

Ken Coates and the St Ann's study

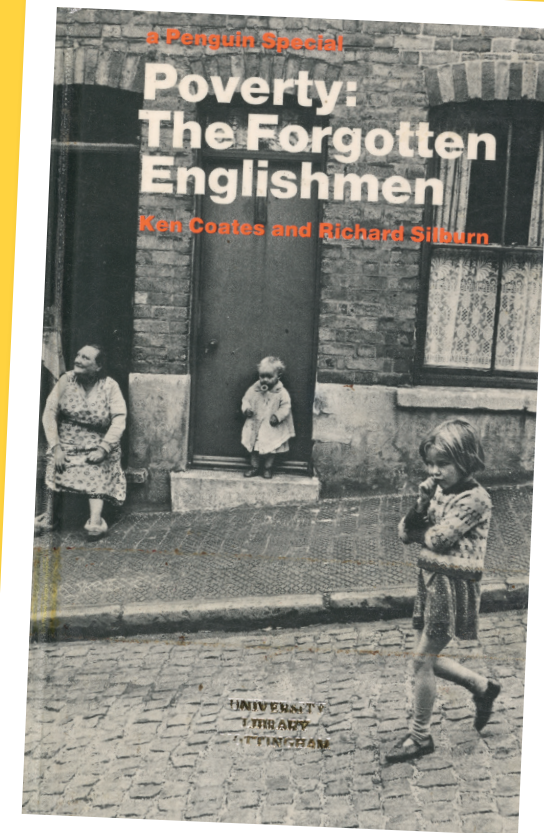
Ken Coates (1930 – 2010), a leading figure in British left-wing politics from the 1950s to the 1990s, spent most of his professional career as an adult education lecturer at the University of Nottingham. His life illustrates some of the ways university adult educators contributed to a making civil society vibrant and democratic.



Objecting to the treatment of communist and nationalist guerrillas in Malaya, he did his national service not in the army, but as a “Bevin Boy” in the Nottinghamshire coalfield from 1948. Eight years later, after studying on the Adult Education Department’s day release course, he won a mature student scholarship to the University of Nottingham. Shortly after graduating in 1959 with a “first” in Sociology, he joined the Adult Education Department, teaching miners and other trade unionists.

In the mid-1960s, working with Richard Silburn, a University social administration lecturer, Ken led an adult education class that did research in the St Ann’s area of Nottingham. This had a national impact on understanding of poverty. It began when adult students in “a conventional evening class ... sceptically resolved to examine the evidence for themselves”. They undertook an extensive social survey, recruiting undergraduates to help them, and lectured to schools and local voluntary groups around the city. The findings generated “a stormy local controversy” – but also TV programmes, newspaper articles and a book, *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen* (1970).

Ken also saw his many political activities as educational. He was the moving force in the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation (founded in 1963), edited its journal *The Spokesman* for decades, established and ran the Spokesman Press, which published many important books and pamphlets, and founded the Institute for Workers’ Control – influential on the trade union and Labour left in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s he was a moving force in the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) movement. He was a Labour parliamentary candidate for Nottingham South in 1983, and Member of the European Parliament from 1989, but – as a left-winger – was also twice expelled from the Labour Party (in 1965 and 1998).



Ken Coates and Richard Silburn, *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen*, 1970. Ken Coates Collection, HN398.N68.C6.



Photograph showing an area in St Ann's, Nottingham during the so-called “slum clearance”, c. 1969. Papers of Richard (Bill) Silburn, MS 875/3/3/1.

Photograph of a family outside their house in St Ann's, Nottingham, c. 1969. Papers of Richard (Bill) Silburn, MS 875/3/4/2.

‘Poverty in City Shock Facts’, newspaper clipping from the *Nottingham Evening Post* showing response to Ken Coates and Bill Silburn’s poverty study in St Ann’s, Nottingham, 7 May 1968, Papers of Richard (Bill) Silburn, MS875/2/4.