

Orbiston: The First British Owenite Community 1825-28

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Orbiston sprang indirectly from Robert Owen's vision of communities or "villages of unity and mutual co-operation" stretching from pole to pole.¹ Although Orbiston, near Motherwell, Scotland, was not by any means unique, it was one of the earliest experiments in Owenite co-operation among workers in Britain. There the theories of the New System were tried for the first time outside New Lanark by a band of enthusiasts and displaced workers, victims of the post-Napoleonic War depression in Britain. Like Owen those who backed the scheme were concerned with the problems of contemporary distress and what could be done to solve them.²

Indeed social distress and threat of disorder caused such alarm among the landed gentry of Lanark county that in 1820 they looked to Owen for help. Most, no doubt, had read the view of Dr Henry Macnab, reporting on New Lanark and Owen's ideas, that the "great aims of the benevolent views of Mr Owen are the employment, instruction and comfort of the labouring classes and of the poor (...) the education and universal happiness of mankind" (Macnab 1819: 125). Owen relished the opportunity presented by the request to investigate local conditions and make proposals. This he duly did in his most significant economic thesis, the *Report to the County of Lanark*, presented to the Commissioners of Supply on May 1, 1820:

Mr Owen of New Lanark attended this meeting and communicated a plan he had formed for ameliorating the condition of the working classes of Society; and pointing out the best practical modes of employing the working classes in order that public distress might be essentially relieved; and containing a recommendation to the Heritors and Farmers to give such employment in the meantime by the spade and otherwise to the peaceable and industrious labourers as their means might afford. (Commissioners 1820: 387-8)

The Report was remitted to a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Sir James Stewart-Denham of Coltness (friend and neighbour of Archibald James Hamilton of Dalzell), which “embraced an early opportunity of hearing Mr Owen at great length upon the nature and details of the Plan recommended by him for the relief of the distress of the country” (Owen 1821: Appendix, 63).

Further consideration was given to Owen’s scheme at another meeting on November 16. Stewart-Denham’s report was hesitant in “recommending a system which, in many of its prominent features, is acknowledged by Mr Owen himself to be at variance with those principles which are sanctioned by the most enlightened political economists of the age”, but it concluded with a glowing report of New Lanark and Owen’s achievements, “which instead of involving any pecuniary sacrifice [sic], are found to operate beneficially in a commercial point of view” (*idem*, 65). Philanthropy which paid profits would interest even the least socially motivated.

The meeting then heard of “a proposal by a respectable gentleman of the County, for granting a lease of ground sufficient for the purpose of making a trial of the Plan”:

With a view to facilitate the formation of an Establishment on Mr Owen’s Plan, which would supersede the necessity of erecting a Bridewell for the County, Mr A.J. Hamilton Yr of Dalzell, submits a proposal to let 500-700 acres of land, proper for this purpose (...) Mr Hamilton is willing, being assisted by the Author of the Plan, to superintend the whole, without charge to the County. (*idem*, 66)

A sketch map showing the proposed community near Motherwell, resembled the agricultural and manufacturing villages earlier advocated by

Owen in *Relief for the Manufacturing Poor* (1817). Although enthusiastic about Hamilton's offer, Owen, not surprisingly, rejected any similarity between his proposed community and a gaol.

A petition to Parliament in favour of Owen's Report and Plan was rejected, and his 'quadrangular paradises' were subjected to some ridicule. Although the Commissioners for Lanark in turn rejected the scheme, Owen found a staunch supporter in Hamilton, and together they resolved to try a model community on the Dalzell estate at Motherwell. Capital to set up the community was to be raised by 2,000 shares of £25 and as soon as 1,500 had been subscribed operations were to begin. Owen and Hamilton would oversee a Committee of Management, but eventually, when initial capital had been repaid, the worker-members of the community would have full management of their own affairs.

