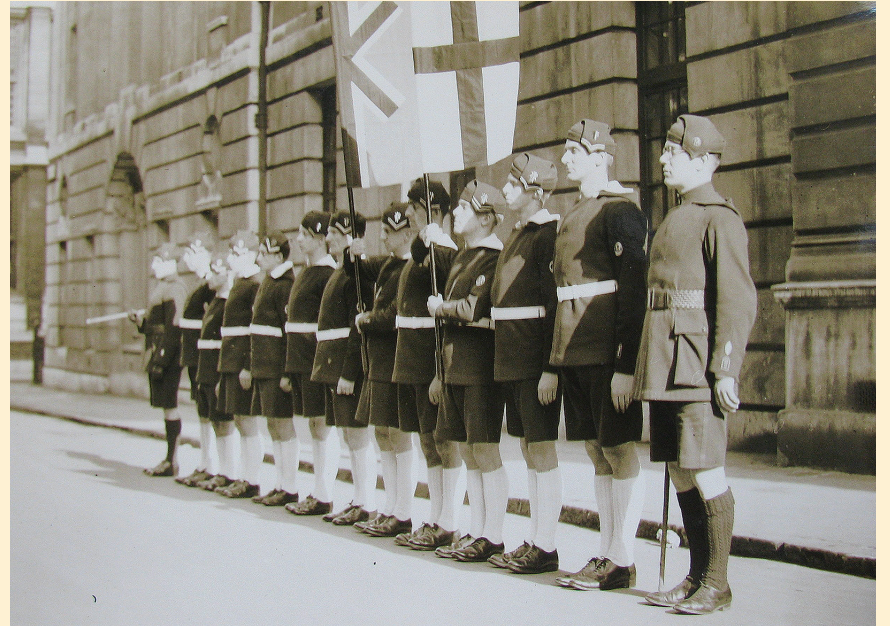


KIBBO KIFT IN THE CITY

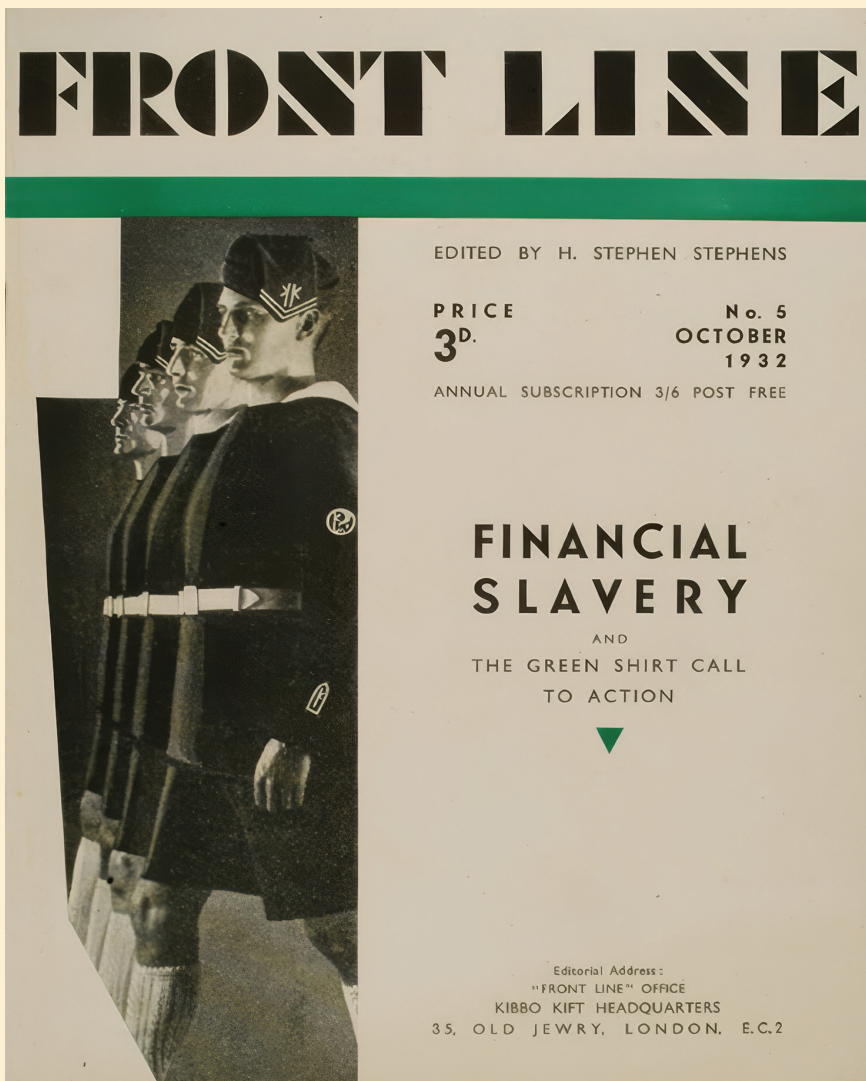


The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift were a 1920s youth group devoted to hiking, handicrafts and world peace: a fresh start for humanity after the carnage of world war. By the 1930s the group had grown a harder edge. They were now political shock troops. Led by their charismatic leader, John Hargrave (1894 – 1982), the Kibbo Kift marched for Social Credit – a utopian monetary-reform theory promising universal wages and ‘just prices’ for all. In the Social Credit state, poverty would be abolished because every citizen would receive the ‘national dividend’ from the country’s wealth. There would be no national debt, no taxation, no need for bankers or economists.

The Kindred became ‘The Social Credit Party of Great Britain (Greenshirts)’. They moved to the City of London, the heart of the hated financial system.

Above: Greenshirts parading in Old Jewry, 1932 Courtesy Kibbo Kift Foundation

A STROLL ROUND THE CITY OF LONDON



1

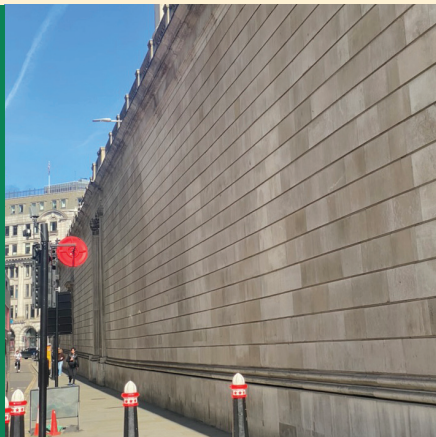


35 Old Jewry

The Kibbo Kift / Greenshirts' National Headquarters from 1932 to 1934. This was John Hargrave's war room. Here, he delivered rousing speeches, devised propaganda stunts and marched his men up and down in front of the Bank of England. Old Jewry was ideally located to generate a ‘tidal wave of feeling that can and will sweep Social Credit to power.’

