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‘The Workers’ Stately Home’: Wortley Hall in Postwar Britain

Although there are relatively large bodies of interrelated literature concerning trade unions, industrial politics, workers’ education and leisure in postwar Britain, little has been written about the importance of Wortley Hall (also known as ‘The Workers’ Stately Home’ or ‘Labour’s Home’) as a popular educational and holiday centre for the British labour movement and organised working-class. Drawing on previously unpublished archival and oral history materials, this article is principally concerned with documenting Wortley’s founding ethos as a proletarian venue and the pioneering efforts by local rank-and-file leaders to raise sufficient finances to secure the Hall’s future as a little ‘oasis of socialism’. It also considers Wortley’s wider significance apropos postwar debates concerning adult education and how the Hall related to similar institutions; the considerable increase in country house sales and enthusiasm for finding alternative uses for them in the immediate postwar years; like examples of non-profit holiday centres aimed at working-class people; how Wortley was born out of and contributed to the political culture of the labour movement in South Yorkshire; and finally, to what extent support for the Hall was the product of wider currents and tensions within the labour movement, including both the role of the Communist Party (CP) and the prevalence of postwar concerns over Communist influence. The article is structured to deal with these issues via an empirical, chronological-narrative approach to Wortley’s early years.¹ As such, it represents a modest contribution to the current resurgence of interest in postwar labour institutions and the British left.²

KEYWORDS: Wortley Hall, Workers’ Education, Trade Unions, Communist Party, Broad Left, South Yorkshire, Communist Women

The Politics of Workers’ Education

Formerly the ancestral home of the Earls of Wharnccliffe in what is now South Yorkshire, Wortley Hall looks like any other country estate inasmuch as a long winding drive leads to an imposing eighteenth-century stone-pillared mansion, which is encircled by 26 acres of ancient gardens and woodland. However, this Grade II listed stately home has belonged to the trade union, labour and co-operative movement, and been a notable workers’ educational, recreational and holiday setting, for the past seventy-odd years. With accommodation for 100+ overnight guests, the bedroom wings bear the names

¹ Much of what survives of the Hall’s written archive relates to the 1950 and 1960s. Unfortunately, there are fewer materials concerning the 1970s onwards.

² A useful summary of this recent scholarship can be found in the following two edited volumes: Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (eds), *Against the Grain: The British Far Left From 1956* (Manchester, 2014) and *Waiting for the Revolution: The British Far Left from 1956* (Manchester, 2017). See also, Neville Kirk, ‘Challenge, Crisis, and Renewal? Themes in the Labour History of Britain, 1960-2010’, *Labour History Review*, 75: 2, 2010, 164-65.

of George Lansbury, Tom Mann, Robert Owen and Keir Hardie, among others. Where aristocratic portraits once hung, the walls are now decorated with pictures of radicals and trade unionists like Karl Marx, William Morris, Sylvia Pankhurst, Raymond Williams, George Arthur Roberts, Abe Moffat, George Caborn, Bill Ronksley and Fleur Lombard. The *Morning Star* has long been the daily newspaper of choice, freely available to guests in the Hall's reception. And while Wortley has had to broaden its core activities to offset the gradual downturn in trade union business³, which has meant it becoming increasingly dependent on weddings parties and other hospitality functions since the 2000s, the Hall continues to host a range of international, national and regional labour-related and political left events.⁴ Moreover, Wortley is still registered under the Industrial & Provident Societies Act, operates on co-operative principles as a not-for-profit organisation, and is collectively owned and democratically controlled by approximately 2269 individual and 284 organisation shareholders.⁵ Though by no means unique in its aims and constitution, the Hall remains a monumental example of 'socialism in action', especially in the context of South Yorkshire's labour movement.⁶

And yet, a handful of local histories, autobiographies and newspaper articles notwithstanding, the story of 'Labour's Home' has been largely overlooked by academic historians. This is surprising, particularly when one considers that many of Britain's leading socialist historians, left intellectuals, Labour politicians and trade unionists attended conferences at Wortley during the upswing in postwar labour militancy and its subsequent decline from the 1980s onwards.⁷ This being the case, the Hall might be thought of as one of labour history's 'neglected byways', to paraphrase Alan Campbell *et al's* seminal analysis of British trade unionism in the second half of the twentieth century, and thus a worthy

³ This slump in trade union patronage was mainly due to the spate of anti-union laws introduced by the Conservative governments of 1979 to 1997, a corresponding decline in trade union membership and deindustrialisation more generally. See for example, Andrew Taylor, *What About the Workers? The Conservative Party and the Organised Working Class in British Politics* (Manchester, 2021), 337-392; Keith Laybourn, *A History Of Trade Unionism c.1770-1990* (Stroud, 1992), 190-216; Department for Business & Trade, *Trade Union Membership, UK 1995-2023: Statistical Bulletin*, 29 May 2024. The Hall's geographical remoteness and the lack of public transport has been a further hindrance. Finally, several of the larger trade unions have built their own residential training centres in recent years, which compete for the same custom.

⁴ For example, trade union day and residential courses, neighbouring branch and constituency Labour Party meetings, Young Communist League schools, the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Trust annual lecture, the Raymond Williams Foundation, Left Foot Forward, radical theatre productions and the annual South Yorkshire Festival.

⁵ The Share Register is open to any TUC trade union, Labour or co-operative organisation and individual members. At the time of writing, shares can be purchased in units of £10.00. Shareholders have one vote at general meetings, regardless of the number of shares they may hold. A management board is elected from and by the shareholders and the board is responsible for employing the senior management team who in turn employ the day-to-day staff.

⁶ See for example, Daisy Payling, *Socialist Republic: Remaking the British Left in 1980s Sheffield* (Manchester, 2023), 56, 62-65.

⁷ Examples of left intellectuals and educationalists who visited Wortley during its heyday include Eric Hobsbawm, Dorothy and Edward Thompson, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Beatrix Campbell, John Saville, Ralph Samuel, Ken Coates, Michael Barratt Brown, John Hughes, Ken Alexander, Raymond Challinor, Peter Worsley, Royden Harrison, Brian Pearce, to name but a few. See David Widgery, *The Left in Britain, 1956-1968* (Harmondsworth, 1976), 78-85; Malcolm Ball, *Changing Derbyshire NUM* (Nottingham, 2017), 65-66; John Harris, 'Marxism Today: The Forgotten Visionaries Whose Ideas Could Save Labour', *Guardian* (29 September 2015).

research topic in itself.⁸ Whilst we can only surmise *why* Wortley has gone unnoticed by professional scholars all these years, Lawrence Black offers a valuable insight apropos the neglected history of Swinton Conservative College, which is to say that ‘buildings and place’ tend to be overlooked because they provide ‘not the subject (thus its neglect), but the setting’.⁹ But whereas the Swinton estate can help political historians to better understand the traditional conservative imaginary and country way of life (despite its location in North Yorkshire), perhaps the idea of a ‘Workers’ Stately Home’ is too much of an oxymoron for both old and new labour historians because of the seemingly contradictory associations (at once, plebian, aristocratic, pastoral, industrial, colonial and ordinary) at play. This paradox may also explain the relative neglect of other country houses that were similarly repurposed by trade unions¹⁰, certainly when compared to the growing scholarly interest in the purpose-built ‘union castles’ located in urban areas, even if these buildings have themselves been disregarded when it comes to their preservation.¹¹ However, there is a risk that the material, archival and oral histories of these postwar labour movement premises become lost in the (not unlikely) event that they cease to be labour buildings and are sold to private developers.¹²

Recovering the history of Wortley Hall also presents an opportunity to revisit some of the key historiographical debates concerning the labour movement’s involvement in workers’ education, the range and meanings of the labour movement, and the expansion of residential adult learning in postwar Britain. When not completely passed over, many educationists and historians have tended to characterise modern British adult education according to two contrasting political ideologies and teaching practices. On the one hand, the liberal-humanist tradition emerged with the Settlement and the University Extension movements, Ruskin College, the Workers’ Education Association (WEA) and the Workers’ Educational Trade Union Committee (WETUC) from the late nineteenth century onwards. Organised by paternalistic middle- and upper-class individuals on behalf of the working class, their educational praxis was aimed at promoting disinterested learning, self-improvement, moral capital and the amelioration of class division. In contrast to this Arnoldian dissemination of sweetness and light was the movement for so-called Independent Working Class Education (IWCE), which properly emerged with the Marxist classes developed by the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist

⁸ Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy (eds.), *The Postwar Compromise: British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1945-64* (Monmouth, 2007), xli.

⁹ Lawrence Black, ‘Tories and Hunters: Swinton College and the Landscape of Modern Conservatism’, *History Workshop Journal*, 77 (2014), 188.

¹⁰ For example, the Electrical Trades Union purchased Esher Place for £23,000 in 1952; Ruxley Towers was sold to the National Union of General and Municipal Workers in 1962; and Quorn Grange is currently owned by the General Federation of Trade Unions Educational Trust.

¹¹ Even Nick Mansfield’s *Buildings of the Labour Movement* (Swindon, 2013), which includes chapters on labour movement buildings located in the countryside and ones associated with holidays, fails to mention Wortley.

¹² Similar concerns have been expressed over the TUC’s recent announcement that it plans to sell Congress House in London; see Marcus Barnett, ‘The Last Workers’ Castle’, *Tribune* (1 August 2024).

Labour Party.¹³ Demands from industrially militant workers for adult education courses, primarily aimed at making socialists and controlled by the labour movement, sharpened with the formation of the Plebs League, Central Labour College (CLC), National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) and the CP's Marx House Schools during the early part of the twentieth century. And whilst there were moments of co-operation between (and factional differences within) the two competing movements, it has become customary to focus on one or the other in the belief that each was inclined to view the other with suspicion, occasional contempt, and never the twain shall meet.¹⁴

In reality, both the intra- and inter-organisational politics of workers' education was far more nuanced. For example, Shiela Rowbotham, Jonathan Rose and John McIlroy have questioned the tendency for Marxist historians and some of the founding IWCE practitioners (such as the NCLC's first General Secretary, Jim Millar) to simplify the polarisations between the different types of adult education and their institutional histories. All three scholars have argued that, despite the NCLC accusing the WEA of 'nobbling' workers, the reality is that the pedagogical relationship between tutor and student remains unclear.¹⁵ Reflecting on the Association's first 50 years, former WEA Vice President Mary Stocks also notes, when asking herself how the 'ordinary trade unionist' viewed the 'two opposing educational creeds', that it 'might be supposed that he [sic] was a little bewildered'.¹⁶ Rose even suggests that the NCLC overstated its ideological differences with the WEA in an effort to make itself more attractive to students and to secure additional resources from the labour movement.¹⁷ And indeed, a cursory glance at the minutes of several trade union regional meetings reveals that it was common for area committees to sponsor delegates for educational schools and postal courses with the WEA, WETUC, Ruskin College and NCLC. More recently, Christos Efstathiou has provided us with a valuable account of the so-called 'Great Debate' within the WEA during the early 1950s about whether communist tutors lacked objectivity, which resulted in much disagreement among the organisation's hierarchy and several left-wing tutors leaving the WEA.¹⁸ Efstathiou also highlights how several notable historians of adult education, from J.F.C Harrison to Lawrence Goldman, have tended to neglect this

¹³ Whilst acknowledging the importance of the likes of the Labour Church movement, Socialist Sunday Schools, the Clarion and co-operative movements, insofar as they reflected the aspirations of the working class and were under their control, Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement: 1870-1920* (London: 1974), 296-303, argues that it was the explicitly Marxist groups who had the biggest impact advancing IWCE. See also, John McIlroy, 'Independent Working Class Education and Trade Union Education and Training', in Roger Fieldhouse (ed.), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester, 1996), 264.