The Motherwell Scheme attracted some interest nationally including the support in 1822 of the Owenite British and Foreign Philanthropic Society, whose aim was a trial of Owen's scheme. It issued a prospectus on the proposed community, with a list of subscribers (accounting for nearly half the £100,000 sought by Owen) including Owen himself, Hamilton, James Morrison of London, Henry Jones (a retired naval officer), General Robert Brown of County Wexford, Captain Robert O'Brien (another Irish landowner), Abram Combe, John Maxwell MP, Henry Brougham MP and William Falla, the advocate of spade husbandry. A distinguished gathering in London on June 1, 1822 heard Owen say that the community would form a model for others, and would train suitable individuals on the principles of the New System to act as promoters of future communities. Owen was at last convinced that his vision would soon become a reality, but his hopes were dashed later in the year by the failure of the B & FPS to back their enthusiasm with capital.³ His attempts during 1822-23 to gain support of the elites in Ireland resulted in a massive propaganda campaign, but little action.⁴

Never doubting the ultimate launching of the community, Owen purchased land from Hamilton's father, which he later sold back to Hamilton as the site for the community. But Owen was committed still further to spreading the gospel of the New System, involved in partnership and other difficulties at New Lanark, and, more significantly for the community movement in Britain, had by summer 1824 set his sights on the purchase of New Harmony. Motherwell was soon forgotten. The way was clear for Hamilton and Combe at Orbiston.

Of the founders Archibald James Hamilton (1793-1834) was typical of the military and ex-military individuals attracted to Owen. But he was more forthright in his views. "It was a singular coincidence", Hamilton wrote, "that I should be born in a year which would so determine my future feelings and opinions". So for someone of his class he had radical views saying that his "useless education and commissioned service" with the Dragoons and Scots Greys in the Peninsular War and at Waterloo had left him disillusioned with the establishment and with the accepted order of society. After his army service he settled at home to oversee the family estate, and began to take an increasing interest in local and national affairs.

Owen's New View had a profound influence on Hamilton (the two had first met in 1816) and, like Combe, he became an ardent disciple. He translated his social opinions into practical schemes aimed at relieving local unemployment in Dalzell, including intensive agriculture (as advocated by William Falla, the horticulturalist, whose ideas Owen adopted) and cottage industries. In many ways Hamilton was the typical, paternalist Scottish landowner, with interests in his estate, parish schools and poor relief, dabbling also in economic developments, such as coal mining, turnpikes and railways. But he departed from the norm in his fervent adoption of Owenism and his criticism in 1820 of the formation of volunteer regiments to quell the Radical uprising in and around Glasgow.

Abram Combe (1785-1827) was a man of entirely different background. Son of a prosperous Edinburgh brewer, Combe was apprenticed in the leather-tanning trade and by 1807 owned a successful tannery. He quickly established himself in Edinburgh society joining his brothers George (the phrenologist, who thought Owen's 'bump of benevolence' the largest he had encountered) and Andrew (a highly regarded physiologist). George and another brother, William, later became involved in the affairs of Orbiston following Abram's untimely death in 1827.

Combe first met Owen in 1820, visited New Lanark and like Hamilton became a firm convert to Owenism after reading the *New View*. A year later he met Hamilton, resident in Edinburgh, to attend classes in the university. Their first joint effort was the Edinburgh Practical Society, a co-operative group (mostly composed of skilled operatives) with an eventual membership of 500 families. Like Orbiston it had strong moral and self-help motives and its members had to pledge abstinence from alcohol, tobacco and swearing. A society store and school were run on the lines of those at New Lanark, but within a year it had failed as a result of the misappropriation of funds by the storekeeper. According to Hamilton the personnel were badly selected and he urged that members of future Owenite communities should 'be possessed of more than ordinary knowledge' (another significant Owenite mantra).

