century when there was a need for their services. Economic growth during periods of stability provided working people with limited but significant resources to develop collective self-help enterprises. By the early twentieth century mutual enterprises would face increased challenges from both the state and from capitalist competitors. During the First World War, many companies engaged in profiteering and actively campaigned to increase tax upon co-operatives. In turn, this created a major stimulus to the creation of the Co-operative Party, which provided an element of political representation and would

help to bring the movement within the remit of the Labour Party. Although co-operative and mutual ideas were floated within this arena, the broader labour movement tended to be preoccupied with 'capturing the state' as a means to deliver social change. In addition, broadening state welfare provision would whittle away the position of friendly societies. The 1911 National Insurance Act gave them a role in the state scheme of national health insurance but their influence would gradually decrease. Even though membership of friendly societies rose to 14 million by the 1940s, decline would be dramatic after 1945 with the implementation of welfare reforms (Cole, 1944; Gosden, 1961, 1973; Yeo, 1988; Birchall, 1994; Gurney, 1995, 1999; Cordery, 2003).

During the post-Second World War period, many mutual and co-operative enterprises struggled to compete with flexible capitalist businesses which nurtured hire purchase and started to make credit and debt socially acceptable. The Co-op continued to be the top retailer and to command a significant market share of groceries, which increased into the 1950s. It would be stifled though by the rise of capitalist conglomerates that developed retailing on new sites and used their purchasing power to 'pile it high and sell it cheap'. The idea of membership also fell out of favour as mutual organisations struggled to understand their purpose in a rapidly changing world that was becoming increasingly prosperous. Some mutuals lost their sense of distinctive identity based on active member participation and new members dried up. In the absence of effective governance, small coteries of managers and elected officers wielded excessive control. Democratic organisations could stagnate in this context and leaders clung to their positions and managed their way into decline and stasis. A shrinking market share and the need to compete also led to many mergers and takeovers of failing mutual enterprises. At the turn of the twentieth century there were approximately 1,500 independent co-operative societies but, today, fewer than 20 remain and tend to be located in smaller towns and rural areas, serving a more affluent clientele than was once the case.

Throughout this period, co-operative and mutual initiatives sprang up in a number of new

areas. The radical ferment of the late 1960s fed into the formation of worker co-operatives, especially in wholefoods. A significant survival today is the wholesaler and distributor Suma, based in Elland near Leeds, with a turnover of £13.5m (Co-operativesUK, 2009). Responses to this groundswell included the 1976 Industrial Common Ownership Act, the Industrial Common Ownership Movement and the Scottish Co-operative Development Committee. In addition, there were a number of abortive attempts to turn around failing businesses through a co-operative model such as that at Meriden Motorcycles, a so-called 'Benn co-operative', after the Labour minister Tony Benn. Forcing mutual and co-operative ownership in a situation where there was limited co-operative understanding and experience, allied with a shaky business case, ran the risk of associating such initiatives with failure. However, following plans to rationalise Lucas Aerospace, Benn's support for the creative proposals from workers to develop 'socially useful production' illustrated the wide potential for broadly co-operative ideas (Wainwright and Elliot, 1982).

Mutual enterprises were to experience yet more difficulties in the 1990s. Legislation in the previous decade had been passed to enable building societies to compete with other financial organisations but also paved the way to their demutualisation into banks; the Abbey National, Halifax and Bradford and Bingley, among others, took this route. This development was fed by the interests of directors, the faith in the power of the market and the willingness of members, the unknowing owners of these businesses, to receive a windfall payment from the historic reserves that had been built up out of the loyalty of previous generations. Most were subsequently subject to further amalgamations with other banks. Prior to the credit crunch of 2008, Northern Rock was the only independent demutualised building society remaining (Hunt, 2009). Thus, across much of society, until recently, co-operative and mutual enterprises were viewed as a declining and residual business form.

These developments lent a sense of urgency to existing attempts to reformulate a distinctive co-operative and mutual purpose. A renewed set of values and principles was agreed by the

International Co-operative Alliance in the mid-1990s – a ‘Statement of Co-operative Identity’ which has served as a guide for co-operatives worldwide. It was followed by the Co-operative Commission in 2001 which highlighted the need for ‘successful co-operative businesses’ with the emphasis on all three words (Co-operative Commission, 2001). The Co-operative Bank has illustrated how ethical and co-operative policies could generate considerable customer support. At the centre of this vision has been the relationship with members and there have been many attempts to ‘make membership meaningful’ through the re-introduction of a dividend, events and social occasions and acting on member expectations. In turn, the idea of ‘mainstreaming’ co-operative values and principles gave rise to experiments in ‘new mutualism’ in areas such as leisure, education, care and health. The interconnection between new and old has generated synergies, despite differences in understanding and culture: community shops, football supporters’ trusts, leisure trusts (Simmons, 2003) and credit unions, to mention just a few examples, all now play a significant role in the representative body, Co-operatives UK. This renewal reflects the significance of maintaining co-operative and mutual ownership even when they appeared to be indistinct from other forms of business and ownership. The revival of mutuality has been based upon recognising the unique role of members in mutual enterprise as joint owners.

Moreover, co-operative and mutual models have offered one possible avenue of development for community-based projects. In the area of food, the Plunkett Foundation has identified potential for the growth of community shops, farmers’ markets, agricultural co-operatives and other initiatives. Indeed, mutual and community networks might be expanded and sustained on a larger scale through building a ‘mutually owned food system’ in which groups could support one another with advice, guidance and finance, perhaps contributing part of their profits towards a wider purpose (Couchman, 2010).

These developments are at an early stage and the re-emerging meaning of mutual and co-operative membership and ownership will take time to develop its full potential. The

## Case study: Credit unions

A new form of mutual is the credit union – a financial co-operative governed by a board directly elected by member owners. Credit unions help to address issues of financial exclusion by allowing members to save and by borrowing small amounts of money and offering financial advice and guidance. They were only formally recognised in 1979, although some of the pioneers who helped to establish them in the UK had moved from the Caribbean and Ireland where credit unions were more prolific.