¹⁴ One of the first studies to look at both of these traditions as a related phenomenon was Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906-1940* (Cardiff, 1993).

¹⁵ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London, 2001), 256-297; Sheila Rowbotham, 'Strangers in a Strange Country: Responses of Working-Class Students to the University Extension Movement, 1873-1910, *History Workshop*, 12 (1981). McIlroy, 'Independent Working-Class Education', 276-77. Rose is especially disparaging of Roger Fieldhouse's and Stuart MacIntyre's critical historiographies of the early WEA.

¹⁶ Mary Stocks, *The Workers' Educational Association: The First Fifty Years* (London, 1953), 89.

¹⁷ Rose, *Intellectual Life*, 279.

¹⁸ Christos Efstathiou, 'The Great Debate': Welfarism, Objectivity, and Cold War Ideology in the Workers' Educational Association', *Labour History Review*, 84: 1 (2019), 47-69.

internal debate, thus reinforcing what is essentially a Whiggish interpretation of the WEA's institutional history.

Besides, much of the ideological zealotry and public quarrels between these organisations gradually subsided with the emergence of the postwar welfare state and the social democratic consensus upon which it was founded. The ensuing combination of prolonged economic stability, near full employment, higher living standards, the rise of popular entertainment, increasing demands for scientific education, anti-communism and the Cold War, also effected a concomitant decline in the popularity of both liberal-humanist and more radical models of workers education whose political and pedagogical philosophies had been conceived in more uncertain times. This trend was hastened with the 1944 Education Act which paved the way for the expansion of university extra-mural departments, local authority adult education and short-term residential colleges. Whilst this development initially complimented the 'Great Tradition' of adult learning that had epitomised the pre-war WEA, many of these new providers ended up prioritising vocational education in collaboration with local employers and professional bodies. One must also agree with Roger Fieldhouse that the increased competition for dwindling student numbers pressured the Association into becoming a general further education provider for largely middle-class users in the interests of survival, thus losing sight of its original social purpose.¹⁹ Likewise, the NCLC's attempts to curry favour with the unions and the Labour Party led the organisation to gradually soften its Marxist political education. However, despite its shift towards respectability, utilitarianism and the centre-right, the number of NCLC-affiliated unions and adult students continued to decline after the war.²⁰

Insofar as they provided courses normally less than a week in length, and attendees were expected to share bedrooms, one can reasonably claim that Wortley was not dissimilar to many of the short-term residential centres and colleges that also emerged in the wake of WWII (for example, Grantley Hall, Urchfront Manor, Belstead House, Wansfell College, Pendley Manor, Stoke House, Wedgewood Memorial College, Burton Manor and Denman College).²¹ During the early years of development, sources of funding came mainly from LEA's (then under the auspices of county councils), philanthropic donations, voluntary organisations, co-operative societies, professional associations, and several universities (through extramural departments), among others²². The colleges also relied on

¹⁹ Roger Fieldhouse, 'The Local Education Authorities and Adult Education', 'The WEA' and 'University Adult Education', in Fieldhouse, *Modern British Adult Education*, 84-93, 181-182, 208-222.

²⁰ John McIlroy, 'The Demise of the National Council of Labour Colleges' and 'The Triumph of Technical Training?' in Brian Simon (ed.), *The Search for Enlightenment* (London, 1990), 173-207 & 227-235; John Holford, *Union Education in Britain* (Nottingham, 1994), 63-76; W.W. Craik, *The Central Labour College, 1909-29* (London, 1964). 156-167.

²¹ The number of short-term colleges that opened between 1941-50 was 23, 7 between 1951-60 and 12 between 1961-70. For additional information about each of the college's histories, see John Herrick, *The Short-Term Residential College: A Model for the Future*, (Nottingham, 2011); Guy Hunter, *Residential Colleges: Some New Developments in British Adult Education* (California, 1952), 65-77; Derek Tatton, *The Tension Between Political Commitment and Academic Neutrality in the WEA*, (Milton Keynes, 1987), 115-176.

²² Walter Drews (former Principal of Wansfell College, 1973-93), *The British Short Term Residential Colleges for Adult Education 1945-1995* (Ulster, 1995); Walter Drews and Roger Fieldhouse, 'Residential Colleges and

‘lettings’ to external organisations during the week (typically for conferences and closed courses) as a means of diversifying their revenue and making ends meet, a business model that Wortley adopted from the outset insofar as unions and like bodies provided their own tutors and course materials. An early champion of small groups of adults studying and living together for short periods was Guy Hunter (Warden of Grantley Hall, 1952-1955, and Urchfont Manor, 1945-1951), who usefully documented the variability of the colleges’ origins and pedagogical objectives.²³ Apart from teacher training, which generated income from partnering Local Education Authorities, the most popular and financially sustainable residential curricular during the immediate postwar period were vocational industrial training programmes. Such courses aimed to improve co-operative relations among employers, managers, foremen and employees, particularly in the recently nationalised industries created by the Labour government between 1945-1951, such as steel, coal and the railways.²⁴

A further similarity with Wortley is that many of the aforementioned residential centres and colleges occupied country houses that had also been vacated (or would have been were it not for a postwar change of use) due to mounting labour, fuel and maintenance costs; building material shortages and licence restrictions; increased death duties and taxes on incomes; a decline in the number of domestic servants; and a long-term depreciation in the value of farming land and rents.²⁵ What were once private homes had become dilapidated, prohibitively expensive, white elephants that risked bankrupting whole estates.²⁶ Consequently, it is estimated that between 1940-1969 the National Trust acquired a collection of 78 stately homes under the rubric of preserving our ‘rural heritage’ in the ‘national interest’; many more were bought for a snip and repurposed by insurance companies, industrial corporations, government agencies, nursing charities, the military, enterprising individuals and the Mutual Households Association.²⁷ It is unknown if the Wortley pioneers were directly influenced by Sir Richard Livingstone’s wartime clarion call to grow residential adult education provision and his criticisms of ‘the dreary surroundings in which so many WEA classes meet’²⁸, but they undoubtedly shared Livingstone’s realisation that the changing economic (mis)fortunes of

Non-Residential Settlements and Centres’, in Roger Fieldhouse (ed.), *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester, 1996), 239-263.

²³ Guy Hunter, ‘Vocation and Culture - A Suggestion’, *Adult Education*, 25: 1, (Leicester, 1952-53), 7-19.

²⁴ Sharon Clancy, *Sir George Trevelyan, Residential Adult Education and the New Age* (Cham, 2023), 6; Guy Hunter, ‘Residential Colleges for Adults’, in S.G. Raybould (ed.), *Trends in English Adult Education* (London, 1959), 124-125.

²⁵ For example, Attingham Hall, Knuston Hall, Braziers Park, Barlaston Hall and Madingley Hall.

²⁶ Probably the main chronicler of the decline of the English country houses during this period was James Lees-Milne, an architectural historian who worked for the National Trust from 1936-1973 and played an essential role persuading impoverished patricians to sell their houses to the Trust. See also, David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of The British Aristocracy* (London, 1996), 640; Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (London, 1997), 311-15; Caroline Seebohm, *The Country House: A Wartime History* (London, 1989); John Martin Robinson, *The Country House at War* (London, 1989). Although Wortley was requisitioned during WWII, it does not appear in any of the above-mentioned accounts.

²⁷ Howard Newby (ed.), *The National Trust: The Next Hundred Years* (London, 1995); John Cornforth, *Country Houses in Britain – Can They Survive?* (Crawley, 1974), 35-38.

²⁸ Richard Livingstone, *The Future in Education* (Cambridge, 1942), 50, was President of Corpus Christi College, then Vice Chancellor, Oxford University.

Britain's landed gentry provided an exceptional opportunity for developing a system of workers' education that emphasised the importance of the 'residential element', which was as much about learning and sociality taking place in attractive buildings as it was the subjects that were taught.

To the extent that Wortley combined residential training programmes with popular recreation and working-class comradeship, antecedents can also be found in the Co-operative Holiday Association (CHA) and the Holiday Fellowship (HF), established in 1891 and 1913 respectively. Founded as non-profit making organisations by Thomas Arthur Leonard, both the CHA and HF were conceived and developed steadily as a 'People's Holiday Movement'. Originally influenced by muscular Christianity, their main aim was to provide 'simple and strenuous recreative and educational holidays', specialising in affordable, week-long residential walking holidays for working-class adults (and families at selected centres from 1934).²⁹ Like Wortley, the centres tended to be administered by a secretary who worked for a modest honorarium. By 1939 the HF had acquired 44 holiday centres across the UK (many of them former country houses), however, approximately 20 were requisitioned by the government (for housing evacuees, refugees, agricultural workers and medical rehabilitation centres) during WWII and many of them were returned in bad condition. HF struggled to reopen those centres in need of extensive repairs. Despite this setback, the organisation had almost 40,000 shareholders by the 1950s, and coach touring vacations were introduced for older holiday makers who were no longer capable of walking. Indoor activities were not dissimilar to a typical Wortley programme, which were highly regimented and communal: singing, concerts, discussions, readings, painting, games, dancing, curtain raisers, and so on. And like Wortley, most HF centres had sizable libraries for educational purposes.³⁰

Of even greater and lasting importance was the growth in TUC and individual unions' educational provision that was aimed at training shop stewards and branch officers to be better negotiators and loyal union functionaries. Such approaches were reinforced with the creation of a new grouping of union education officers and the TUC absorbing what remained of the WETUC and NCLC in 1964. The postwar settlement and the deepening of the Cold War also emboldened the trade union right and their willingness to act as a kind of 'Praetorian Guard' for the Labour Party leadership against the left.³¹ Whilst the TUC had sought to undermine the CP during the interwar years by issuing the infamous 'Black Circular', which instructed Trades Councils to proscribe Party members, anti-

²⁹ T. A. Leonard, *Adventures in Holiday Making: Being the Story of the Rise and Development of a People's Holiday Movement* (London, 1934), 28. Leonard was not unlike Albert Mansbridge insofar as they were both Christian Socialists and influenced by the likes of Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley and William Morris. He also helped establish the Workers Travel Association (1922), Youth Hostels Association (1930) and the Ramblers' Association (1935). See also Douglas George Hope, *Thomas Arthur Leonard and the Co-operative Holidays Association* (Cambridge, 2017), 96-110; David Hardman, *The History of the Holiday Fellowship: 1913-1940* (London, 1981); Charles Johnson, *The History of the Holiday Fellowship: 1941-1980* (London, 1981).

³⁰ Harry Wroe, *The Story of HF Holidays* (London, 2007), 21 & 24. The HF still operates as a co-operative, owns 15 UK country house and has 48,000 members.