Combe also tried community formation in his tan-yard (1822), with a profit-sharing scheme. This, too, was soon abandoned and Combe turned to writing about Owenism. During 1822-25 he produced numerous pamphlets advocating the adoption of community building and expounding his own economic and religious ideas. Somewhat at odds with general Owenite views was his *Religious Creed of the New System* (1824) which developed his own peculiar form of deism, 'Divine Revelation'. More interesting was a statement of his economic outlook in *The Sphere for Joint Stock Companies* (1825), containing details of the proposed community at Orbiston.⁵

Such was the enthusiasm of Orbiston's promoters in spring 1825 that building operations had begun before the legal and financial arrangements were completed. The site of 291 acres on the Dalzell estate near the river Calder, "all arable and of excellent quality", was formally acquired from General John Hamilton by the Orbiston Company on May 13, 1825. The articles of agreement signed earlier (March 18) set the capital at £50,000 in 200 shares of £250 and designated Abram Combe trustee. Several of the original subscribers to the Motherwell Scheme immediately took shares in Orbiston, and using the paid-up share capital and land as securities, Combe borrowed on bond nearly £20,000 of which the Scottish Union Insurance Company in Edinburgh loaned £12,000.⁶

Orbiston resembled the design advocated by Owen in *Relief for the Poor* and *Report to the County of Lanark*. The symmetrical, barrack-like, central block was to be 4 storeys high and intended for community use, housing kitchens, dining rooms (to accommodate 800 people), drawing rooms, ball-room, lecture hall and library. The wings on either side were to provide private living quarters for the communitarians, with special accommodation for the children. Initial construction was under way by March 1825, the first phase being the north wing.

Six months later, on October 17, a meeting of the shareholders (or 'proprietors') was held in one of the finished apartments. Combe reported that 125 shares had been taken up and that expenses to date totalled over £5,000. After examining progress, several shareholders offered to double their investment, although they decided to postpone work on the central block and concentrate efforts on building workshops nearby. "The meeting", Combe wrote, "expressed themselves satisfied with the way the work was conducted; and I was unanimously confirmed Trustee for the Company; and Henry Jones and J[oseph] Applegarth were appointed Auditors" (*Orbiston Register* Nov 10, 1825).

News of Orbiston soon spread and even before the north wing was completed, Combe had numerous applications. The first to arrive were a group

of handloom weavers from Hamilton; they were shown over the buildings, selected their rooms and enrolled as tenants. A number of builders also lived in the partly-completed wing during the winter of 1825-26, but large-scale occupation did not begin until the spring. Apart from the obvious financial difficulties the main item of discussion at the proprietors' meeting on March 18, 1826 was the selection and role of future members. The meeting agreed "to sanction the immediate introduction of the system of Union and Mutual Co-operation" and that "individuals who could agree to co-operate, might have management of their own affairs" (*Orbiston Register* Mar 30, 1826). Following the meeting, Combe presided over a conference of existing and future communitarians. He undertook to become a member himself, act as supervisor and read the regulations, 13 in all, similar to those of the Edinburgh Practical Society but laying greater emphasis on equality and co-operation.

The decision to introduce co-operation was a momentous one. Much of the enthusiasm for mutual co-operation came from Combe and Hamilton, who were at that stage entirely responsible for the community. Orbiston did not have the official backing of Robert Owen, and to his credit Combe pointed this out categorically in January 1826. However, Owen's absence did little to encourage public enthusiasm and some of the reports were hardly laudatory. Orbiston Community, like Owen's take-over of Harmony, had been planned in haste and with similar confusion (*Orbiston Register* Jan 12, 1826).

On April 9, 1826 the builders departed and members of the new community moved in. At once the problem of unselected personnel (so obvious at New Harmony) became clear. "A worse selection of individuals", Combe wrote, "men, women and children, could scarcely have been made – a population made up for the most part of the worst part of Society". There were about 100 workers, who had simply been accepted into the community as they applied, and some had come to avoid the evils of the Old System, "rather than to seek the advantages of the New" (*Orbiston Register* Aug 19, 1827).

There was confusion and disagreement from the start. Although the first week was devoted to the allocation of accommodation and making the building habitable, a number approached Combe on the Saturday, demanding their week's wages. The ignorance of Old Society, which Owen had forecast in *Relief for the Poor* as being one of the greatest barriers to the introduction of the New, was already evident. At a general meeting Combe stated that "Labour was the source of all Wealth" and attempted to explain "other of the prevailing notions which puzzle the unlearned". He pointed out the advantages of the New System: everyone would work to supply a common stock and the unskilled would be trained as necessary; each would put a value per hour on his or her labour, which would be verified by an elected committee; and each could draw from the common stock what he or she had earned. These proposals were "unanimously agreed" to but, Combe remarked, "fell to the ground like a dead letter" (*ibidem*).