Credit unions face regulations that limit interest rates and charges among other things. They must recruit members from within a ‘common bond’ which could be those living or working in a geographical area, having the same employer or being members of a religious, trade union or other group. As a result, credit unions have tended to remain relatively small scale and directly target the financially excluded. In 2009 there were over 700,000 members of credit unions with savings of £556m and borrowing totalled £450m (Association of British Credit Unions, 2009). Larger examples tend to be focused on workplaces such as Leeds City Credit Union or Scot West Credit Union, based in the west of Scotland, both of which started in local government workplaces but now serve a wider group of members. The differences with the smaller credit unions is striking: one run informally by volunteers, the other by uniformed office workers and managed by professionally qualified staff.

There have been many calls for the expansion of credit unions which include plans to widen the common bond so that it is easier to recruit members from a broader constituency and also attract more wealthy depositors as part of offering comprehensive financial services such as mortgages, ISAs and cash cards connected into the national Link system. There is considerable potential for growth but this

shift is not without its dangers. While the foreign examples that are commonly quoted, such as those in Ireland and Canada, grew gradually through self-help, fears have been expressed that this process of growth must be managed sensitively. Otherwise existing groups of members may feel disempowered by the sudden professionalisation and expansion of their societies, which might dilute the sense of collective feeling and good will.

Co-operative Group, with a turnover of just under £14bn (2009), owned by its individual consumer members, is crucial to the attempt to re-invigorate the co-operative movement. Although it is best known as a retailer, it describes itself as a 'family of businesses' which include funeral services, agriculture, travel, pharmacy, legal services, motors, banking, travel and insurance. In recent years it has championed Fairtrade produce which guarantees a fair price for producers and nurtures co-operatives in developing countries. The significance of such a large and democratic business, based on co-operative values and principles, is an important feature of contemporary mutuality and shows that mutual forms can expand well beyond the small scale. Thus, despite their decline for much of the twentieth century, consumer co-operatives are still a significant force.

A further related development has been in the area of employee ownership. In 1979 Robert Oakeshott with the support of long-standing employee-owned businesses such as Scott Bader and John Lewis, established the Employee Ownership Association which supports a range of businesses wholly or partly owned by employees (Oakeshott, 2000). The John Lewis Partnership currently comprises Waitrose supermarkets, John Lewis department stores, Greenbee services, a production unit and a farm. It is owned by its 70,000 employees and has a turnover of approximately £7.4bn (2009). The company was gifted by trust to the employees by John Spedan Lewis in the early twentieth century and aims to develop a 'unique Partnership culture, which makes sure we deal with our customers, suppliers and all stakeholders with integrity and respect ... at the

heart of our commercial success' (John Lewis Partnership, 2005). These giants have helped to embed mutuality across society, a fact revealed in Table 2 which suggests that mutual membership corresponds to a figure just short of the UK population, including housing associations, National Health Service (NHS) trusts and clubs and societies. Even allowing for individuals holding multiple memberships, this remains a striking figure. In total, over 23m people in the UK are estimated to be members of mutuals.

At certain historical moments, such as the early twentieth century, or even after 1945, these ideas and practices might have been expanded considerably had the wider context been more favourable. As mutual ownership extended into mainstream society, it also generated considerable hostility from existing interests, including politicians and capitalists alike. Mutuals were to witness prolonged periods of decline in the face of state and capitalist expansion throughout the twentieth century. Reaching a limit to growth made it difficult to adapt mutual organisations to a new context. Nevertheless, these forms have had a tremendous impact across society in terms of providing stability and redistributing resources through loans, savings, food, insurance and other services. In addition, the very fact of surviving difficult times reflects a strength of co-operative and mutual ownership.

Recent indications are that co-operative and mutual enterprises are likely to expand in coming years, signalling the rediscovery of a sense of values from history. The strength of this approach is its focus on democracy, membership and participation. It offers a sustainable model of growth for smaller-scale community initiatives. Co-operative and mutual enterprises can be found in all areas of the economy and are making a significant contribution in welfare services such as health and education.

## Charitable ownership

Helping others is a persistent theme of human history, although the way in which it has found tangible expression in charitable organisation and ownership is a more recent development. The historical range of charitable ownership includes: religiously inspired injunctions to help

Table 2. The scale of mutuality

Sector	Number	Members	Employees	Assets	Revenue (£)
Building societies	52	22,000,000	42,300	341,000,000,000	4,000,000,000
Friendly societies	200	6,000,000	5,000	17,000,000,000	1,646,000,000
Mutual insurers	14	3,288,366	12,932	60,999,154,000	2,715,383,000
Other financial mutuals	2	2,001,200	13,397	70,329,400,000	4,534,800,000
Co-operatives	4,630	10,650,338	167,519	7,872,948,119	24,488,183,181
Co-operative trust schools	28				
Credit unions	487	747,230	950	592,000,000	63,000,000
Employee-owned businesses	200		110,000		25,000,000,000
Football supporters' trusts	169	100,000	100	5,460,000	5,460,000
General practitioner co-ops	40		8,000		150,000,000
Housing associations	2,000	6,000,000	151,330	57,000,000,000	11,580,000,000
Leisure trusts	120		26,000		625,000,000
Clubs and societies	11,600	7,000,000	20,000	220,000,000	463,000,000
NHS foundation trusts	115	1,500,000	398,196	17,790,000,000	22,770,000,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,657</b>	<b>59,287,134</b>	<b>955,724</b>	<b>572,808,962,119</b>	<b>98,040,826,181</b>

Source: *Mutuals Yearbook*, 2009. Borehamwood: Mutuo

those in need; bequests and philanthropy; charitable action linked to business; charitable foundations; and charitable service delivery agencies. It blended into voluntary organisation in the twentieth century and connects to other models of ownership outlined here.