The evolution into Greenshirts meant a new look. Now the Kindred wore paramilitary uniforms. They kept the Kibbo Kift's mark – a single or double K – and Hargrave's favourite colour green (*‘do not imagine that this colour linkage is not POLITICAL ... there was a logical, biochemical, political purpose in choosing GREEN, and the triple range of green-white-black in the fight for Social Credit.’*). Flags, badges, posters and leaflets all bore the brand. John Hargrave was a commercial artist who worked in advertising and knew the importance of visual impact.

2



The Bank of England

The wicked source of the '*mumbo-jumbo of High Finance*'. Throughout the 1930s Greenshirt squads paraded solemnly around the Bank's building, banging drums and beating tom toms. In November 1937, a bucket of green ink was thrown against the white stone perimeter wall, leaving a large green splash. Greenshirts reported gleefully that workmen '*found it had penetrated the stone so far that it was very difficult to remove*'.

Montague Norman, the Bank's Governor, was the movement's arch-villain. Hargrave wrote a furious biography of his quarry, denouncing the '*prankish cunning*' and '*curiously clandestine air*' of this '*master snake charmer*'. The Greenshirts also attacked by letter-writing: a year-long correspondence tried to argue Norman into conceding that the '*sane economic system*' of Social Credit was the only way forward for the world.

3



(site of) 44 Little Britain

In 1934 the Greenshirts moved their National Headquarters from Old Jewry to 44 Little Britain. By this time, the Greenshirts were not only fighting the bankers, but also the Black Shirt fascists and the Red Shirt communists.