During the first months there was only limited co-operation. Communal dining facilities were rejected by the majority of members, who "began to look to themselves in the Old Way". "The New System appeared altogether inferior to the Old, that nothing but the refusal of their husbands to accompany them, prevented the wives from setting out to Old Society". Gardening was more successful, and members planted fruit and vegetables, dug ditches and laid paths. Combe himself tried to set an example by working with the spade, but overcome by physical effort and worry about the community, he became ill and was forced to hurry to Edinburgh to seek medical advice. The affairs of the infant community during summer 1826 were left in the hands of Henry Jones, a former supporter of the B & FPS and subscriber.

While Combe was absent, John Gray, the Owenite theoretician, visited Orbiston. His impressions were not encouraging and O'Brien also expressed reservations. He insisted that the only way to improve the situation was to replace the existing community members "with a selection of respectable and

well-conditioned persons". When Combe returned, he found things "at sixes and sevens", but "expressed himself as satisfied with the class of people gathered together". The New Society had so far been a failure because "the individuals would work for wages, but they could not comprehend the idea of working for the produce of their own labour". Members seemed unwilling to promote mutual co-operation and Combe was thus forced to re-organise the community and its workforce (much as occurred at New Harmony) (*ibidem*).⁷

Although there was general apathy, there were a number of more educated members who were anxious to try the New System. A group of skilled workers formed a foundry using an old mill for their workshop. Combe was delighted with this success. Some members thought, however, that preferential treatment was given to the foundry promoters, and seemed prepared to force the issue of Combe's interference in affairs. Combe asserted that "he would not remain the nominal head of the experiment, and at the same time have its affairs conducted in a manner which he would not approve". The arguments were momentarily settled and the community agreed that Combe should have "sole direction" of activities (again comparable to Owen's position at New Harmony).

Increasing numbers of workers at Orbiston began to show some willingness to join in mutual co-operation and several new departments were created, including horticulture, agriculture, building and artisans. Clearly, however, there was little enthusiasm, though Combe admitted that experiment was the only path to ultimate success.

Closing his eyes to the disarray, Combe recorded his dreams for the future of Orbiston Community. He hoped that a house could be rented in Edinburgh or Glasgow for the benefit of members and a cottage acquired on the coast so that they could "enjoy daily the beautiful and romantic rides for which the West Highlands are so famed". He was even more optimistic when he wrote:

The Community at Exeter, which is now building under the direction of Jasper Vesey, will be ready to receive any of our members, as we should certainly be to receive any of them. The Community near Cork, of which Wm Thompson has sent us particulars, will have the same feeling. Besides those in Britain and Ireland, we have our friends of Harmony in Indiana – for a disciple of the New System will always be at home among his brethren. (*Orbiston Register* Aug 26, 1826)

In August when Combe again left due to ill health, the community was split into two camps – a majority in favour of co-operation and equal distribution, and a minority (mostly skilled craftsmen) who wanted to maintain the status quo. Thus Orbiston lost its leader at a critical point, and this forced some reorganisation of affairs. During September and October Hamilton assumed nominal leadership and soon found himself in a difficult position. He faced growing agitation for equality and co-operation on one hand, and reluctance of the foundry company and several shareholders on the other. Hamilton thought “the sooner the tenants acted as a body the better”, and they could then take full control of the community.

After extended negotiations a meeting of the proprietors on October 17 agreed to lease the land and buildings to the members. The shareholders were to be paid 5 per cent interest on their capital and have rights of access to accounts and influence expenditure. Each member had to be re-elected, agree to maintain the regulations and swear belief in the doctrine “that man is the creature of circumstances and that character is formed for and not by the individuals, as taught in the writings of Mr Owen”. Although the legal transfer of the property had still to be concluded, the members could assume management with ostensible equality and co-operation (*Orbiston Register* Oct 17 and Nov 1, 1826).