For millennia, charity was organised informally and referred to the process of giving to the poor rather than the action of specific organisations. In the Middle Ages, the Church was the dominant provider of charity as a Christian duty. Charity could be defined in terms of the rights of the poor to nourishment and clothing, particularly during times of famine and need. Bequests by individuals were often the result of a desire to prove one's personal worth to God and fulfil a Christian duty to help the needy. For instance, endowments might be made to hospitals, such as the right to use wood from royal forests and other resources. Early examples of direct charitable organisation and ownership include St John's Hospital in Malmesbury, which is mentioned in a charter given by Athelstan in 939 (Nightingale 1973, pp. 5–6), the Hospital of St Cross in Winchester, established by Bishop Henry de Blois in 1136 and almshouses built to support parish residents in need (Doubleday and Page, 1973). Following the reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century, charity

became more secular and regulated by the state, although religion would remain central to charitable activity. The first legislative intervention was the 1597 Charitable Uses Act, amended in 1601, which outlined the main purposes of charity:

*The relief of the aged, impotent and poor people; the maintenance of sick and maimed soldiers and mariners, schools of learning, free schools and scholars in universities; the repair of bridges, ports, havens, causeways, churches, sea-banks and highways; the education and preferment of orphans; the relief, stock or maintenance of houses of correction; the marriages of poor maids, the supportation, aid and help of young tradesmen, handicraftsmen and persons decayed; the relief or redemption of prisoners or captives; and the aid or ease of any poor inhabitants ...*

A broad notion of public benefit and helping those in need emerged from the legislation which, ever since, has allowed a great diversity of activity to be presented as charitable. State intervention was also connected to the welfare of the poor – the 1601 Elizabethan Poor Law was introduced alongside charity legislation in response to social and agricultural upheaval.

However, as charitable activity and ownership was given formal recognition, it gradually became more marginal to dominant economic and public action. Although some landlords who had benefited from the Reformation made significant charitable bequests, the scale of such activity receded over time. Traditional social and charitable obligations inherent in property ownership were being severed and this had the effect of giving charity a more autonomous organisational identity. The wealthy might choose to be charitable but it became less incumbent upon them to do so as the earlier obligations were relaxed. Complaints would also be voiced that charity was, in fact, a harmful practice which fostered dependence. Later, the 1736 Mortmain Act would have the effect of curbing charitable bequests (Jordan 1964; Hill, 1968).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the face of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, charitable organisations multiplied. Growing social upheavals led to a considerable charitable response although charities were better represented in areas where they had traditionally existed, such as London and market towns, rather than the newly industrialising areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Charitable societies increasingly served as an intermediary between the individual philanthropist and beneficiary. In part, this was fuelled by the growth of subscriptions and donations. Charities developed significant social services and organised welfare, hospitals, schools and a range of other services. Some national charities were formed during this time, such as Barnardo's, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Salvation Army, which would grow into property-owning organisations. Charitable action and organisation would also be developed by enlightened and paternalistic businessmen such as George Cadbury, Joseph Rowntree, W. H. Lever and others who established charitable foundations and communities run for the benefit of their workforce (for example, Owen, 1965; Kirkman Gray, 1965; Williams, 1989; Alvey, 1995).

In the twentieth century, charitable activity became increasingly intertwined with the notion of 'voluntary service', which itself developed into 'voluntary organisation' and, eventually, a 'voluntary sector' (6 and Leat, 1997). The further development

of welfare services in the twentieth century also impacted upon charitable activity. On the one hand charitable organisations, such as voluntary hospitals, were directly taken over by the NHS in 1948, so demoting voluntary and charitable activity to a secondary, supportive and experimental role. However, the role of charities continued to expand as new needs were identified. Starvation in post-war Greece led to the formation of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief in the 1940s, which evolved into Oxfam. Charities continued to carve out areas of activity related to social and educational provision, for instance, in relation to disability. In some cases, ownership of land and buildings related directly to charitable purposes, especially in terms of institutions such as children's homes, hospitals, schools and residential centres for the disabled and victims of war (Abel-Smith, 1964; Gorsky and Mohan, 2001).

However, the traditional role of charities was to come under pressure in the later twentieth century. In part, this resulted from the gap that existed between benefactor/trustee and beneficiary. In the nineteenth century, charity often appealed to distinctions between the 'industrious' and the 'idle', the able and the needy, which led to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of 'lunatics' and others. More recently, deficit approaches have also assumed the root of social problems to lie with people themselves, rather than in social structures. Critics noted the continuing significance of these assumptions as well as the danger of servicing the organisational demands of charity rather than the needs of an external constituency. Residential care in particular was scrutinised. This could nurture a dependency culture among clients instead of fostering autonomy and independence. Older organisations have had to reinvent themselves as their initial *raison d'être* has altered in new circumstances. Charities such as Action for Children and Barnardo's no longer run residential care homes and have shifted to other activities relating to child welfare, including advice and campaign work.

From the 1960s, many older assumptions would come under pressure with the emergence of radical campaigning charities, such as Shelter and the Child Poverty Action Group, which attempted to avoid stigmatising the poor themselves.

Other charities were set up to combat poverty internationally, such as ActionAid, which started as a child-sponsoring agency and later extended its interests to support educational and social projects. Change has impacted upon disability charities, which have had to rebrand themselves and attempted, with varying degrees of success, to embrace a 'social definition' of disability in response to the criticisms of disability rights campaigners.

Charitable activity has also been brought back into the mainstream. Since the 1980s there have been repeated attempts to reduce the role of the state through the use of voluntary and charitable organisations which have seen their grants replaced with contracts. Charities have become one type of agency, alongside other public and private service providers, which deliver services on behalf of the state. This recognition has impacted upon their autonomy and ability to campaign for wider social changes. Such developments can make it difficult to 'bite the hand that feeds', in criticising government policy, for example. This is a familiar tension for many charitable and voluntary groups that actively engage in delivering services while also campaigning and organising self-help initiatives (Handy, 1988).

Today there are a small number of highly significant and visible large charities which employ professional managers and frequently own considerable assets. They tend to adopt structured forms of organisation in order to manage their resources which arise from donations, grants, contracts and earned income. Many of the larger charities operate trading arms which allow them to trade on the high street, not only the ubiquitous charity shop – the first Oxfam shop was established in 1948 – but also through publishing and other business development. These are complemented by a number of charitable foundations which continue

to be a part of the British landscape (Anheier, 2001, 2005). In addition, there is a profusion of smaller and medium-sized charitable organisations covering a wide variety of issues and tend to be run informally by volunteers. Some larger charities have been creative in developing volunteering schemes based on the enthusiasm of members. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), for example, has mobilised volunteers not only in interest groups but also utilising them to collect information and campaign for changes. In the last few years, the number of charities has increased by over 5,000 each year. Table 3 indicates the wide significance of ownership by general charities.