³¹ David Howell, "'Shut Your Gob!': Trade Unions and the Labour Party, 1945-64", in Campbell *et al*, *Postwar Compromise*, 126.

communism was especially prevalent across all levels of the labour movement during the immediate postwar years.³² Richard Stevens notes that, despite this political hostility and the repercussions surrounding the events of 1956, the CP continued to hold important national and regional positions in a number of trade unions and to win respect on the shop floor for its workplace activities. Although some commentators have criticised the Party's adoption of *The British Road to Socialism* (1951) and its postwar industrial politics as yet another departure from its Leninist origins and capitulation to the political culture of labourism, many others attribute the CP's dogged resilience to its decision to establish broad popular alliances with the unions, the Labour left and other progressive groups.³³ The strategy of building left-unity over Party sectarianism and opposing monopoly capitalism was further developed under the leadership of Bert Ramelson who, as the Party's National Industrial Organiser, encouraged communist activists to work alongside trade union officials and the Labour left to influence industrial policy, mobilise workers and win the labour movement.³⁴

This essay aims to extend these historiographical discussions by suggesting that, insofar as the Hall's early development was greatly assisted by a cadre of local communist trade unionists and fellow travellers who had been influenced by the anti-fascist popular frontism of the late 1930s³⁵, and on account of its willingness to accommodate an eclectic range of liberal-left organisations and cultural activities, Wortley itself was conceived and loosely organised in the spirit of a united front. Most of the aforementioned residential adult education centres established after WWII relied heavily on LEA funding and were shaped by various wartime educational reports³⁶ that emphasised the importance of short courses for rebuilding a sense of community and providing working people with a 'second chance' to retrain. Conversely, the Hall was more a product of the CP's postwar transition to *The British Road*, particularly its reformist calls for a Broad Left strategy rooted primarily around the labour movement.

³² Richard Stevens, 'Cold War Politics: Communism and Anti-Communism in the Trade Unions', in Campbell *et al*, *Post-War Compromise*, 168-191. See also, John Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951-68* (London, 2003), 226-234; V.L. Allen, *The Russians Are Coming* (Shipley, 1987), 267-290; Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1941-1951* (London, 1997), 177-190.

³³ For critical accounts of the Party's industrial strategy during this period, see John McIlroy, 'Notes on the Communist Party and Industrial Politics', in John McIlroy, Nina Fishman & Alan Campbell (eds.), *The High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964-79: British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics* (Aldershot, 1999), 216-258; Geoff Andrews, *Endgames and New Times: The Final Years of British Communism 1964-1991* (London, 2004), 105-139. A more positive appraisal, and response to the above criticisms, can be found in Roger Siefert and Tom Sibley, *Revolutionary Communist at Work: A Political Biography of Bert Ramelson* (London, 2012), 110-114. See also, Callaghan, *Cold War*, 177-194; Keith Laybourn, *Marxism in Britain. Dissent, Decline and Re-Emergence, 1945-c.2000* (Routledge, 2006), 57-80.

³⁴ See John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, 'Organizing the Militants: The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, 1966-1979', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 37: 1 (1999), 1-31.

³⁵ For a fuller account of the historiography of the popular front and claims that the CPGB was largely unsuccessful in building cross-class alliances in Britain, see John McIlroy, 'Stalin, the Comintern and the Popular Front in Britain, France and Spain, 1935-1939: Some Historiographical and Political Reflections', *Journal of Socialist Theory*, 51: 2-3, (2024), 305-361.

³⁶ For example, British Institute of Adult Education, *Adult Education After the War* (Oxford, 1945); Board of Education, *White Paper: Educational Reconstruction* (London, 1943); Ministry of Education, *Pamphlet Number 8, Further Education: The Scope and Content of its Opportunities under the Education Act of 1944* (London, 1947). See also, Drew and Fieldhouse, 'Residential Colleges', 257.

This organisational and political approach proved especially successful in South Yorkshire due to the region's industrial makeup and the close working relations between neighbouring Labour Party, communist and trade union activists. Unlike the social movements, middle-class radicalism and cultural politics that were associated with the emerging New Left and the later Eurocommunist generation, Wortley's postwar history is firmly rooted in the Old Left, centred mainly around the traditional blue-collar working class.³⁷ Both the Hall's social environment and methods of operation were –and still are– mainly proletarian in terms of its recreational offerings, strong connections to the labour movement and hierarchical structures. As such, it affirms the general thrust of Campbell *et al's* polemical observation that, contrary to the revisionist claims made by postmodern identity politics, and labour history's neglect of women and minorities notwithstanding, the 'duality of class and labour movement' continues to be an important subject of politics and history apropos their durability and universality.³⁸

Additionally, drawing on Eric Hobsbawm's reflections on the birth of the Society for the Study of Labour History (SSLH) and 'history from below' (or 'grassroots history'), hopefully this essay goes some way to, not only uncovering what has hitherto been passed over by academic historians, but to also 'provide a link with the present' and 'to find a way forward in left politics through historical reflection'.³⁹ With that in mind, what follows is purposely written to engage with professional historians, trade unionists and a wider public alike, in the belief that the history of Wortley Hall is a subject of both academic and political significance. Whilst recognising the importance of further developing labour history research and pioneering work, it is in a similar vein that several notable labour historians have recently cautioned against the discipline's retreat into the narrow confines of 'academicism', the growing tendency for colleagues to 'hunker down' or 'take the neoliberal shilling'. Such developments, they argue, are detrimental to the kind of 'radically committed scholarship' that motivated a good many labour historians during the 1960s and 1970s. And though this belief in 'History's loftier or idealistic uses' has resulted in occasional accusations of ideological bias and being too attached to their subject, each of the said labour historians make convincing arguments that a commitment to the cause of the labour movement and socialism is not incompatible with rigorous historical analysis and explanation.⁴⁰ Relatedly, Mary Davis also observes that, despite the many first-

³⁷ For a summary of the social composition of the CP during the postwar period, particularly the distinction and occasional distrust between 'middle class idealists' and 'working-class pragmatists', see Kenneth Newton, *The Sociology of British Communism* (London, 1969), 75. Cf. Andrews, *Endgames*, 20-49, who argues that Newton fails to take into account the legacy of the YCL's interest in cultural politics and its impact on the Party's subsequent development, in particular the turn to Gramsci.

³⁸ Campbell *et al*, *Postwar Compromise*, 5. See also, Mary Davis, 'Women and Class', *A Centenary for Socialism: Britain's Communist Party, 1920-2020* (London, 2020), 262.

³⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, 'History from Below – Some Reflections', in Frederick Krantz (ed.), *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology* (Oxford, 1988), 26; 'Looking Back Half a Century', in Joan Allen, Alan Campbell and John McIlroy (eds.), *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives* (Pontypool, 2010), 5.

⁴⁰ For example, Peter Gurney, 'History and Commitment: E.P. Thompson's Legacy', *Labour History Review*, 78 (3), 2013, 331-349; Neville Kirk, 'Challenge, Crisis, and Renewal? Themes in the Labour History of Britain,

rate courses delivered by the TUC and affiliated unions, and the occasional ‘commemorative foray’ notwithstanding, the British labour movement itself has tended to neglect its own past when training today’s activists.⁴¹ But there is a danger that this ahistorical approach negates the very history that the labour movement should be recuperating as ‘usable pasts’ for present and future generations of working-class people.⁴²

Historical recovery is also important for the reason that, although Wortley is by no means a lost cause at this moment in time, its future looks increasingly uncertain. This is partly due to the growing financial pressures within the UK hospitality sector, but more importantly, because of a significant downturn in trade union activity in recent years. Whilst some unions have simply opted to hold their residential schools at other venues, it is undoubtedly the case that the latter trend also reflects the steady decline of British trade union membership since the late 1970s and the consequent dwindling of funds available for education and training.⁴³ And though it is debatable as to whether contemporary TUC-administered workplace learning initiatives have succeeded in their stated aim of encouraging both general trade union renewal and smaller-scale branch activism (vis-à-vis the decline of the shop steward model of collective bargaining)⁴⁴, the government’s abolishment of the Union Learning Fund in 2021 has been a further setback insofar as it is now more difficult for employees to take undertake paid educational leave to attend day-release courses or residential schools (and have the course fees paid for by their employer). We can put hope that to everything there is a season, that the tide will turn again, and that any initial sightings of vultures circling over Wortley will be held off. But we cannot wait passively for that to happen. Although mindful of John McIlroy’s cautioning against ‘the condescension of adult educators’, ‘the romantic inflation of left intellectuals’ and ‘uncontextualized, celebratory accounts’, equally, the article that follows constitutes an intervention to promote that desirable outcome by, hopefully, raising awareness of the Hall’s past and present, within and without the labour movement.⁴⁵ In short, and to quote a former Wortley President, and Vice-President of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Stuart Charnley: ‘This is our oasis of socialism; let us ensure its successful continuation’.

1960-2010’, *Labour History Review*, 75 (2), 2019, 162-180; Campbell *et al*, *Postwar Compromise*, xxxi-xxxii & 5-6; Mary Davis, *Comrade or Brother? A History of the British Labour Movement* (London, 2009), 2-5.

⁴¹ Davis, *Comrade or Brother?*, 3. Similarly, John McIlroy, ‘Making Trade Unionists: The Politics of Pedagogy, 1945-79’, in Campbell *et al*, *Postwar Compromise*, 37, notes that many contemporary accounts of post-war trade unionism say very little about education and training.

⁴² See for example, Paul Griffin, ‘Making Usable Pasts: Collaboration, Labour and Activism in the Archive’, *Area*, 50: 4 (2018), 501-8.

⁴³ Department for Business & Trade, *Trade Union Membership, UK 1995-2023: Statistical Bulletin* (London, 2024), 5-7.

⁴⁴ John McIlroy and Richard Croucher, ‘British Trade Unions and the Academics: The Case of Unionlearn’, *Capital and Class*, 37: 2 (2013), 263-284; John McIlroy, ‘Ten Years of New Labour: Workplace Learning, Social Partnership and Union Revitalization in Britain’, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 46: 2 (2008), 297.

⁴⁵ McIlroy, ‘Independent Working-Class Education’, 264, and ‘Making Trade Unionists’, 37, names A.J. Corfield, J.P.M. Millar and John Holford as examples of ‘a specialist literature largely based on uncontextualized, celebratory accounts’ of trade union education.

An 'Oasis of Socialism' is Born

The opportunity to acquire Wortley as a home for workers' education and recreation came about when Archibald Ralph Montagu-Stuart-Wortley-Mackenzie, the 3rd Earl of Wharncliffe, decided to let the Hall due to spiralling maintenance and staffing costs. It was late 1949 when a veteran trade unionist and former miner by the name of Albert Vincent Williams, better known as Vin, would have likely read an advertisement in a local newspaper pronouncing that Wortley Hall was available for short-term lease. Williams had a longstanding involvement with the NCLC, first as a voluntary tutor, then as a regional organiser responsible for coordinating day, weekend and week schools across South Yorkshire and the North Midlands⁴⁶. He also had a reputation for being a visionary and often talked about his dream of obtaining a large building with extensive grounds that could be used for both education and recreational purposes.⁴⁷ Initially, Williams discussed the idea of renting the Hall with Alf Hague, a delegate to the powerful and communist-dominated Sheffield District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), and secretary to its political subcommittee.⁴⁸ Both shared a common interest in workers' education and Hague had employed Williams' services to help organise regional AEU weekend schools, which helped recruit new union members and strengthen the district's shop stewards' and work committees.⁴⁹ After further discussions with a small number of people in the local labour movement, Sheffield AEU delegated Alf Hague and Mick Shaw⁵⁰, another communist and local AEU shop steward, to visit Wortley Hall and report back. Despite finding the building abandoned and in need of major repairs (the two of them had entered through a broken window), they recommended that the AEU in Sheffield support Williams' socialist enterprise.⁵¹

Following several meetings between Williams and the Wharncliffe estate, a provisional fourteen-year lease was agreed that became effective from September 1950, with rent of £50 for the first year (on the understanding that all renovation costs would be met by the lessee) and £500 per annum thereafter. Various national labour organisations were approached for donations and loans, however, a couple of honourable exceptions notwithstanding, Vin's fundraising appeal fell on deaf ears. Undaunted, he invited several well-connected trade union officers, Co-operative Party members and

⁴⁶ Len Williams, *Dreadnought: The Life and Times of Albert Vincent Williams* (Sheffield, 2007), 21-22.