A provisional committee, elected earlier, was confirmed at a tenants' meeting on October 19: President, Abram Combe; Superintendents of Departments, Miss Whitwell (formerly of New Lanark), Alexander Campbell, John Hutton, John Lambe, Edward Simpson; and Elected Representatives,

Messrs Cameron, Fenner, Foster, Hamilton, Kirkpatrick, Reid, Rogers, Sheddon, Wigg and Wilson. Each department for domestic arrangements, education, horticulture, agriculture, mechanics and artisans had its own superintendent, who was to keep accounts of production and expenditure and presently weekly reports. The individual worker would be credited at the community store with the value of his or her production. Weekly meetings of the Governing Committee would likewise supervise all community affairs and examine the reports of all trades and departments (*Orbiston Register* Nov 1, 1826).

As winter drew in, it became increasingly obvious that Combe was unlikely ever to see the fruits of his labours at Orbiston. In the December issue of the *Register* he wrote, “the idea of witnessing the improvements made by the Community at Orbiston, since I left it, is now even more than I can raise a hope to”. His brother William was elected to the new office of Vice-President to act on his behalf.

Shortly after William Combe’s arrival, the Governing Committee produced a detailed outline of proposals for the future. There were to be eight departments and every member would belong to one of them: store or bazaar; domestic; police; lodgers; education; agriculture; mechanics; and artisans. Although merely a statement of intent, the proposals envisaged a high degree of community action and co-operation, and described the role of each department. The nucleus was the store, which was to provide raw materials, food and clothes. The horticultural and agricultural departments would provide the store with grain, fruit and vegetables. The store would function for the benefit of the whole community and members could draw goods to the extent of their earnings. The domestic department was responsible for day-to-day supervision of kitchens, dining-rooms, bake house, wash house, children’s dormitories and mess-rooms. The police department had “to provide for due

order throughout the building” and also prevent (as at New Lanark) “drunkenness, quarrelling or rioting” (*Orbiston Register* Dec 27, 1826).

The educational provision at Orbiston (for both children and adults) was modest, but successful enough considering the short life of the community. The schools were run jointly by Catherine Whitwell and Alexander Campbell, assisted for a time by Applegarth. Apparently a striking figure, Whitwell, sister of the Owenite architect, Stedman Whitwell, was a teacher at New Lanark and had devised the famous visual aids for the institute and school. Campbell was a joiner who had embraced trade unionism and co-operation as an alternative to capitalism. Applegarth had also taught at New Lanark and was one of the few individuals we know who later proceeded to New Harmony. Subjects included reading, writing and arithmetic, supplemented by history, geography, dancing and music. Discipline seems to have been lax and truancy was a major problem, which is surprising since at least one contemporary noted that at New Lanark “the system was one of severe discipline, but of real and solid usefulness”. Adult education at Orbiston included debating, lectures, music, dancing and drama, mainly promoted by Catherine Whitwell.⁸

The three important productive departments – Agriculture, Mechanics and Artisans – employed the majority. Agriculture made a significant contribution and was one of the most successful ventures. The mechanics’ department included the foundry company (who were nominally independent), joiners, carpenters, plumbers, glaziers, stone-cutters, masons, nailers and slaters. The artisans’ department also indicated the wide variety of skills attracted to Orbiston: printers, book-binders, tailors, watch-makers, spinners and weavers, wood-workers, and also a sub-section of female needle workers. These artisans, under the leadership of Henry Kirkpatrick (printer of the *Register*), were undoubtedly the most united in community. But indeed, the minority who had opposed community of property were confined to the agricultural department and the enterprising foundry company. Both were highly

independent, kept separate accounts, and attended few meetings of the Governing Committee.

Favourable reports came from various departments at the beginning of 1827. Farming operations had been fairly successful, the artisans and foundry were doing well, and masons, joiners and carpenters busied themselves in extending farm buildings and erecting a saw mill (driven by the foundry waterwheel). Weavers and shoemakers, printers and bookbinders undertook work for Old Society at competitive rates. Some indication of the many skills available at Orbiston is illustrated in the advertisement placard issued in autumn 1826.⁹ However, despite the successes of some departments, it soon became obvious that all was not well.