However, charities are currently under pressure from a number of directions. Charitable models are often confined by structured differences between trustees, beneficiaries and staff, and have been criticised as inhibiting democratic participation, especially by those they were established to help. The growth of social enterprise, with its emphasis on independent income through trading, has further challenged the dependence of charities on grants and donations. In spite of these drawbacks, charity has a long history and continues to have a popular resonance in twenty-first-century Britain, especially given that it is a convenient legal structure with considerable tax advantages. The shift towards empowering users and beneficiaries is likely to increase in future years as part of a wider re-invention of charitable activity and ownership. While charitable organisations have been squeezed by the demands of the state, by the need to raise income and engage in trading, not all charitable activity can necessarily be organised and supported through business and contractual mechanisms. Charitable forms of ownership blend into all the other models outlined here (Weinbren, 2007) and are likely to

Table 3. The scale of general charities in the UK

Number of general charities	171,000 (2006–7)
Total income	£33.2bn (2006–7)
Net assets	£91.3bn (2006–7)
UK paid voluntary sector workforce	634,000 (2006)
% of people volunteering	43% at least once a year (2007–8)

Source: based on *The UK Civil Society Almanac 2009*, London: NCVO

continue to have an influence in the future. Many charities are household names and the notion of 'helping others' is deeply ingrained and capable of mobilising significant sections of the population, as indicated by Table 3. As a result, aspects of charitable ownership may expand in coming years.

## Municipal and state ownership

Contested notions of municipal and state ownership, including 'public' and 'common' ownership, have been central to historical transformations in the twentieth century. Recently, state forms of ownership have been represented as a monolithic practice dominated by top-down approaches and inflexible bureaucracy but, in previous decades, efficiency and universalism might have been the watchwords. In fact, municipal ownership and state nationalisation were seeded within the framework of wider debates over ownership and how to organise society for the common good. Community and mutual ownership was central to these debates that have not yet been resolved and remain part of a continuing history.

In Britain, municipal ownership developed from the late nineteenth century with experiments in local state control of housing, utilities, transport and related services. Local government offered a community-based solution to problems of poverty and mismanagement of resources – sympathisers represented government as a co-operative body devoted to the public good and arising directly out of people's needs. Early municipal reforms were introduced in Birmingham by Joseph Chamberlain, who became mayor in 1873. Motivated by a sense of civic improvement, water, gas and other services were successfully municipalised while educational, cultural and leisure facilities were built (Browne, 1974). The local state appeared to provide a powerful lever for social change in delivering common interests. However, there were some early warning signs that government could be unduly bureaucratic and discriminatory. For example, co-operatives donated their libraries to the local corporation only to find that many of the books would be discarded. Educational classes were ceded to local government at the expense of losing a distinctively co-operative message (Gurney, 1995).

Two significant proponents of municipal ownership were Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who spent much of their lives documenting the past history of trade unions, co-operatives and local government with a view to extracting lessons for the future. Concerned about the inefficiencies of unplanned capitalism, it was Sidney who drafted the famous Clause IV of the constitution of the Labour Party which called for the 'common ownership of the means of production':

*To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.*

The meaning of this blueprint for 'common ownership' was to be much debated in future years. Writing in the *Observer* in 1917, Sidney had noted that it was not a prescriptive declaration but offered considerable leeway for debate:

*... it leaves open to choose from time to time whatever forms of common ownership from the co-operative store to the nationalised railway, and whatever forms of popular administration and control of industry, from national guilds to ministries of employment and municipal management, may, in particular cases commend themselves.* (Webb, 1917)

Here we gain a sense of the contention between multiple 'socialisms' in the early twentieth century (Yeo, 1987). During the inter-war years, the equation of common ownership with state ownership and control would become pervasive in the Labour Party at the expense of other forms of socialism based on mutuality and voluntarism. The Webbs themselves favoured state ownership and planning by well-trained professionals. Other community-based options were discussed but struggled to gain a hearing at crucial moments. It was claimed that only the state could provide a 'national minimum' for all. Charities and mutual organisations might, it was thought, complement

state provision, but they were presented as partial and inconsistent and unable to reach the whole population, either geographically or socially. In addition, co-operative proposals for welfare services found only limited support, even among co-operators themselves.

The meanings of common ownership would continue to evolve during the twentieth century. In the wake of the Second World War, the concern to provide universal solutions to a range of social and economic problems went hand-in-hand with nationalisation of industries and services which were to be controlled and managed centrally – ownership solutions paralleled the delivery of services. The nationalisation of the mines was the cause of great celebrations among miners who organised marches to the mines – they felt they were to be the new owners. The reality would prove to be very different, however. The nationalised industries were subject to management by politically appointed businessmen who did not feel answerable directly to the workforce, nor inclined to consult consumers in any meaningful way. Although the language of common ownership and public service developed, this was not translated into the control of these industries and services. Unions would have a significant role to play in the ‘corporatist’ state, ensuring the smooth running of the economy and occasionally helping to develop industrial strategy (Middlemass, 1979). Unions also became significant institutions which owned various forms of property in order to support their workplace strategies. Later, in the 1990s, some union activists became directly involved in managing and controlling enterprises, such as Tower Colliery in south Wales. However, in general, ownership was interpreted in such a way that excluded workers and consumers from participation and control.

The end of consensus politics led to widespread de-nationalisations as publicly owned industries were sold at a discount during the 1980s. This was done for a number of ideological reasons relating to faith in the ‘free market’. Attempts were made to foster a ‘property-owning democracy’ through council house sales and other re-distributive mechanisms. There were also practical reasons for these changes. It was claimed that the state could not

provide adequate levels of capital investment required. This argument has been applied to assets remaining in public ownership such as schools and hospitals and has led to a number of alternative funding mechanisms as well as asset rationalisation, sale and leaseback.