⁴⁷ J.P.M Millar, *The Labour College Movement* (London, 1979), 180.

⁴⁸ Marian Hague, 'Alfred Hague – Socialist (1919-1992): His Life and Work', WH Archive.

⁴⁹ For example, the archive contains an advertisement publicising a NCLC/AEU weekend school that was held at Grantley Hall (near Ripon), 29 September-1 October 1950. See also, John Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley: The Story of Labour's Home, 1951-2011* (Sheffield, 2011), 14.

⁵⁰ Mick Shaw, 'A Real Sense of Achievement', *Morning Star* (16 December 1997). Fellow Communist, Bill Moore, paid the following tribute to Shaw in a farewell pamphlet published for his funeral: 'One of the few remaining members of that splendid band of engineers, led by Herbert Howarth, George Caborn, Harold Ulyat, Ted Scott and Albert Knight, who, in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, upheld the century-long reputation of Sheffield for defending trade union and human rights in the workshop by, time after time, successfully defeating the attacks of employers, local and national media, and their own right-wing national leaders – so inspiring future leaders of the calibre of Derek Simpson', WH Archive.

⁵¹ Interview with Val (daughter of Mick Shaw) and John Keyworth, 28 August 2022. Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley*, 14-15.

Labour Councillors from the Sheffield, Chesterfield, Barnsley and Rotherham areas to visit Wortley, with a view to forming a provisional committee to advance his plans. The first meeting took place in Lady Wharnccliffe's former sitting room (now known as the Boardroom) on 4 May 1950 and those present elected Williams as Secretary, Harry Johnson (another CP member and full-time AEU divisional organiser) as Chair, and Alf Hague as Treasurer. There was broad agreement that the project ought to be financed and managed as a co-operative venture, comprising both individual and organisational shareholders. It was therefore decided to widen the call for support to the rank-and-file of the labour movement.⁵²

The committee borrowed £100 from a group of comrades to pay for ten thousand leaflets to be printed and painstakingly mailed to ward and constituency Labour Parties, regional trades councils, trade union branches and district committees, co-operative societies, and the like, inviting the organisations and individual members to take out (up to a maximum of 200) 1s. shares in Wortley Hall and to support a national draw on the 1950 Doncaster St. Leger horse race.⁵³ Applications for shares, totalling an impressive £1861, were received from all parts of the UK, and the draw made a whopping £1300 profit. Several of the larger trade unions made donations worth over £700.⁵⁴ By the end of the appeal, endowment grants and donations totalled £4706. Local businesses provided their services and furnishings at little more than cost prices.⁵⁵ Even more impressive was the assortment of voluntary workers who travelled (mainly by bus) to Wortley each weekend for several months to renovate the Hall.⁵⁶ The archive contains various newspaper cuttings, printed ephemera and memoirs, that variously describe the 'beehive of activity' as engineers, miners, plasterers, joiners, electricians, decorators, plumbers, clerks, housewives and children, 'poured in their skill and enthusiasm'.⁵⁷ So much so that the final cost of repairing, converting and furnishing the Hall was only £10,000, not the £40,000-£50,000 originally estimated by the surveyors.⁵⁸ Reflecting on the accomplishment several years later, the monthly *AEU Journal* went as far as to claim that, 'the thousands of hours of voluntary labour ... has

⁵² *Wortley Hall: Labour's Home – 25 Years Souvenir* (Manchester, 1976).

⁵³ Writing on the occasion of the Hall's fiftieth anniversary, Marian Hague astutely noted: 'The cost of a single share (1/- or 5p) seems ridiculous now but in 1950 it meant that a person with a very low wage could become a part owner of Wortley Hall', in Harold Shaw, *Wortley Hall: the Early Years* (Wortley, 2001). See also, Williams, *Dreadnought*, 23-26.

⁵⁴ The AEU donated £250, as did the Scottish National Union of Mineworkers. Other significant endowments came from the Electrical Trades Union (£100), the FBU (£50), the NCLC (£40) and the National Union of Railway Men (£25), WH Archive.

⁵⁵ For example, the painting and decorating were done by the painting department of the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society Ltd. They also helped install five new baths and twenty-seven washbasins. The furnishings were provided by Messers Swycher Bros at manufacturers prices, saving over £1000 on the cost. First Annual General Meeting Agenda, Chairman's Opening Remarks, 1 February 1953 (Wortley, 1953).

⁵⁶ 'The Miracle of Wortley Hall' was the headline for a *Reynolds News* feature article written by Gordon Schaffer, reprinted in the Hall's first brochure (Preston, 1951).

⁵⁷ *Wortley Hall: Labour's Stately Home* (Wortley, 2003). Bas Barker, a former member of Wortley's executive and a leading AEU shop steward for the Chesterfield area, happily recalled 'whole gangs' of people working weekends at the Hall; *Free but Not Easy*, 96.

⁵⁸ For a breakdown of costs and liabilities, see First Annual General Meeting Agenda, 1 February 1953 (Wortley, 1953).

been one of the greatest examples of socialist endeavour in the annals of the Labour Movement'.⁵⁹ Remarkably, over just several months, the semi-derelict mansion had been transformed into a centre that provided sleeping accommodation, catering, conference and recreational facilities for 120 persons.

Wortley Hall (Labour's Home) was formally opened on May Day 1951 by Sir Frank Soskice (Labour M.P. for Sheffield Neepsend and the Solicitor General), with approximately 3000 people in attendance.⁶⁰ Other local dignitaries and acts included Lady Mabel Smith (Labour County Councillor), Lord Morris (former Labour MP for Sheffield Central), Alwyn Machen (Yorkshire Miners Association), the Scunthorpe Co-operative Ladies Choir and the Hickleton Colliery Band. The opening ceremony programme invited guests 'To find joy, fellowship, recreation and knowledge within and without'. And in doing so, 'To revive a zeal for greater effort within this our great movement, that was born out of the struggles of the common people of this our land, to realise what we fundamentally believe is our common purpose'. That is, 'To serve the desires, needs and aspirations of the whole of the working-class movement'. The Hall's first brochure included photos and detailed descriptions of the Hall's newly restored amenities: for example, the entrance hall, main staircase and gallery, the oak panelled dining and sitting rooms, the library and games room, the sumptuous lounge, the dance and lecture halls, and the dormitory bedrooms (varying from 2 to 8 single beds). Entertainment included billiards, putting green, tennis, squash courts, table tennis, fishing, licensed bar, concerts, socials, visits to factories and daily lectures 'on all topical subjects connected with the Trade Union, Labour and Co-operative Movements'.⁶¹ Would-be guests were assured that Wortley would provide 'a holiday that will live long in your memories'. Above all, apart from standing 'for something unique in Labour History' insofar as the Hall is 'owned and controlled by the workers', 'It's better – It's cheaper – It's Ideal'. And by 'bringing members of the Broad Labour Movement together into a community of fellowship and comradeship it opens the field of knowledge of this, Our Great Movement'.⁶²

Shortly after the Hall's official opening, Bert Wynn (Area Secretary of Derbyshire Miners) suggested that Vin Williams and Alf Hague visit the manager of the non-profit Derbyshire Miners' Holiday Camp at Skegness (opened in 1939), Jack Williamson. Like Wortley, the Camp offered affordable holidays aimed at working-class families and the Derbyshire Miners' Association helped to subsidise short breaks for retired miners and the permanently sick. Writing on the occasion of Wortley's fiftieth anniversary, Marion Hague noted that the Hall owed both Wynn and Williamson 'a great debt

⁵⁹ *AEU Journal*, 4 April 1966, Volume 33, 175-76.

⁶⁰ *Wortley Hall: Labour's Home*.

⁶¹ Wortley Hall's first brochure (Preston, 1951). A syllabus of daily lectures for June 1951 gives a flavour of the topics and impressive calibre of speakers that were on offer for guests. For example, the second week in June included: 'Power – Political and Economic' (Lord Shepherd, Chief Government Whip in the House of Lords); 'Our Educational System' (J.H. Bingham, Leader of the Labour Party, Sheffield City Council); 'Our Mixed Economy' (Ray Fletcher, Organiser NCLC South Wales); 'Labour Finance' (Bill Robinson, Manager Sheffield CWS Bank); 'Chemicals and Monopiles' (Bob Edwards, Gen. Sec. Chemical Workers' Union); Re-Armament and the Welfare State' (Wm. E. Lawn, Educational Secretary, Huddersfield Co-op Society).

⁶² Wortley Hall's first brochure (Preston, 1951).

of gratitude' for guidance regarding catering, bar management, club rules and legislation.⁶³ And indeed, Wortley became increasingly popular as a holiday destination for young families and pensioners alike. At the time of opening, visitors could enjoy a week's full board for just under £4 a week (rates varied slightly depending on the time of year); old age pensioners were granted a reduction to £2. 7s. 6d (outside the peak season months). Two of the Hall's earliest guests, Mary and Harry Crann, noted how 'most of the holiday makers booked for the next year before they left'.⁶⁴ Trade union summer schools notwithstanding, holiday bookings were prioritised during the summer months and trade union business tended to be concentrated during the winter months. Thus the Hall alternated between being an affordable summer holiday home and an education centre during the 'closed season'. Additionally, people from the surrounding villages and cities started to visit Wortley to socialise in its bar, attend concerts and dinner dances. One of the early theatrical highlights was an open-air performance of Robert Tressell's *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* by Unity Theatre.⁶⁵ Additionally, after acquiring several book collections which were either donated or loaned by local autodidacts (such as Fred Shaw) and national organisations (for example, the Hyndman, Jean Dot, Wedgwood Memorial and Henry Collins Libraries), Wortley soon boasted a library that was unrivalled for its socialist literature in the South Yorkshire region.⁶⁶ And several Executive reports to the Society's AGMs indicate that, from the mid-fifties onwards, the Hall had become the chosen place to stay for visiting international delegates and trade unionists, especially from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, thereby 'playing a very useful part in fostering visits from other countries, and thus developing international friendships'.⁶⁷

The Hall's provisional committee wasted little time 'to bring within the greater orbit of control and management those who had subscribed to shares'. An executive committee was properly elected at a shareholders' meeting on 21 July 1951 'to act until such time as the Rules and Constitution could be prepared and registered, and the first official General Meeting convened'.⁶⁸ Williams and Johnson continued as Secretary and Chair, W.H. (Bill) Robinson⁶⁹ (manager of the Sheffield Co-operative

⁶³ Marion Hague, original draft of 'Early Memories of Wortley Hall (Labour's Home)', (n.d.); Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley*, 33.

⁶⁴ Mary and Harry Crann, *Wortley Hall, Rags to Riches: Memories of a Socialist Ideal* (n.d.). The 11-page booklet is one of the better accounts of what a holiday at Wortley was like during the early years of the Hall.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, this was the adaptation by Bill Rowbotham (better known as Bill Owen who played Compo in *Last of the Summer Wine*). There is an original notice (and photographs) of the performance in Wortley's Archive advertising four performances, 31 July – 2 August 1954.