Growing financial difficulties were exploited by several of the shareholders who had never been firmly committed to co-operation and community action. O'Brien and Jones both spread "dismal forebodings" among members and other shareholders. Combe, by contrast, wrote with optimism to Hamilton that he could not "conceive any possible way of turning capital to better account than the one we have adopted", perhaps forgetting that Hamilton had committed a large part of his personal fortune to the community.¹⁰ Shortage of ready capital was strikingly apparent by March 1827, which writing to Hamilton, William Combe explained.

The community had accumulated substantial debts, and demands were now being made – mostly small bills and interest payments – amounting to nearly £2,000. He thought they could hold out till harvest time, when "most of the demands would cease". Hamilton and Abram Combe came to the rescue at once with bonds and ready cash, which temporarily saved Orbiston from bankruptcy. Affairs were still far from bright, though William Combe reported that "a good feeling prevails among the community", and the majority of the members were anxious to be in the fields. As it transpired, this was the last harvest at Orbiston.¹¹

Rumours and counter-rumours precipitated loss of confidence amongst communitarians. Some began to complain about conditions and lack of security. Even those who had continued to operate on capitalist lines began to feel the pinch, and some of the foundry operatives were first to leave (all of them consistent opponents of equal distribution). By midsummer the financial situation was desperate, and it was clear that the demise of the community was not far off. The general economic climate was such that the bondholders had been pressing for realisation of their assets for months. In a last bid to save the community, the Governing Committee (under William Combe) investigated the running of every department to see if productivity could be improved and economies made. The result was the abandonment of equal distribution and co-operation. Instead, a piece-rate system was introduced, and members were urged to make every effort to save the community.

Individual enterprise did little to retrieve the lost fortunes of Orbiston. Members continued to grumble, and many left during the summer to return to Old Society. The last hope of saving Orbiston vanished when news of Abram Combe's death was received on August 11. An appeal was at once made to Hamilton to take charge, but ill health prevented him from doing so. He thought in any case that his help would merely postpone the ultimate collapse, for the members would do little for themselves:

It would also be against the spirit of the System, as every individual in such a Society should feel himself interested in its success. By mutual and combined exertions they should work out their own social salvation; but this has never been exemplified in the members of Orbiston Community.¹²

Only the harvest maintained the dwindling membership during the autumn of 1827. The last edition of the *Register* (September 19, 1827) related the sad tale of the finances and gave an appreciation of Abram Combe. The end came in December, when William Combe, pressed to the utmost by one of the bondholders for full repayment, was finally forced to close Orbiston.

Practically all members returned to Old Society, though a handful stayed on to work the land on behalf of the shareholders, including Alexander Paul (former Secretary) who was later appointed factor and trustee on the sequestered estate. The aftermath of Orbiston was a series of protracted legal wranglings in the courts, but the end for the community came on that chill December day when an Owenite experiment was abandoned.

In a sad letter to Owen, Hamilton outlined the tragedy of Orbiston. Hamilton thought that too many members of Orbiston were near their friends in Old Society, and like so many of them, lazy and addicted to drink. “The experiment at Orbiston”, he later wrote, “was no fair test of Pantisocracy [sic]” .¹³

After the collapse of the community Campbell and Sheddon (as partners of the foundry company) were prosecuted by one of the many creditors and found themselves in jail. Campbell wrote to Owen (who had only recently returned from the US) acclaiming the virtues of the New System. “I can only say for myself that the whole of the proceedings at Orbiston has tended to conform my mind stronger both as to the practicability and utility of your system over the present arrangement of Society.” Equal distribution, he admitted, had been a failure, and Friendly Society legislation could have been used to give confidence to the members. He felt that the failure of Orbiston would “prevent for a long time other capitalists from embarking in the like speculations”, and that limited capital would similarly deter the labouring classes from forming their own communities.