These pressures have been reflected in both the Gershon (2004) and Lyons (2007) reports. Other motivations for public service reform can also be identified and include the desire to cut costs, engage staff in taking greater responsibility, involve the public in governance and improve the overall nature of such services. Social and mutual enterprises are gradually coming to be seen as possible alternatives to the commercial penetration of welfare services. But many within community and mutual organisations have argued that policy has been lopsided and exclusively concerned with accessing new sources of income. Devoid of wider historical and philosophical understanding, notions of ‘pragmatism’ and ‘value for money’ have been particularly evident since 1997 and have led to criticisms of ‘disjointed policies’. For example, David Rodgers of The Co-operative Development Society (CDS Co-operatives) argues that the preservation and expansion of common assets might have motivated housing policy during the Blair years rather than an exclusive concern to access finance which led to many unintended consequences, including escalating salaries and a ‘provider capture of value’:

*If you had a philosophy ... saying it isn't just money but the ... involvement of the residents, developing human and social capital through participatory means, you might have still gone for stock transfer but you might have done it in a different way, that transferred those assets into community ownership. It's only latterly, almost in reaction to that policy, some people have said, well, we don't want to do this unless it comes into community ownership. Now, belatedly, you've got the development of community ownership stock transfer models ... Another form of social ownership which is about more than just that pragmatic problem of how you get the money in. If you'd have done it based on an understanding of council housing being part of the commons, what society owns and uses as a whole, then you*

*might have said, no, transfer it into what is effectively a not for profit, private form of ownership.* (Rodgers, 2010)

From this perspective, the emphasis on 'ends' rather than 'means' and 'standards not structures' would seem to be misplaced (Blair, 1998). A value-driven approach to community and mutual ownership could bring considerable benefits but has remained a serious challenge for policy-makers.

Although direct state ownership has been undermined by a number of trends, it continues to play an important role and is one way to ensure common services are widely available. Representative democracy has been an essential form of accountability. In certain areas, state provision still has a major role to play, especially in terms of ensuring fairness and access to education and health, security, police and key public services. The state has also been central to ensuring the continuance of earlier forms of common land ownership. Indeed, the case for including state ownership as 'community and mutual' rests on its ability to provide common services which are at least potentially controllable by communities. In fact, many of the contemporary proposals to increase the provision of welfare services by mutuals, social enterprises and voluntary organisations may be considered to be within state provision rather than straightforward examples of privatisation. As such they represent a continuation of public services by new means; for example, leisure trusts and co-operative school trusts. Some are only partially mutual, in terms of ethos and membership for instance, and only have limited ownership and autonomy.

The state is also central to all forms of ownership in other ways. Legal and regulatory frameworks are essential to nurturing community and mutual ownership but carry the possibility of restricting activity. The way in which the state liberates, constrains and taxes different forms of property and ownership is not merely a technical detail but impacts on the whole structure of society. In one possible scenario, community and mutual ownership could merely become an arm of state policy. Those involved in voluntary and charitable initiatives have

become particularly aware of this issue in recent years, as Stuart Etherington (2010) of the NCVO noted, the nature of the relationship between civil society and the state has been changing:

*That can be a contractual relationship where, basically, it is not really about mutuality and it's not really about different forms of ownership; essentially it is about the state contracting with voluntary organisations in a way that the independence of action and independence of ownership is, in effect, eroded and organisations become agents of the state. That's the state beginning to expand its remit into civil society.*

As a result, future years may witness an oscillation between the impulse to mutualise public services and make them more responsive to public needs, on the one hand, and to tighten regulation and increase target-setting on the other. The promise of community autonomy and independence will be severely tested by governmental desires to 'deliver' its promises (see also Corrigan and Sayer, 1982).

## Conclusion

In section two we offered a brief historical overview of the scope and importance of community and mutual ownership. Emerging from this history we have identified five models: common and customary; community; co-operative and mutual; charitable; and municipal and state ownership. At a local level these can be hard to distinguish but have tended to become more distinct as scale and levels of ownership increase. At certain historical moments, divergent models may also share common societal concerns (Weinbren, 2007). A certain amount of conflict and overlap between the models can be identified, especially in cases where community and mutual initiatives served differing constituencies. This is unsurprising in a divided society; indeed, within community and mutual ownership it is often possible to detect simmering conflicts around issues of class, gender and other markers of inequality. Yet these tensions have also offered clues to the ways in which such models may develop in the future:

- Common land and rights held in common have been significantly depleted over time and this was often supported by state action. Significant vestiges of common land still remain in the form of village greens, public parks, the right to roam and national parks. The Community Right to Buy in Scotland and Community Land Trusts represent attempts to enable communities, with limited access to finance, to take control of land and assets. Many people have a strong sense of ownership over these common spaces which could form the basis for community development in the future.
  - Community ownership encompasses a plethora of informal groups and religious, political and social movements which have experimented with ownership. These have included village halls and collectively owned shops, as well as dispersed and socially productive individual and familial ownership of housing and land. Other models of ownership were initially nursed within this sphere and community ownership remains an engine of inventiveness which feeds more generally into society. Hopes of scaling up this area of activity have some contemporary purchase but will necessarily require increased levels of professional organisation and support.
  - Co-operative and mutual ownership represented a response to inequality and exploitation in the nineteenth century. The successful development and survival of these highly significant businesses based on democratic member control and federal structures demonstrated that it is possible to expand well beyond marginal spaces into the mainstream of society and to significantly transform areas of social life. There are also strong synergies between older and more recent mutual forms: worker co-operatives, credit unions, football supporters' trusts to name a few. The range of co-operative and mutual activity makes it highly significant and capable of expansion.
  - The long history of charitable ownership includes foundations, schools, hospitals and charitable organisations to alleviate poverty. The role of charities was diminished as the state came to play a dominant role in welfare, which was frequently accompanied by criticisms that charities projected a deficit view of their beneficiaries. Since the 1980s, charities have been increasingly involved in contracting for welfare services: charitable organisations still proliferate in a number of areas, including community development, education, health, housing and international development. In the future, this form of ownership is likely to expand, given the scale of poverty and need, in addition to the fact that charitable legal forms carry tax advantages, the impulse to 'help others' remains widely understood and charities continue to unlock considerable levels of volunteering and public interest. Charitable ownership is being transformed by delivering welfare, by the growth of commercially minded social enterprise and by the interest in empowering marginalised people.
  - From the late nineteenth century, municipal and state ownership originated within debates about organising for the common good against a backdrop of capitalist development, which had wrought inequality and neglect of both people and resources. Early municipal experiments included the ownership of electricity, gas, sewers, transport, education and housing. After 1945 this impulse fed into the nationalisation of industry, hospitals and other assets which lasted until the 1980s, when large-scale privatisations were initiated. Although state ownership has been criticised as being inefficient and unresponsive to community needs, it has been relatively effective in ensuring that public services are widely available. The state also regulates all forms of ownership. Historically community and mutual ownership has not been supported by the state in a sustained manner. The contemporary policy focus on third-sector organisations is apparent but it is not yet clear that it is based on a sustained vision.
- The range of successful historical practices is complemented by a sense of unfulfilled potential