⁶⁶ Having its own library meant that the Hall was not dependent on local public libraries, which were regarded as 'servicing bodies' by recognised adult education providers and were unlikely to stock more radical literature or specialist works. Library subscribers at Wortley included left intellectuals, such as John Saville (then Senior Lecturer in Economic History, Hull University), who had the misfortune of receiving an officious letter reminding him that five books he had borrowed in July 1961 were three years overdue and 'should have been returned to us long ago'. Letter from Alf Hague to John Saville, 30 November 1964. See Marion Hague's memoirs in Shaw, *Wortley Hall*, for a fuller account of how Wortley acquired its various collections of books. Bob Jones also produced a four-page report that itemised valuable books following a visit on 23 April 2014.

⁶⁷ Executive Report to the Fifth Annual General Meeting – 4 March 1956.

⁶⁸ First Annual General Meeting Agenda, Chairman's Opening Remarks.

⁶⁹ In her memoirs of Wortley's early years, Marion Hague singles out Robinson for special mention on the grounds that, 'Without his continuous help and guidance on financial matters, the whole project of Wortley Hall

Wholesale Societies Bank on Snig Hill) as Treasurer and, in spite of being on long-term sick leave due to poor health caused by his industrial job⁷⁰, Hague was persuaded to shoulder day-to-day responsibility for the management of the Hall as Organiser (along with his wife, Marion). The first meeting of the newly elected executive took place on 11 August 1951, at which they prepared the basic rules that would form the basis for Wortley's legal constitution. The draft was then circulated to shareholders for feedback and amendments, which, in turn, were integrated into a definitive charter. Following extensive legal advice from Ellis Green of Irwin Mitchell solicitors, Labour's Educational, Recreational and Holiday Homes Ltd was finally registered as a limited company (under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act) in March 1952.⁷¹ Chapters II and V of the first rulebook outlined the Hall's founding objects and principles of administration, of which the following were key:

- §2 (d, e) To provide facilities whereby regional, district, divisional councils and national organisations of trade unions, labour parties, co-operative organisations, educational bodies and youth organisations connected with the broad Labour Movement can hold their own respective day, weekend and summer residential schools, conferences, meetings, rallies, garden parties and other functions.
- §2 (f) To seek the co-operation of all educational organisations in the promotion of either specific or general forms of education of an adult character, which is applicable and useful to the education of the members of the Labour and Co-operative Movements
- §2 (g) To promote meetings, discussions, dances, film shows, concerts, television and radio programmes, rallies, demonstrations, fetes, shows, exhibitions of art, scientific and trade displays, rural industries, sport, dramatics and entertainments.
- §28 (1-5) The government of the Society shall be by the authority of the Annual General Meeting ... Every individual and organisation member shall be entitled to attend the AGM and shall be entitled to one vote, and no more.⁷²

The first AGM was held on 1 February 1953 in Sheffield's City Hall with 154 delegates representing shareholders.⁷³ Johnson opened the meeting as the Society's Chair and *inter alia* noted that 'What at

would have foundered several times', in Harold Shaw, *Wortley Hall: the Early Years*. Likewise, the Executive's annual reports often mention that Wortley would not have survived without the support of the CWS Bank and Robinson's financial acumen. See also, Vernon Thornes, *Commemorating the Co-Operative Movement (Specifically Sheffield & Rotherham)* (South Yorkshire, 1995), 22.

⁷⁰ There is a folder containing various medical records and reports for Hague, including details of a fifteen-week treatment for tuberculous and fibrositis in Crimicar Lane Sanatorium, which his doctor attributed to Hague been an electric-arc welder and inhaling toxic fumes over many years.

⁷¹ First Annual General Meeting Agenda, Chairman's Opening Remarks.

⁷² *Rules of Labour's Educational, Recreational, Holiday Homes Ltd*, (Wortley, 1952), 2 & 7. WH Archive has several folders and envelopes that contain numerous drafts, scribbles, crossing outs and revised versions of the Hall's founding rules and later amendments.

⁷³ The 'Notice of First General Meeting' listed a brief Business Agenda, several key rules for information, and was circulated to all shareholders by Williams on 27 October 1952.

first was an idea was now a practical reality', which 'stood for what the old pioneers in the movement had stood for, freedom of discussion for all within the broad labour movement'.⁷⁴ The Provisional Management and Executive Committee presented its first report 'with a sense of pride, of a task undertaken and achieved' before noting that its first duty was 'to effect the transfer of obligations and responsibilities to the now registered body of shareholders incorporated ... as a Limited Company', which was approved unopposed.⁷⁵ Though forty nominations were received for the executive committee ballot, many of the old executive were re-elected and continued to operate as a Broad Left alliance. Tellingly, communist-affiliated AEU members won eight of the thirty vacancies and, together with Hague and Johnson, continued to exercise a significant influence on Wortley's future development.

In November 1957 Wortley received a letter from the Estate trustees asking if the Society would be interested in buying the property.⁷⁶ The Management Committee agreed that they would indicate an interest, 'having in mind a purchasing price of £4000'.⁷⁷ After a few months of waiting to get a response the Wharnccliffe Estate replied, through A. Wilby & Son, with an asking price of £15,000.⁷⁸ Hague, as the newly appointed Secretary, was tasked to 'make the necessary approaches to national trade unions seeking their financial backing in purchasing Wortley Hall'.⁷⁹ Guarantees were given that any loan to the Wortley Hall Purchase Fund would be in the form of debenture stock (in units of £5) that would be repaid in ten years at 4% per annum. Loans would also have been repaid in full should the negotiations with Wharnccliffe Estate have fallen through. Surviving records indicate that the most generous offers of support came from unions where the CP had influence among the leadership⁸⁰, for example, the Amalgamated Union of Foundry Workers (£2000), Tobacco Workers' Unions (£1000), Warwickshire District NUM (£750), Scottish NUM (£100), South Wales NUM (£100), Derbyshire NUM⁸¹ (£250), Constructional Engineering Union (£100), Sheffield's Firth-Brown Shop Stewards' Committee (£100) and, despite its initial reservations, the FBU (£200).⁸² And there are numerous other receipts and letters pledging support for smaller amounts.⁸³

⁷⁴ Chairman's Address, Report of the First General Meeting of Labour's Educational Recreational Holiday Homes Ltd, WH Archive.

⁷⁵ First Annual General Meeting Agenda, Chairman's Opening Remarks; Report of the Provisional Management and Executive Committee submitted to the First AGM, WH Archive.

⁷⁶ Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting, 23 June & 15 December 1957; Minutes of the Management Committee Meeting, 10 November 1957.

⁷⁷ Management Committee Minutes, 10 November 1957.

⁷⁸ Executive Committee Minutes, 23 March 1958.

⁷⁹ Management Committee Minutes, 16 March 1958; Executive Committee Minutes, 23 March 1958.

⁸⁰ Stevens, 'Cold War Politics', 176, lists those unions where the CP had a significant presence during the postwar years.

⁸¹ The Derbyshire NUM's backing was especially generous given that it already had a holiday camp at Skegness for its members and their families.

⁸² WH Archive holds a ledger that lists the hundreds of organisations and individuals that took out either a loan or shares. See also, Management Committee Minutes, 9 & 24 August 1958, 14 September 1958 and 9 April 1959; Executive Committee Minutes, 21 June, 20 September 1959

⁸³ The smallest documented amount donated was 10/- from a Mr F Priestley, in Cottingley (near Bingley), who wrote a letter (n.d.) explaining that, as an old age pensioner, that's all he could afford. Bill Robinson, Wortley's

A progress report presented to the Management Committee in December 1958 indicated that the purchase fund had reached £9,600.⁸⁴ Following further negotiations with Wharncliffe Estate it was agreed that the Hall could be purchased for £10,000.⁸⁵ The matter received final approval at the Seventh Annual General Meeting held at Wortley Hall on 8 March 1959.⁸⁶ The Society instructed Sheffield solicitor Irwin Mitchell & Co to undertake the necessary conveyance searches.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the purchase fund had grown to £12,000 and a decision was taken to close the appeal as the amount raised covered the agreed sale price and associated legal costs.⁸⁸ Finally, on 26 October 1959, Labour's Educational Recreational Holiday Homes Ltd acquired legal freehold ownership of 'the land, buildings and the Mansion House known as Wortley Hall near the city of Sheffield'.⁸⁹ In closing the Eighth Annual General Meeting (held on 13 March 1960), Johnson (Chair) commented on 'the remarkable progress achieved since the idea was first conceived to create Wortley Hall' and how '1959 would always be regarded as a memorable year in the history and records of ... Labour's Home'. The meeting recorded that ownership of Wortley was a 'great achievement and tribute to the spirit and endeavour of the rank and file of the working-class movement'. The executive's report to the AGM added, for good measure, that it aimed to make Wortley 'the finest centre in the country', 'a place without comparison in our Movement'.⁹⁰ Although the report's concluding statement is perhaps best understood as a rhetorical flourish, it nevertheless raises the question of who else among the rank-and-file supported the Hall in its early years. And to what extent was their backing of Wortley shaped by broader currents and tensions within the labour movement, particularly in the context of South Yorkshire?

The Emergence of the Broad Left in South Yorkshire

Whilst recognising that the influence of individual trade union activists ought not to be exaggerated, McIlroy also notes the importance of acknowledging the role played by rank-and-file leaders in key unions and industries if we are properly to understand the policies and organisations of the labour movement. I have previously mentioned that Wortley's early development was supported by a cadre of local communist trade unionists and fellow travellers guided by the popular frontism of *The British Road*, particularly its reformist calls for building regional and national alliances in the labour movement.

Treasurer, wrote Hague to say that he thought Mr Priestley's letter 'should be shown as an example of the spirit behind Wortley Hall' (12 November 1958).

⁸⁴ Management Committee Minutes, 7 December 1958.

⁸⁵ The reduced purchase price was first discussed at the Management Committee, 24 August 1958; see also, Management Committee Minutes, 8 February 1959.

⁸⁶ Seventh Annual General Meeting Minutes, 8 March 1959.

⁸⁷ Management Committee Minutes, 15 March, 9 April, 31 May, 12 July, 9 August, 13 September 1959; Executive Committee Minutes, 26 April 1959 & 22 May 1959.

⁸⁸ Executive Committee Minutes, 21 June 1959. Management Committee Minutes, 11 October 1959.

⁸⁹ The original conveyance documentation is stamped by the West Riding of Yorkshire Registry of Deeds, Wakefield. Interestingly, subsequent amendments to the conveyance and deeds reveal that a formal change of name from 'Labour Home' to 'Wortley Hall' only occurred on 8 April 1992. See also, Management Committee and Executive Committee Minutes, 8 November 1959.

⁹⁰ Executive Report to the Eighth AGM, held on 13 March 1960.