Bankruptcy of both the Orbiston Company and its off-shoot, the Orbiston Foundry Company, was quickly established, but settlement of the affairs was not finally completed until 1831. The land was sold to Cecilia Douglass, who owned a neighbouring estate, for £15,050, and in the division of the assets only one creditor was paid in full. The shareholders, including the Combes, Hamilton, Morgan and the Rathbones of Liverpool, lost all their investment.

The various participants had mixed fortunes. Hamilton settled down on his estate and continued to take an interest in local affairs. William Combe went to the US (supposedly to join New Harmony, although there is no record of him there), where one of his brothers noted “he displayed the same want of energy as he did on this side of the Atlantic”.¹⁴ Campbell, who played a leading role at Orbiston, became an untiring propagandist of Owenism as a travelling lecturer and then as a co-operator. Alexander Paul expressed a desire to cross the Atlantic “to find out comfort and happiness in mutual co-operation”. Typically most of the other confirmed Owenites reappeared later in trade union, radical, Owenite and Chartist circles. But the majority merged into Old Society again – as if Orbiston had never existed.

As an experiment in pantisocracy Orbiston was a failure. Yet its demise does not seem to have discouraged Owen, for in Autumn 1828 he wrote to Hamilton with his usual flowing enthusiasm:

It will gratify you to learn that the good cause is progressing substantially in all countries, and that your exertions, although not crowned with immediate success at Orbiston, have contributed essentially to make the principles known, and to prepare the way for their practice in many places.¹⁵

For Owen, at least, the great experiment was just that, a test of his ideas and the basis for future community projects.

Notes

¹ On the background to Owen's community schemes see Harrison 1969; Garnett 1972; Claeys 1993; Royle 1998; Donnachie 2000.

² On Orbiston specifically, see Donnachie 1971.

³ On the Motherwell Scheme, see Harrison 1969: 28-9; Donnachie 1971: 137-140.

⁴ On the Irish tour see Donnachie 2000: 190-95.

⁵ On Hamilton and Combe see Harrison 1969: 26-32, 103-5; Donnachie 1971: 140-45.

⁶ North Lanarkshire Archives, Motherwell Heritage Centre, Scotland, Hamilton Papers, List of Subscribers, May 27, 1827; National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh, Court of Session, EP 58, Ranking and Sale of Orbiston, Mar 11, 1831.

⁷ On New Harmony see Donnachie 2000: 219-49.

⁸ Further research is being undertaken on Whitwell, an interesting figure in Owenism.

⁹ Hamilton Papers, W.Combe to Hamilton, Mar 4, 1827;and W.Falla to Hamilton, Aug 16 ,1826.

¹⁰ Hamilton Papers, A. Combe to Hamilton: Feb 19, 1827.

¹¹ Hamilton Papers, W. Combe to Hamilton, Mar 14, 1827.

¹² Hamilton Papers, Hamilton's Memoir (Mss.) "The soldier and the citizen of the World".

¹³ Co-operative Union, Owen Collection, Hamilton to Owen, Sept 8, 1828; 'The Soldier and Citizen'.

¹⁴ Hamilton Coll., Paul to Hamilton, Aug 17, 1829.

¹⁵ *Idem*, Owen to Hamilton, Oct 14, 1828.

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The other chief Owenite community experiments were in Great Britain—“at Queenwood, Hampshire (1839—45), in which Owen took part for three years; at Orbiston, near Glasgow, Lanarkshire (1826—27); and at Ralahine, County Cork (1831—33). He was not directly involved with either of the latter two communities. The Owenite movement undertook several experiments. In addition, Hamilton provided his 290-acre estate, Orbiston, for the first Owenite co-operative community in the United Kingdom, in 1825. The community collapsed in 1827 on the death of its founder. Ralahine Community, County Clare, Ireland (1831—1833) was organized on the estate of John Vandeleur by Edward T. Craig. Nashoba Commune, Tennessee (1825—28) was organized by Fanny Wright to educate and emancipate slaves. To ensure emancipation without financial loss to slaveholders, slaves would buy their freedom and then be transported to the independent settlements of Liberia and Haiti. Franklin or Haverstraw Community, Haverstraw, Rockland County, New York (1826).