in the many cases where there has been failure and defeat. The ideas around the inequity of land ownership and enclosures that motivated groups such as the Diggers, continue to resonate and reverberate hundreds of years later among community development initiatives (Wylar, 2009; Leadbeater, 2010). In other cases, there have been internal reasons for decline: for example, in the case of those organisations that turned inwards and avoided updating their purpose and values. Moreover, there is a danger that the perceived 'failure' of any particular community initiative will result in 'the community' being written off more generally. The models outlined above offer the opportunity to learn from failure and decline in the past. An awareness of the full range of community and mutual forms of ownership provides one way to help overcome problems in any particular area of activity. As Jonathan Bland pointed out: 'The whole strength of what we have in the UK is that we have a range of different options ... There will be different models suited to different needs' (Bland, 2010).

# 4 Conclusions and implications for policy and practice

The potential for community and mutual forms to re-populate twenty-first-century society and re-energise a sense of the common good is considerable. Climate change is predicted to intensify natural disasters across the globe. Recent decades have witnessed a growing incursion of neo-liberal priorities focused on the freedom of capital and the maximisation of shareholder value. The result has been increased inequality, within and between countries, leading to considerable social upheavals and marginalisation, as well as significant problems in relation to jobs, energy security and access to healthy food. The policy interest in 'community cohesion' and 'social capital' is evidence of the way in which these forces have been undermined. A growing disillusion with the established political process has been further exacerbated by recent scandals. The widely expressed claim that public services are inefficient and unresponsive has led to calls for new approaches to welfare, especially with reductions in funding.

In this new situation, diversifying ownership along mutual and community lines is coming to be seen as one answer to a wide range of issues related to social justice, inclusion, citizenship and participation, economic growth and environmental sustainability. In the past, co-operative enterprises and charitable associations pioneered new forms of business and welfare provision and there is currently a renewed interest in them doing so in the future. On the eve of the 2010 election, politicians from all sides were queuing up to endorse community and mutual solutions. The Labour Government promised to support third-sector organisations, to mutualise Sure Start, British Waterways, Northern Rock and English Heritage. The Conservative Party claim to 'Big Society, not big government' rested on the growth of mutual and employee-owned businesses. The Liberal Democrats also promised a mutuals, co-operatives and social enterprise bill with a minister responsible

for mutuals. Many of these proposals have found a home in the coalition government, Our Programme for Government (HMI 2010). The Commission on Ownership will further enliven public discussion on community and mutual ownership.

This report has outlined five historical models of community and mutual ownership: common and customary; community; co-operative and mutual; charitable; and municipal and state ownership. Taken together, these models continue to be a significant force across the UK economy and society. A range of ideas, practices and principles can be gleaned from historical antecedents. While it would be naïve to draw direct lessons from history, it is nevertheless possible to identify a number of crucial historical issues which are inherent in developing community and mutual ownership. Historical analysis enables us to appreciate the potential for systematic growth of community and mutual ownership based on values, democracy, membership and belonging.

## Staged growth and expansion

Community and mutual ownership could develop significantly through staged processes of growth. Older forms of community and mutual ownership have passed through many stages of development and illustrate the fact that it has not always been a marginal, alternative or ephemeral activity. In the past, co-operative and mutual organisations certainly expanded beyond specific communities through amalgamation, federation and establishing national organisations. Recent commercial acquisitions of Somerfield and Alldays by the Co-operative Group, as well as the re-mutualisation of ex-building societies such as the Bristol and West, offer further examples of large-scale growth. In the past, philanthropic business leaders successfully gifted their companies to their workforce as with Tullis Russell paper manufacturer, Scott Bader and John Lewis.

Mature forms of community and mutual ownership took time to achieve and were often based on building shared understanding and new ways of working. These historical experiences also connect to contemporary examples of popular planning. A recent example would be the Development Trust Association's interest in assessing the state and nature of community centres across the country in the light of suggestions that they might be transferred to communities – but unless communities are willing and able to take on this responsibility at short notice, there could potentially be a net loss of community spaces. Another would be the way in which a network of co-operative schools is forming to provide shared support and training. In terms of rural development, the Plunkett Foundation has started to think about wider structural supports for isolated initiatives:

*Community is starting to become the building block ... you've got this whole range of individual examples, your community supported agriculture, your farmers' market and so on. What ... could actually make that more resilient ... that could actually give mutual support ... so that if one bit got in trouble, the other bits were able to ... keep it going and stop it failing.*

(Couchman, 2009)

Similarly, in housing, the recent report of the Commission on Co-operative and Mutual Housing (CCMH) (2009) focused on the need for a systemic approach. As Nic Bliss, editor of the report, noted:

*What we're basically saying there is that to make a cooperative and mutual structure operate ... you need the grass roots element to be happening at one end of the spectrum but at the other end of the spectrum you need political, with a small p, support, you need infrastructure that is going to make it happen, political infrastructure, and you need support structures that are going to be there to facilitate it ... you need all of those things happening in tandem. That has only happened rarely in this country ... You've got to have all these different things in place if you are going to build a co-*