The CP's prioritising of left unity and industrial politics as a means of radicalising the Labour Party resulted in several trade union Broad Lefts in which the Party exercised a significant degree of influence. Despite the growing hostility from the right wing of the AEU towards the CP and the defeat of the communist District President Herbert Howarth in 1957, Sheffield engineering and steel was one such Party stronghold. Though relatively few in numbers compared to the total workforce, Party activists worked tirelessly to secure key positions as elected shop stewards, convenors, branch officers and delegates.⁹¹ Of the Sheffield factory branches with a long tradition of CP activity⁹², the Party was especially influential at Firth Brown Tools where George Caborn was a longstanding AEU shop steward convenor.⁹³ As a founding member of Wortley's executive board, the CP's Yorkshire District Committee (1950-1980) and National Executive (for eight years during the 1950s), Sheffield AEU District President (1960-1968), then full-time District Secretary (1968-1981), Caborn epitomised that postwar generation of Sheffield, Rotherham and Chesterfield metalworkers who helped swell the ranks of the CP's industrial cadre. Moreover, he was instrumental in organising the city's postwar Broad Left movement, which included the local Labour Group, Sheffield Trades and Labour Council and various other progressive organisations (such as the Sheffield Campaign Against Racism).⁹⁴ Among those who paid tributes at Caborn's funeral service following his untimely death in 1982, Ramelson acknowledged Caborn's influence on the national Party's industrial strategy and the 'major role' he played in building unity 'between the Sheffield engineers, the Rotherham steelworkers and the Yorkshire miners', thus laying the foundations for what would later be proclaimed as the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire.⁹⁵

⁹¹ For example, Stevens, 'Cold War Politics', 179 & 190, notes that there were sixteen CP factory branches in Sheffield and of the 25-member District Committee, there were 15 communists and fellow-travellers against 10 non-communists Committee at the end of 1956. See also, Howard Carter, *The Mouse the Roared: The Communist Party and Labour Activists in Sheffield, 1950-1975* (Oxford, 2017), 12-14; John Callaghan, *Cold War*, 234-239; McIlroy, 'Notes on the Communist Party', 233-238; Ken Coates, 'The State of the AEU', *New Left Review*, 42, March/April 1967. As well as playing leading roles in several local disputes throughout this period, AEU Divisional Committee minutes also show that communist delegates regularly carried motions that were critical of American imperialism and NATO vis-à-vis support for improving economic and political relations with the Soviet Union and China. The AEU Division No. 13 comprised delegates from Sheffield, Chesterfield, Barnsley, Penistone, Doncaster, Retford and Scunthorpe. Sheffield Archives, AEU/AUEW Divisional Committee Minutes, 1940-1955, 1956-1965, X53/1/2-3.

⁹² McIlroy and Campbell, 'Organizing the Militants', 13, claim that Shardlow had up to 100 CP members in the 1960s. See also, Siefert and Sibley, *Revolutionary Communist*, 70.

⁹³ John McIlroy, 'Every Factory Our Fortress': Communist Party Workplace Branches in a Time of Militancy, 1956-79. Part 2: Testimonies and Judgements', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 12 (2001), 59-66; Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen & Andrew Flinn, *Communists and British Society 1920-1991* (London, 2007), 68-69.

⁹⁴ Helen Jackson, *People's Republic of South Yorkshire* (Nottingham, 2021), 42-48; AUEW 'In memoriam' booklet (1982); George Caborn Memorial Trust leaflet (Sheffield, 1985). Caborn also mentored several influential labour movement figures and future Wortley stalwarts, for example, Mick Shaw, Ken Randell, Jack Illingworth, Bill Michie, Roger Barton, Derek Simpson, Albert Knight, Richard Caborn, Ernie Walker, Steve Howell and the late Vi Gill.

⁹⁵ Ramelson went as far as to say that he 'would never have dared to undertake the job of Industrial Organiser of the Communist Party' had he not spent several years in in Yorkshire working with and learning about the trade unionism and the labour movement from working-class leaders such as Caborn. Recording of George Caborn's funeral.

Harold Carter notes that occasional political and strategical disagreements notwithstanding, cooperation between Sheffield's communists and Labour politicians 'became seen as increasingly normal'.⁹⁶ It was an arrangement that was both flexible and mutually beneficial. The likes of Caborn could be relied upon to persuade local trade unionists to campaign and vote for Labour politicians, while the latter would reciprocate by occasionally encouraging their members to vote for communist candidates in union elections. This special relationship provoked a national outcry from the movement's establishment when senior Labour councillors, including Ron Ironmonger (then Chief Whip on the Sheffield Council)⁹⁷, nominated Caborn for one of three new AEU National Organiser posts against a Labour Party candidate in 1966.⁹⁸ It was no secret that the President of the national AEU, William Carron (who became infamous for ignoring his union's democratically agreed policies at TUC and Labour Party conferences in favour of his own opinions, better known as 'Carron's Law'), was vehemently anti-communist and determined to stop their postwar advance in the union.⁹⁹ Just a few years previously, Caborn had been suspended from union activities for twelve months by the union's national leadership as 'punishment' for attempting to organise a national conference of shop stewards to discuss various industrial issues at Wortley Hall, which by now had become the Sheffield AEU and CP's preferred venue of choice for political meetings and training schools.¹⁰⁰ Shortly before his death, Caborn reflected on the close-knit political culture that flourished in and around Sheffield during this time.¹⁰¹ Unsurprisingly, he highlighted the region's non-sectarian ecumenicism and the importance of trade union education – a view that is commonly echoed by a younger generation of Labour Party activists and communists who were mentored by Caborn and later became prominent figures at Wortley themselves.

This wider understanding of the movement's postwar commitment to a Broad Left politics and adult learning helps to explain Wortley's non-sectarian willingness to accommodate each of the humanist, IWCE and CP traditions of workers' education under one roof, clearly evident from the hundreds of archival letters wishing to organise day, weekend or week schools. In so doing, Wortley

⁹⁶ Carter, *The Mouse*, 14. See also, Paul Allender, *What's Wrong with Labour?* (London, 2001), 66-73; William Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield* (1970), 73-74, 274-275.

⁹⁷ Ironmonger was to eventually become Leader of the City Council (1966-74) and the South Yorkshire County Council (1973-79).

⁹⁸ As it happens, Caborn was defeated by a candidate from Preston by 38,902 votes to 28,364; see Jim Arnison, *George Caborn (Episodes in the Life of a Working Class Leader)*, 23. Seifert and Sibley, *Revolutionary Communist*, 109, note that this (albeit unofficial) understanding between the CP and sections of the Labour Left to ensure that broad left union candidates were elected to positions of influence worked in both directions: for example, Bert Ramelson supported Hugh Scanlon during the 1967 campaign for the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) Presidency, even though Reg Birch, a member of the CP's Executive Committee, was the communist candidate. Scanlon was deemed to be more of a unifying figure who would strengthen the broad left movement.

⁹⁹ Callaghan, *Cold War*, 237-239.

¹⁰⁰ Carter, *The Mouse*, 13; Mick Shaw, *A Treatise of a True Socialist – George Caborn* (1983), 10-11. Arnison, *George Caborn*, 13-14. John Callaghan, *Cold War*, 239, similarly observes that both left and right factions in the AEU had their own venues.

¹⁰¹ Harold Carter, *The Life and Death of Old Labour: Collective Action and Social Cohesion in Sheffield and Southwark, 1945-1997* (Oxford, 2005), 186.

managed to realise G.D.H. Cole's entreaty, published in *The Plebs Magazine* in 1916, that the labour movement was best served by both the WEA and IWCE-ers.¹⁰² In fact, bookings included an eclectic range of liberal-left *and* religious groups, thus reflecting the region's nonconformist character too: the Labour Party, cooperative Societies, WEA, NCLC, Clarion Cycling Club, Workers' Music Association, Women's Cooperative Guild, Young Christian Workers, Salvation Army, Methodist Youth Department, Woodcraft Folk, TUC Educational Trust, British-Soviet Friendship Society, and numerous trade unions, to name but a few. This said, the Hall was not the only venue for political education in South Yorkshire, raising concerns that too many overlapping initiatives across the region could end up competing for the same resources, as had been the case with adult education in earlier decades.¹⁰³ For example, the area's vibrant proletarian culture attracted a newer generation of left intellectuals during the postwar period, some of whom helped to pioneer industrial day release courses for Derbyshire and Yorkshire miners and steelworkers through Sheffield University's extramural department.¹⁰⁴ And though a relative latecomer, Barnsley's Northern College soon became known as the 'Ruskin of the North', offering both long and short residential courses in Liberal and Gateway Studies, Social and Community Studies, Trade Union and Industrial Studies.¹⁰⁵ As it happens, there was much cross-fertilisation and cooperation between the different projects and the people involved, ultimately enhancing workers' education across the region.¹⁰⁶

It is in this historical context of South Yorkshire's 'structure of feeling' that John Grayson recently argued that British adult education is best understood as part of a network of left social movements, political parties or groupings, located in a particular time and space'.¹⁰⁷ Whilst this is certainly true of Wortley, it would be remiss to ignore the Hall's special relationship with the NCLC and CP during its early years.¹⁰⁸ Each organisation held numerous residential schools at Wortley during

¹⁰² G.D.H. Cole, 'What Labour Wants from Education', *The Plebs Magazine*, 8: 10 (1916), 217-220.

¹⁰³ Payling, *Socialist Republic*, 63.

¹⁰⁴ Primary sources include the NUM (Derbyshire Area) Minutes of both the Area Council and Area Executive Committee, 5 & 9 August 1952, 29 October 1952, 1 November 1952, 30 March 1953, 14 September 1953, 19 December 1953, 24 February 1954, 24 September 1955, 15 October 1956, 20 December 1958. See also, John Halstead, 'The Local Tradition of Working-Class and Self-Help Education', in Malcolm Ball and William Hampton (eds.), *The Northern College: Twenty-Five Years of Adult Learning* (Leicester, 2004), 30; John Grayson, 'Developing the Politics of the Trade Union Movement: Popular Workers' Education in South Yorkshire, UK, 1955 to 1985', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 90 (2016), 116. Michael Barratt Brown, *Seekers: A Twentieth Century Life* (Nottingham, 2013), 127-142, was especially influential and a key driving force behind later related initiatives such as the Society of Industrial Tutors, Institute for Workers' Control and Northern College.

¹⁰⁵ See Ball and Hampton, *Northern College*, 51-68; Michael Barratt Brown, *Seekers*, 143-50; Drews and Fieldhouse 'Residential Colleges', 252-254.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Taylor, 'Creating Northern College', in Ball and Hampton, *Northern College*, 36-50.

¹⁰⁷ Grayson, 'Developing the Politics', 114.