Street fighting led to the Public Order Act of 1936 which banned the wearing of outfits that might be construed as military uniform. Greenshirts tested the new law by carrying their uniforms on poles along with banners reading 'Shirts or no Shirts, Social Credit is Coming'. They turned to alternative propaganda methods – fly posting, graffiti, agit-prop theatre, public meetings, leafleting and dramatic street stunts ('*the pageantry of economic revolt*').

6



(site of) London Chamber of Commerce, 69 Cannon Street

'Attendance at public meetings for the purpose of asking questions from the Kibbo Kift point of view' was a favourite Greenshirt technique. In 1934 an event at the London Chamber of Commerce was disrupted by a Greenshirt shout for Social Credit. Gate-crashing public events also proved effective: '*the Greenshirts became part of every procession or demonstration in London no matter who arranged it.*'

7



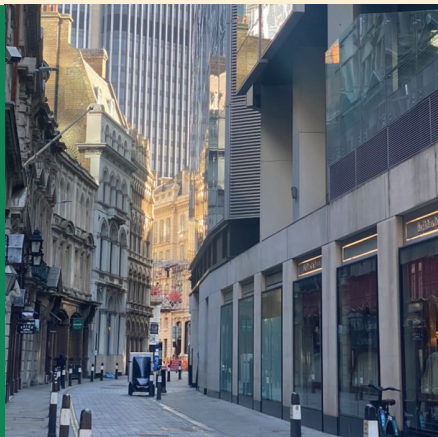
(site of) The Corn Exchange, Mark Lane

An early Kindred member, Eric C Knights, worked at the Corn Exchange for C.W le May, agricultural seed merchants. He was typical in being '*poor but enthusiastic*', as the Metropolitan Police's Special Branch characterised the group. '*Well-meaning clerks, minor civil servants and garage mechanics*' was another description. Several were progressive-minded teachers attracted by the movement's original emphasis on creative play and pacifism.

Police surveillance increased as the Kindred turned political, but one report concluded they posed little threat to national security:

'There is no doubt that the movement has failed to make a popular appeal, which is probably due to the fact that the [Social] Credit system is so complicated that it is unintelligible except to a comparatively small number of people.'

4



(site of) the London Stock Exchange, Throgmorton Street

In April 1939, Greenshirts drove a small car plastered with Social Credit placards past the London Stock Exchange. On the roof was an effigy of a British soldier being crushed to death by Montague Norman with his large bag of 'National Debt'. According to the *Daily Mail*:

'The car was promptly surrounded by a boisterous crowd. Traffic was brought to a standstill. Members [of the Stock Exchange] did their best to set fire to the effigy and eventually tore it down amid cheers. One of the two young men in the car who did not seem to realise where they were asked 'Who are all these people?' as the police shepherded them to safety.'

According to *Attack*, the Greenshirt newsletter:

'Pandemonium broke out in Throgmorton Street when Bankers stooges attacked the effigies but Greenshirts emerged victorious.'

5



(site of) Bank of Montreal, 47 Threadneedle Street

In 1935 Greenshirts were electrified by the news that a Social Credit party had come to power in the Canadian province of Alberta. Greenshirts marched three times round the Bank of England with drums and trumpets before turning to the several Dominion national banks in Threadneedle Street. In February 1938 a green brick was thrown through the window of the Bank of Montreal, followed in April by a drum march through the City.

The *Daily Mail* poked fun:

'Eight members of the Social Credit Party of Great Britain marched through the City the other day, banging drums. Several stockbrokers who thought it was the bottom falling out of the market have been ordered to Brighton for their health.'

Hargrave travelled to Canada in 1936 as a self-appointed expert in monetary reform. Rebuffed, he returned to London and later denounced Alberta's 'failure'.

8



The Guildhall

The death of the City's MP in 1938 encouraged the Social Credit Party to suggest that the expected successor make a '*noble gesture*' and stand aside '*to allow a progressive candidate to be returned unopposed*'. The suggestion was ignored. In the end, the Party decided not to field a candidate '*in the stronghold of banking and finance*'. However, the exercise had given them insight into 'City methods' and they promised to be prepared next time.

There was no next time. The City's tiny parliamentary constituency was abolished after the war and the group's Little Britain HQ didn't survive the Blitz. In the 1951 parliamentary election Hargrave stood in Stoke Newington as the Social Credit candidate (his campaign part-financed by the painter Augustus John) and lost his deposit. A year later Hargrave wound up The Social Credit Party but urged his followers to fight on: '*Fight on as individuals ... and win. I shall be fighting with you in the same cause. Social Credit is the only remedy*'.