*operative housing system ... that's what we've been campaigning for for the last 20 years.*

(Bliss, 2009)

Aspirations such as these look to the example of Mondragón in the Basque region of Spain, where a cluster of co-operative organisations attempts to guarantee employment if any particular industry fails. Thus, models of community and mutual ownership offer a number of lenses with which to analyse not only specific resources such as land and buildings, or community organisation, but also whole systems, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Community and mutual ownership can be now found in virtually every sector of the economy and society, ranging from large-scale businesses to informal community groups. There is an opportunity to consider how more systematic approaches might help to develop community and mutual ownership beyond its existing spaces. Planning groups in a number of areas could act as a foundation for building broader support structures. They might involve a wide range of stakeholders, including policy-makers, representatives of community and mutual organisations and trade unions as well as academics and researchers with an interest in ownership. Some suggested areas for development include:

- *Finance*: given the central role of financial industries in the UK economy as well as current levels of financial exclusion, there would appear to be considerable potential for larger financial mutuals to provide a greater degree of stability given that they are based upon member-owners. In addition, there is a need for wider access to financial services provided by credit unions and other organisations. The financial system as a whole might benefit from greater common control over credit and investment and an element of democratic control of pension funds. Representative mutual organisations could have a role to play here (Hutton, 1995; Gamble and Kelly, 1996; Minns, 1996; Mellor, 2010).
- *Urban development and regeneration* is taking place through community ownership

initiatives and participative structures. Given current levels of inequality, poverty and urban decline, there will clearly be a continuing and growing role for community organisations to represent and support local constituencies.

- *Rural economies*: the crises in agriculture, as well as the decline in rural economies, leave considerable potential for new forms of community and mutual control of shops, agricultural co-operatives, community businesses and tourism as well as the community ownership of land facilitated by CLTs and other mechanisms. These starting points provide a basis for sustained growth into new areas of business and ownership.
- *Food* is a closely related area which impacts across the country. The size and scope of consumer co-operatives continues to offer considerable opportunity for greater community control over the production and distribution of food. In addition, community and mutual organisations have begun to develop strategies to provide greater access to healthy food for marginalised communities.
- As noted above, *housing* is an area where community and mutual ownership might be developed considerably. The Commission on Co-operative and Mutual Housing has recently argued that co-operative housing should be available in all areas by 2030 and this presents considerable challenges. Mutual models can help to provide a range of affordable housing options which also contribute to wider community benefit (CCMH, 2009; Rodgers, 2009).
- *Public services* are currently the largest growth area where experiments in community and mutual models are ongoing, including not only housing but also care co-operatives, leisure trusts, foundation hospitals and co-operative trust schools. The strength of these examples is that they bring various stakeholders together including staff, government and users of services. Given the scale of these operations, if they are to succeed in the long term,

considerable development of membership and governance will have to take place while fostering a greater feeling of community ownership. This applies not only to members, leaders, staff and users, but also to policy-makers and regulators who have not always fully understood mutuality and community organisation. At a national level trade unions have been lukewarm about proposals to dilute and 'privatise' universal state welfare services but, locally, many branches have been more sympathetic (Hunt, 2009; Bland, 2010).

- The problems created by climate change and dependence on imported energy sources will increase in future years. Community and mutual forms of *energy production* are being developed, and have the capacity to develop further. The isolated example of Glas Cymru shows that non-profit models are applicable to utility companies.
- *International development*. In recent years, inequality has become very marked between countries, a problem which relates directly to many of the problems outlined here – food and climate change in particular. The Fairtrade movement has actively worked to support co-operative and community ownership in developing countries by ensuring fair and stable prices for producers. Often this has involved establishing direct relations with community and mutual organisations in different countries.

In developing and implementing systematic approaches to community and mutual ownership, we should be alert to a number of dangers. The 'community and mutual' label cannot offer cast-iron assurances. Both co-operative and charitable structures have been utilised by for-profit business federations, groups of lawyers and independent schools which would rarely count as examples of community and mutual ownership. Who benefits from any given form of ownership is a crucial question in this respect. The dividend paid to co-operative members is a world away from those paid to shareholders in public limited companies. For long periods of history, women were excluded from ownership of property, and

community and mutual forms could perpetuate this exclusion even though many progressive counter-examples can be identified. In addition, not all examples of community ownership will necessarily lead to socially or environmentally desirable results. Community forms can deteriorate, ossify and turn inwards without a clear sense of serving the needs of members and users. Given these potential drawbacks, it is sensible to consider a number of issues and dilemmas relating to community and mutual ownership that have arisen out of this historical study.

## The nature of ownership

Ownership is multi-faceted and extends well beyond the more limited meanings of property (Grunebaum, 1987). This is very apparent in relation to community and mutual ownership. Legal and organisational structures create a framework of ownership that may or may not allow community control. For example, co-operatives are usually based on industrial and provident society legislation which prioritise member control. In the past, they provided a crucial foundation for sustained community and mutual development beyond the diverse forms of participation that can be found in all communities.

Beyond this, relationships have been a further crucial facet of ownership. Much has been made recently of the capacity of mutual forms to generate engagement and collaborative relations (Craig *et al.*, 2009; Cabinet Office, 2010). Contemporary practitioners have indeed confirmed that effective community and mutual ownership can help to build supportive community relationships where people are more willing to support and take responsibility for initiatives which they own:

*... ownership unlocks a different relationship ... someone actually feeling they've got a stake in an enterprise, fundamentally changes what they're willing to do with it.*

(Couchman, 2010)

*Ownership ... changes behaviour and how you related to co-workers, subordinates and customers.*

(Hunt, 2009)

Ownership has also been tied into feelings, emotions and psychological states of mind (Rahmatian 2008). In the past, community and mutual ownership was connected to a sense of moral and social purpose as well as a conviction that social change was possible. This was clearer in the nineteenth century when values of thrift, self-responsibility and respectability were openly propagated by mutual organisations – their very survival depended upon members incorporating such values into their lives, if only partially and for certain occasions. Today, these values are less apparent but still resonate in the need for people to be willing to establish and sustain forms of autonomous organisation. They also grow from self-help initiatives which enable communities to take greater control over their lives. This has been an incremental and ad hoc process of personal change and collective learning based on altered relationships. Thus, new forms of ownership may necessitate new social relationships and values.