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, Millar, *Labour College Movement*, 82, claimed that 'so far as can be ascertained, only one organiser appointed by the NCLC was a member of the Communist Party'. Apparently, this was the South Wales NCLC organiser, Charlie Stead. The intriguing question as to whether Stead was 'a communist infiltrator' is discussed in greater detail by Alan Campbell, John McIlroy, Barry McLoughlin & John Halstead, 'The International Lenin School: A Response to Cohen and Morgan', *Twentieth Century British History*, 15: 1 (2004), 67-69.

its early years, which hundreds of trade union delegates, Labour and Communist Party members attended from across the UK.¹⁰⁹ In the case of the NCLC this was in spite of Jim Millar's initial concerns that, given Vin Williams' involvement with both organisations, the use of the Hall for NCLC schools might represent a conflict of interest and 'prejudice the other NCLC work' in the area.¹¹⁰ Subsequently, there was a constant stream of (almost monthly) correspondence between Millar and Hague concerning NCLC bookings. And occasional disagreements about the need to modernise the accommodation, mealtimes, yearly increases in charges and unruly behaviour notwithstanding, what survives of the Hall's archive would suggest that the NCLC was its single largest patron and an important source of revenue until it was incorporated by the TUC. This observation is further supported in a pamphlet by Judith Watts and Donald Nannestad, who note that the postwar NCLC courses at Wortley educated many Labour Party members in Barnsley, and how the main impetus for political education came from Williams himself.¹¹¹

Whilst there are no references to Wortley as being a 'Little Moscow'¹¹² during this period (even though local villagers have long been suspicious about the Hall and have been known to refer to it sardonically as 'The Kremlin'¹¹³), the CP clearly saw it as a residential base where they could carry out their 'cadre work', thus ensuring that Party members received the appropriate political education.¹¹⁴ The Party's use of Wortley was probably also due to its decision to cease educational activities at the London and Manchester Marx Houses shortly after the war.¹¹⁵ Jack Cohen from the CP's Education Department frequently wrote Hague during the 1950s and 1960s to book Wortley for various schools that were taught by Party functionaries¹¹⁶ and routinely advertised in the *Daily Worker*. Several historians and sociologists have commented on the CP's commitment to education as a means of progressing the maturity of the working-class and the development of Marxist-Leninist ideas, however, little has been written about the actual content of the vast quantity of Party literature that members were expected to read.¹¹⁷ Political education was deemed especially important for the CP's factory branches if they were to win over their fellow workers on the shop floor, the wider trade union movement and,

¹⁰⁹ The archive contains detailed registers of the names of delegates, their union affiliation, dietary requirements, dormitory allocation, and so on.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Millar to Williams, 5 April 1951.

¹¹¹ Judith Watts and Donald Nannestad, *The First Fifty Years: Half A Century of Labour Rule in Barnsley* (Barnsley District Labour Party, 1983), 23-24.

¹¹² For a fuller explanation of the idea of the little Moscow, see Stuart Macintyre, *Little Moscovs. Communism and Working-Class Militancy in Inter-war Britain* (London: 1980); Kevin Morgan, 'Bastions, Black Spots and Other Variations: In and Beyond the Specificities of the Little Moscow', *Twentieth Century Communism*, 5: 5 (2013), 193-209.

¹¹³ Interview with Brian Clarke, 25 June 2022.

¹¹⁴ Callaghan, *Cold War*, 16 & 26.

¹¹⁵ Cohen, 'Revolutionary Education', 146 & 149.

¹¹⁶ For example, Maurice Dobb, A.L. Morton, Tom Drinkwater, Ron Bellamy, Maurice Cornforth, J.R. Campbell, Bill Moore, Eddie Frow and John Lewis, among others.

¹¹⁷ See Raphael Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism* (London, 2006), 191-202; Newton, *British Communism*, 59-60; Andrews, *Endgames*, 26; Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, 298-320; Callaghan, *Cold War*, 25-28.

ultimately, the fight for socialism.¹¹⁸ This said, the Party's executive committee became increasingly concerned that members of local branches tended to neglect self-education because they were so absorbed in practical day-to-day activity. It was thus decided to adapt an Education Plan that aimed to organise even more residential schools and to improve general branch education too.¹¹⁹ Course materials from this period covered a range of topics – including the history of the Labour Party, communism, democratic centralism, trade unionism, monopoly capitalism, industrial democracy, class struggle, social services, Western imperialism, internationalism, war and peace – but the unifying theme was invariably the Party's role in building left unity across the movement and the dangers of sectarianism.¹²⁰

To what extent the CP's Broad Left strategy advanced the recruitment and mobilisation of women during the first decades of the postwar period is debatable. Certainly, *The British Road* envisaged 'housewives' as part of the broad popular alliance needed to defeat monopoly capitalism. On the other hand, though women made important contributions to both Wortley and the Party's development, many of them were often limited to supporting roles¹²¹ (for example, social and fund-raising activities) or technical work (such as Party propaganda and administration). Men were far more likely to assume political responsibilities and positions of authority.¹²² In the case of Wortley, at least half of the volunteers who helped to renovate the Hall were women. And yet, all of Wortley's elected officers and committee members were exclusively male in the years immediately following the war. To paraphrase John Corwell, though women at the Hall were not quite 'below stairs', nor were they 'front of house' either.¹²³ This led some female comrades to express dissatisfaction about an unacknowledged sexual division of labour, being made to feel like the unseen backbone. To further complicate matters, women also continued to face significant obstacles in the wider labour movement due to prevailing social attitudes that still considered them to be secondary workers and housewives, even with the gains

¹¹⁸ *The Role of the Communist Party: Marxist Study Themes*, No.10 (London, 1957), 20-21; *The Communist Party and the Role of Branches* (London, 1955), 6-8. See also, Callaghan, *Cold War*, 31-39.

¹¹⁹ Jack Cohen, 'New Approaches to Party Education', *Party Life*, Vol.1, No.1 (1962), 11-13. Whilst Betty Reid accepted that the building of factory branches was the Party's main priority, she also expressed concerns that 'was a certain confusion and conflict' about their relation to local branches; 'A Weekend School for Every Branch Committee Member', *Party Life*, Vol.1, No.1 (1962), 7-10.

¹²⁰ The Bill Moore collection at Sheffield Archives, X274/1/7/23a-d, contains various CP course materials from the 1950/60s. On the issue of left unity specifically, see *Social Democracy and the Fight for Working Class Unity: Marxist Study Themes*, No.2 (London, 1951), 13-16; *People's Democracy – the Path to Socialism: Marxist Study Themes*, No.3 (London, 1951), 5-7; *Socialism and the British Labour Movement: Marxist Study Themes*, No.8 (London, 1954), 21-24; *Our Aim Is Socialism* (London, 1955), 15-16; *The Role of the Communist Party*, *Marxist Study Themes*, No.10 (London, 1957), 12-13; *Communism and the World Today* (London, 1965), 26-27; *Notes for Industrial Schools on the Role of Trade Unions in the Fight for Left Unity* (n.d.); *Tutor's Guide and Study Material for Discussion on our Party Programme The British Road to Socialism* (London, 1968).

¹²¹ Blanche Flannery's daughter, Kate Flannery (a former Party member herself and Secretary of the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign), recalls women communists 'doing a lot of the catering for the Sheffield AEU meetings, literally making the sandwiches'. Interview with Kate Flannery, 9 May 2022.

¹²² Andrews, *Endgames*, 60; Morgan *et al*, *Communists and British Society*, 160-173.

¹²³ Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley*, 115.

made during WWII and the postwar increase in the rate of women in employment.¹²⁴ As noted by Mary Davis, the CP ‘was not immune from the seepage of this patriarchal ideology’, in part because of its own ‘confusion over the relationship of women to class, class struggle and socialism itself’.¹²⁵ This ideological ambivalence might also explain why only two national conferences for communist women were held between 1951 and 1966, despite increasing calls from female comrades for the Party to do more to address women’s issues.¹²⁶

Regardless of these shortcomings, one needs to be careful, as noted by June Hannam and Karen Hunt, not to dismiss socialist women as either ‘national propagandists’ or ‘local tea makers’.¹²⁷ In reality, many female activists moved between national and local political activities based on changing issues and personal situations. Notable campaigns organised by communist women during this time included demands for better wage demands, improved working conditions, the cost of living, rising nursery charges, abortion rights, child welfare, and the equality of career and educational opportunities. And female comrades played an influential role in the formation of organisations such as the International Women’s Day Committee (IWDC), National Assembly of Women (NAW) and the British Peace Committee (BPC), as well as working closely with ex-suffragettes and women in the Labour Party and Co-operative Women’s Guild.¹²⁸ Although such activities were dismissed by some on the left as ‘women’s work’ and ‘wefarism’¹²⁹, equally, they played a key role in uniting women around topical political issues and laying the groundwork for a later generation of women communists who went on to form a broader democratic alliance throughout the socialist-feminist movement and the wider public sphere.¹³⁰ Additionally, while communist women frequently lacked formal backing and resources from the Party’s leadership, this also permitted local groups a level of autonomy to organise campaigns on issues that were directly relevant to women in the community.¹³¹ An important aspect of this broad women’s movement was the development of local educational initiatives, social and cultural events that

¹²⁴ Andrews, *Endgames*, 59-72; Callaghan, *Cold War*, 269-274; Morgan *et al*, *Communists and British Society*, 146-183; Laybourn, *Marxism in Britain*, 31-34, 80, 89-97; Chris Wrigley, ‘Women in the Labour Market and in the Unions’, in McIlroy *et al*, *The High Tide*, 43-69. For a detailed examination of the role of women in the pre-war CP, see Sue Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism, and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939* (London, 1986).

¹²⁵ Davis, ‘Women and Class’, 254 & 259. See also, Tricia Davis, ‘What Kind of Woman is She?’ Women and Communist Party Politics, 1941-1955’, in Rosalind Brunt and Caroline Rowan (eds.), *Feminism, Culture and Politics* (London, 1982), 87-88, for a fuller discussion of the influence of Engels’ *Origins of the Family* on the early CP.

¹²⁶ The second national women’s conference was held in 1962 and was attended by 118 delegates representing 19 Party districts. See Molly Keith, ‘Communist Women in Conference’, *Party Life*, Vol.1, No.2 (1962), 6-7.

¹²⁷ June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London, 2002), 34-36. See also, Morgan *et al*, *Communists and British Society*, 148.

¹²⁸ Davis, ‘What Kind of Woman’, 91-97.

¹²⁹ Morgan *et al*, *Communists and British Society*, 167-173.

¹³⁰ Laybourn, *Marxism in Britain*, 96.

¹³¹ Davis, ‘What Kind of Woman’, 100.

brought together Party and non-Party women, such as the CP women's weekend schools held at Wortley.¹³²

Organised by Marian Ramelson (the Party's District Organiser for Yorkshire), the schools regularly attracted 100+ attendees from across the region, some of them wives of leading Party workers.¹³³ Tricia Davis observes that the schools aimed to introduce women who knew very about politics to new ideas and to communist women. Ramelson was also determined to challenge the restriction of some women to the role of 'party wife'.¹³⁴ That Yorkshire already had a strong tradition of women who had their own sphere of activity in public life greatly assisted matters.¹³⁵ One Sheffield CP member and eventual women's organiser, Barbera Warsop, recalls attending the schools and meeting such women, a few of whom had helped restore Wortley several years earlier: for example, Mary Caborn (Co-op Women's Guild), Mary Shaw (Co-op Women's Guild), Joan Bellamy (CP staff), Frances Moore (a National Union of Teachers activist), Vi Gill (CP executive and the first female deputy convenor at Firth Brown), Arline Gentles (NAW and a shop steward at Stanley Works), and Pauline Turley (who worked at Sheffield's CP Bookshop). As a working-class woman, Warsop was typical of her generation in that she left school at fifteen with no qualifications, became a full-time mother and housewife during her early adult years, and felt cut off from the world of politics. Joining the Party and discovering Wortley provided her with new opportunities for socialising and political education. Warsop was particularly influenced by the formidable Blanche Flannery, a lifelong communist and first woman president of the otherwise male dominated Sheffield Trades Council, who was known to remark that a home was merely a place to go to in between meetings.¹³⁶ On the other hand, like a lot of older, working-class female communists and Wortley women, Warsop felt little affinity with the newer feminist theories associated with the often younger, middle-class generation of female Eurocommunists and their dissenting *Red Rag* magazine.¹³⁷ Also, Warsop's account of Flannery having to badger local trade unionists to donate money and to volunteer for child-minding responsibilities (to enable women to attend schools at Wortley) was symptomatic of Kevin Morgan's observation that, despite housewives being the Party's largest occupational grouping in the 1950s, women were less likely than men to attend such schools.¹³⁸

¹³² Maisie Carter, 'A Supper with a Difference', *Party Life*, Vol.1, No.2 (1962), 8-9, further explains the rationale for organising such events from the perspective of a communist woman.