9



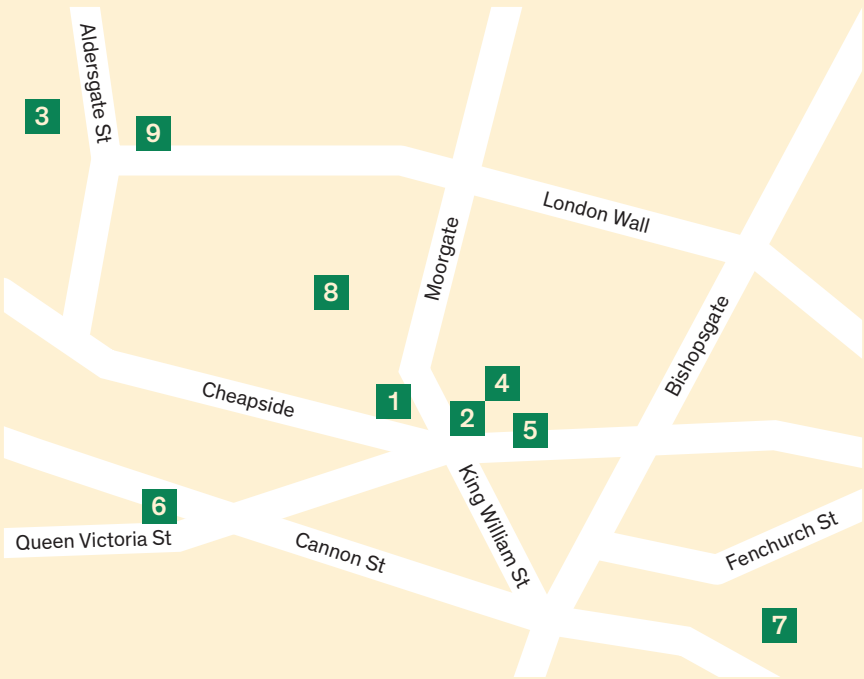
(site of) The Museum of London

The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift returned to the City in 1980 when the movement's collection of artworks and artefacts was deposited with the Museum of London (now London Museum). John Hargrave, then aged 86, attended the handing-over ceremony and expressed his satisfaction with the City location. Here, the collection would '*offer a standing challenge to the financial establishment in the heart of its own territory and a permanent inspiration to rising generations*'.

The transfer was overseen by the Kibbo Kift Foundation which had been founded in 1977 following a flurry of interest caused by a rock musical written by Judge Smith and Maxwell Hutchinson. The Foundation works to keep the movement's history alive and accessible.



Above: Greenshirts in front of the Bank of England, 25 May 1934
Photo by Douglas Miller/Topical Press/Hulton Archive/Getty Images



- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 35 Old Jewry | 6 Cannon Street |
| 2 Bank of England | 7 Corn Exchange |
| 3 44 Little Britain | 8 Guildhall |
| 4 Throgmorton Street | 9 Museum of London |
| 5 Threadneedle Street | |

'We have brought colour, shape, sound and movement to the cold-scalpel reasoning of Social Credit. We have brought pageantry into the fight for a sane economic system.'

FIND OUT MORE

The Kibbo Kift Foundation's website: www.kibbokiftorg.uk.

The Kibbo Kift collection held at London Museum has partly been digitised and can be searched online at: www.londonmuseum.org.uk/collections/

The Foundation deposited the group's paper records at the London School of Economics, where they form part of the Library's 'Youth Movement Archive'. John Hargrave's personal papers are also held here. <https://archives.lse.ac.uk>

BOOKS

- Mark Drakeford, *Social Movements and their Supporters: The Greenshirts in England*, 1997.
 Anabella Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians*, 2015.
 Cathy Ross, *Twenties London: A City in the Jazz Age*, 2003.
 Cathy Ross and Oliver Bennett, *Designing Utopia: John Hargrave and the Kibbo Kift*, 2015.

QUICKFRY ZINES

- #1: A psychogeographic stroll round the Barbican (2025)
 #2: John Dunton (2025)
 #3: Kibbo Kift in the City (2026)

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