A values-based approach will assist in ensuring that community and mutual ownership becomes a core purpose of policy and practice as opposed to a marginal add-on or specific solution to a particular problem. Community and mutual ownership has often been underpinned by distinct values. These may be implicit in some community organisations or worked out and written down, as in the example of the international co-operative movement. Recognising enduring values is a key mechanism for organisations and movements to learn from their own history, especially when their original purpose and the historical context in which they operate has altered. A sense of history and values can also form a basis for policy intervention. Peter Hunt, of Mutuo, noted:

*History is really significant ... one of the problems with politics is that people don't think about history enough, it's not just about what works...*

*There has to be some kind of consistency about the values of what you are trying to achieve and what you then put into place ...* (Hunt, 2009)

Thus, the purpose, values and ethos of any form of ownership are essential to survival and success and can help to guide activity.

## Control and democracy

Control by owners and members has been a further historical theme of community and mutual ownership in which there has generally been a close relationship between organisational forms and the constituencies from which they derive their purpose. The history of community and mutual ownership reveals multiple methods of governance, democracy and participation. The range includes, for example, elections, direct control by communities and members as well as participative forms of consultation with users and the wider community. Representative, direct and deliberative democracy may be appropriate for different purposes and at different times. For example, elections are a requirement for mutual organisations in which members are legal owners and have an obligation to select leaders and hold them to account. While some development trusts and charitable organisations have elections, others have utilised community consultation and user participation. This historical diversity offers choices in relation to democratic control which relates to levels of stakeholder engagement in any given area. It is likely that community control will be at its strongest when these various democratic methods complement one another. Unless democratic forms can be utilised to ensure that community control is exerted in a meaningful way, and allowed to develop autonomously, then it is unlikely to reap significant rewards.

## Membership and belonging

Building trust and engagement among members may mean something very different in the future to what it has done in the past. Historically membership was grounded in a sense of collective identity and developed over a long period of time. The common use of land became customary through repeated activity based upon an informal sort of 'membership'. In the nineteenth century, members were the basis for the expansion of mutual enterprises that would also be nurtured through educational and social activities. As local organisations extended nationally they created a sense of organic growth and associated feelings of ownership.

It is unclear how far people will feel a sense of ownership over, and be willing to participate in, what were previously considered to be state-run public services (Hazen, 2009). This also relates to democratic activity: when there is a limited willingness to participate then membership may be less active and more indirect. Simply applying historic models based on independent and autonomous organisations to contemporary welfare services will transform the meaning of membership. In order to handle this dilemma, policy initiatives would need to be tied to membership development as well as ensuring that communities have the power to make real decisions about the direction of services (see also Birchall, 2002, 2008). Membership and belonging may take longer to develop in some areas than others but are essential prerequisites of community and mutual ownership.

## Nurturing community and mutual development

Publicity is crucial. Awareness of the potential for community and mutual ownership is vital if it is to expand further. Examples include work on incorporating social and co-operative enterprise into the schools' curriculum and the Radio 4 *Archers* storyline, focusing on a community-owned shop. Such sustained publicity helps to make community and mutual options understood and available.

Effectively nurturing collective concerns and enthusiasm is a delicate process: too much exhortation and regulation can dampen self-activity, while not enough support can isolate and ignore forces which might have the potential to expand. Allowing self-directed growth of community interests is a key factor here. This is a tricky path to tread for state agencies eager to provide ambitious targets that meet wider policy agendas. Indeed, the existence of community and mutual ownership does not mean that the state will be non-existent. Historically it has played a key role in circumscribing, defending, regulating and describing the available forms of ownership at any one time.

In the future, it is likely that ownership will become more complex and more important. Through time ownership has extended over

a widening number of resources. It is not just traditional assets of land, capital and buildings that can be owned. Copyright and patents are also an essential aspect of modern history, and, more recently, ownership of DNA, plant extracts, personal shopping history and web activity have all been the subject of some public debate. Community and mutual ownership could contribute to a broader discussion about how these issues are handled.

Predicting the future is fraught with problems – new areas and points of growth will emerge. But the rich history of community and mutual ownership does address many of the pressing issues facing society. Sustainable approaches to extracting the benefits of ownership for the common good offer considerable opportunity. Ultimately, mutual and community ownership must be considered alongside all other forms of ownership or there will be a danger of marginalisation. The history of community and mutual ownership brings alive comparisons with other forms of ownership in terms of the responsibility inherent in all forms of property ownership. In doing so it is hoped that the historic models and dilemmas outlined here will provide a useful basis for discussion, understanding and action.

‘Learning from history’ is notoriously difficult and attempting to force the adoption of historical models would be short-sighted. However, historical analysis does reveal a range of issues pertinent to the current policy interest in extending community and mutual ownership. This report suggests:

- systematic approaches are required if there is to be a staged growth of community and mutual ownership to respond to current social problems. Community and mutual ownership will have the greatest impact where policy and practice is coherent and supportive, particularly across central and local government and related agencies;
- new policies on ownership need to take account of the structural, social and subjective aspects of ownership. Legal and organisational structure is an essential foundation that can shift ownership of assets into community hands. But to gain the full benefit, communities must

be prepared and ready to take responsibility for resources. There needs to be recognition of the time taken to build common understanding and to construct organisations based on a strong sense of membership and belonging;

- varying forms of democracy, ownership and membership may be appropriate to community and mutual ownership in different spheres of activity; for instance, ownership of community shops is likely to stimulate greater enthusiasm and participation than taking responsibility for some previously state-owned public services;
- in developing future policy and practice, however, there is the potential to agree a set of values that can guide policy and take into account the systematic ways in which community and mutual ownership might be nurtured. In the past, community and mutual options have often been viewed as marginal or as a pragmatic solution to particular problems. By contrast, a values-based approach implies a widely shared guide to action. Such values might include the importance of maintaining and increasing a diverse ecology of community and mutual ownership based on independence, autonomy, self-control and democracy.

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