¹³³ Various Letters from Marian Ramelson to Alf Hague, WH Archive. See also, Callaghan, *Cold War*, 270; *Yorkshirewoman: Communist Party District Women's Newsletter*, No.2 (1977), 5.

¹³⁴ Morgan *et al*, *Communists and British Society*, 173-179.

¹³⁵ Davis, 'What Kind of Woman', 100-101.

¹³⁶ Interview with Barbera Warsop, 29 August 2022; Barbera Warsop, 'The Communist Party Women's School at Wortley Hall', 1. Interview with Kate Flannery, 9 May 2022.

¹³⁷ Morgan *et al*, *Communists and British Society*, 180-182. See also, Beatrix Campbell and Val Charlton, *Red Rag - From Beginning to End: The Women We Were and What Our Politics Became* (London, 2025); Davis, 'Women and Class', 260; Andrews, *Endgames*, 62-69.

¹³⁸ Morgan *et al*, *Communists and British Society*, 148. See also, Davis, 'What Kind of Woman', 99-100, concerning questions of women's political activity and shared domestic responsibility with their husbands.

Suffice it to say that, although both organisations were male-dominated at this moment in time, they gradually became more feminised as the forward march of the second-wave women's movement gathered momentum from the 1970s onwards. In the case of Wortley, changes that were both desirable and long overdue was the involvement of more women in the actual running of the Hall. Ann Munsey and Pat Peters, both active members of the CP and NAW, are just two examples of women who have played key roles in securing better representation on Wortley's management and executive committees in recent years: Munsey became the Hall's first woman vice-president and Peters the first female political secretary. Together with other sisters, including Barbera Switzer (Assistant General Secretary of MSF), Megan Dobney (Regional Secretary, South East TUC) and Phillipa Clark (FBU Research Officer), they also campaigned for the renaming of two of the Hall's main downstairs rooms, which eventually resulted in the creation of the NAW Garden Room (1994)¹³⁹ and the Sylvia Pankhurst Library (2003).¹⁴⁰ The former space contains several tributes to sisters who have passed, including a photograph and plaque dedicated to the memory of Fleur Lombard, the first female firefighter to die in peacetime service in Britain, aged 21-year-old. The tribute was donated by female members of the FBU who have held their annual women's school at Wortley for many years now, further cementing the links the Hall has with the FBU and the feminist movement. Likewise, since the renaming of the library, there has been an annual Sylvia Pankhurst lecture (the first of which was given by Mary Davis), which serves as the opening event for the South Yorkshire Festival and regularly attracts large audiences.¹⁴¹ Currently, out of the twelve elected board members six are women, the youngest of which is the granddaughter of Barbera Warsop.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the Hall's achievements in the mid-1960s, the monthly *AEU journal* proclaimed Wortley Hall to be widely 'recognised as one of the finest educational, holiday and social centres that belong to the working-class movement ... a little oasis of socialism that is owned and controlled by its own independent rank-and-file organisation'.¹⁴² Specifically, 'Wortley Hall is possibly the most used educational centre in the North of England. It is heavily booked for Trade Union Schools, Summer Schools, Week-End Schools, Day Schools and Conferences ... It is now the most popular centre in South Yorkshire Area for Dinner-Dances organised by Trade Union Branches, Ward Labour Parties

¹³⁹ There is also a dedication to Celia Pomeroy, a Philippian communist who migrated to Britain in the 1960s, where she became an active member of the NAW.

¹⁴⁰ Cornwall, *Wortley Voices*, 114-15. Email from Ann Munsey to John Cornwell, 13 January 2011. Interviews with Ann and Bryan Munsey (26 April 2022), Phillipa Clarke (2 June 2022), Megan Dobney (14 August 2022), Mary Davis (14 August 2022), Pat Peters (11 May 2022) and Anita Wright (14 August 2022).

¹⁴¹ Norma Bramley, *Sisters in Solidarity: A History of the First 60 Campaigning Years of the NAW* (London, 2012), 14. Until recently, the NAW held its meetings and events at Wortley Hall, and they still have a major presence at the annual South Yorkshire Festival.

¹⁴² 'A Holiday Centre for Workers', *AEU Journal*, 4 April 1966, Volume 33, 175-76.

and Co-operative organisations and Shop Stewards' Committees. In short, it can now be claimed a pronounced success. It has been a triumph for those who had the ideals and enthusiasm in 1950-51 to tackle what appeared to many to be an impossible task'.¹⁴³ The Hall also became a popular destination for international trade unionists, especially from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. One Soviet delegation that visited in 1955 wrote an article for *Trud*, an influential Soviet trade union newspaper, declaring Wortley as a 'home' where 'Soviet people were welcomed as true friends'.¹⁴⁴ Such was the Hall's reputation that even the Overseas Department in the Ministry of Labour wrote Hague in 1967 seeking information on behalf of their Labour Attaché in the United States who had been approached by an American trade union that was 'very anxious to establish some similar scheme' and wished to visit Wortley.¹⁴⁵ By the 1970s, dozens of unions started to base their events at Wortley, including the TUC North of England National School. It's estimated that, during its heyday, up to 3000 'students' visited the Hall every year.¹⁴⁶

The widespread support for Wortley can be understood as a reflection of broader national and local trends within both workers' education and the labour movement during the postwar period. On the one hand, the previously separate and sometimes conflicting traditions of workers' education began to gradually merge, creating a more unified approach to educating working-class adults. At the same time, the TUC emerged as the dominant force in trade union training, taking a lead role in promoting educational courses for workers. Wortley strategically positioned itself to align with these evolving trends, presenting itself as an inclusive space for a range of progressive organisations that were broadly concerned with promoting political education and the empowerment of working people. Additionally, the Hall capitalised on the decline and forced sales of stately homes, seizing the opportunity to benefit from their growing popularity as tourist attractions and residential venues open to the public. Another significant factor that created favourable conditions for Wortley was the CP's postwar efforts to build working-class unity, both within and outside trade unions, through Broad Left organising. The Party's industrial politics resonated strongly throughout South Yorkshire, where a cooperative political culture already existed within the labour movement and broader civic society. The collaboration between different progressive forces and organisations led to a synergy among various educational initiatives that greatly enhanced workers' education across the region and created new opportunities for political engagement. Although women activists faced considerable barriers within both the Party and wider labour movement, their contributions, alongside those of male rank-and-file leaders, played a crucial role in advancing the Broad Left movement, particularly as the socialist-feminist movement' developed from the 1970s onwards, as well as the success of grassroots initiatives like Wortley Hall.

¹⁴³ *AEU Journal*, 4 April 1966.

¹⁴⁴ Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley*, 54.

¹⁴⁵ WH Archive

¹⁴⁶ Cornwell, *Voices of Wortley*, 75.

Since that time, further generations of trade unionists and members of liberal-left organisations have studied and debated at Wortley, further developing their ideas and skills. And though it has always insisted on not being called a ‘hotel’, hundreds of holidaymakers and retired people have enjoyed the Hall’s splendour, gardens, entertainments (usually provided by volunteers and the guests themselves) and socialist fellowship. Twenty-five years after the Hall first opened, Hugh Scanlon (who had been elected President of the AEU as the Broad Left candidate in 1967), thanked Wortley on behalf of his members for being ‘a centre of activity for workpeople’ and ‘a shining example of what can be achieved with workers’ participation’.¹⁴⁷ On the occasion of the Hall’s fiftieth anniversary, then political secretary Brian Clarke, noted that Wortley was still a much-needed place where ‘activists could get their teeth into the subjects up for discussion’, and that the ‘volunteer spirit’ that had been one of the cornerstones upon which Wortley was repurposed ‘is still retained in the democratic structures that support the work of the hall today’.¹⁴⁸ Writing in the late 1990s, Mick Shaw (who had undertaken the initial reconnaissance of the Hall along with Alf Hague) looked back on the early days and thanked ‘all those people, past and present’ who had given ‘their time and intellect to maintain and improve the amenities for the labour movement and keep it to the socialist principles that Vin Williams envisaged’.¹⁴⁹ Though now eighty years of age, Shaw’s daughter, Val Keyworth, regularly visits Wortley with her husband John, himself a longstanding shareholder and committee member. Both of them still talk passionately about Wortley as a ‘broad-church’ where people will ‘work together’ to support a ‘common cause’.

This said, just as Lawrence Black observed that there ‘were no innate politics to country piles’ when many of them ceased to be homes for the privileged few, equally, there is nothing inherent about Wortley’s contemporary political culture either.¹⁵⁰ A steady downturn in trade union business from the 1990s onwards, coupled with growing competition from new hotel chains, caused the Hall to reluctantly diversify its revenue streams, leading to it becoming a popular wedding venue. This shift in Wortley’s business model has raised concerns about how best to preserve its co-operative history and values while having to navigate an increasingly commercial environment. For example, reflecting on these challenges during the Hall’s seventieth anniversary in the 2010s, three senior members of Wortley’s management board expressed their worries about the increasing difficulties of ‘maintaining a grasp’ of the Hall’s ‘values and heritage’ while having to run it ‘on a tight commercial footing’, balancing

¹⁴⁷ *Wortley Hall – 25 Years Souvenir* (Manchester, 1975). For a fuller account of the controversy surrounding Scanlon’s Broad Left candidacy, see Andrews, *Endgames*, 109 & 119; McIlroy, ‘Notes on the Communist Party’, 233-236.

¹⁴⁸ Brian Clarke, ‘A Place of Our Own’, *Morning Star*, 5 May 2001. Interview with Brian Clarke, 25 June 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Shaw, ‘A Real Sense of Achievement’, 1997. Fittingly, one of the Hall’s wings was dedicated to Williams shortly after he died in 1970 ‘as a permanent acknowledgment of the major contribution he made in founding’ the Hall and of his ‘inspiration and unquenchable enthusiasm’.

¹⁵⁰ Black, ‘Tories and Hunters’, 188.

tradition with the need for financial sustainability.¹⁵¹ More recently, several interviewees who have long-standing associations with the Hall have also confided that, if Wortley is to survive as ‘Labour’s Home’ over the coming decades, its postwar history needs to be more widely known, especially among the next generation of trade unionists and left activists. Not so the legacy of Wortley ‘weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living’ or because it will ‘blast open the continuum of history’ any time soon; but for the reason that, in contrast to the pessimistic revisionism that has characterised much debate among Britain’s left since the 1980s, which resulted in a growing disbelief in the primacy of organised labour, the Hall continues to serve as a poignant reminder of what ordinary people can achieve when imbued with a collectivist spirit. Faced as we are with ongoing assaults on trade unions, widespread industrial unrest and a resurgence in right-wing populism, it is vitally important that venues such as Wortley continue to serve as educational centres for the labour movement, whilst also seizing opportunities to ensure their future survival.

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¹⁵¹ Maggi Clark, Graham Benton and Pat Peters, ‘Wortley Hall: the Workers’ Stately Home’, *Morning Star* (18 December 2020).