Thompson, J. (2017). Posters, advertising and the First World War in Britain. In *The Edinburgh companion to the First World War and the arts* (pp. 166-182). (Edinburgh companions to literature). Edinburgh University Press. https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-the-edinburgh-companion-to-the-first-world-war-and-the-arts.html

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Posters, Advertising and the First World War

James Thompson

This chapter examines how the media of posters and advertising responded to the First World War. It focuses principally upon Britain. Posters and adverts are conventionally seen as ephemeral forms, yet First World War posters have been preserved, and disseminated, in huge numbers, and have supplied some of the most enduring images of the Great War. The commercial adverts of wartime have not become similarly iconic, though in 2014 Sainsbury's Christmas advert portrayed the 'Christmas truce' of 1914. The dominant interpretation of the war in popular culture – a composite of selected war poetry and *Blackadder Goes Forth* emphasising futility and disillusionment – renders much of the consumer advertising of 1914–18 ('Fashionable furs at War Prices') alien, bordering on the incomprehensible.[1] The Sainsbury's advert was made in partnership with the Royal British Legion, but sharply divided viewers, with some finding the use of wartime events to advertise groceries offensive, though this was in fact common practice during the war itself. War posters also now meet with deep scepticism, even derision; but the frequent appeals to duty can certainly be accommodated within the 'lions led by donkeys' narrative, and with a sense of the pathos of war; while the anti-waste campaigns of the home front chime with narratives about Britons' capacity for making do, envisioning the Great War through notions of shared sacrifice powerfully shaped by the cultural legacy of the next global conflict.[2]

While the posters of the war now have greater visual currency than the adverts of the time, debates about the former have long been shaped by attitudes to advertising. Jay Winter's description of the propaganda of 1914–18 as 'the most spectacular advertising campaign to date' perpetuates a view rooted in the conflict itself, with *The Times* noting the 'liberal use of advertising methods' less than a month into the war.[3] The involvement of advertisers in the

production of propaganda was real, and, as we shall see, the visual vocabulary of posters was indebted to advertising. However, the established focus upon advertising as an influence upon war-time posters has occluded the significance of other traditions of image-making, and obscured aspects of their reception and character. In particular, existing accounts pay insufficient attention to pre-war political postering. During a by-election in 1916, *The Times* referred to posters as one of 'the older, and ordinary, election methods'.[4] Posters were well established in British politics by 1914, with output in the dual election year of 1910 running into the millions.[5] As John Bourne noted a quarter of a century ago, election campaigning provided the model for much wartime propaganda, and this point can be extended to posters.[6]

This chapter reconstructs the relationship between posters and advertising by recognising the variety of early-twentieth-century visual culture in Britain, noting especially the rapid development of the political poster in the twenty years before the war. The neglect of pre-war postering has led some to present the First World War as the birth of the political poster.[7] This emphasis upon novelty can be found in accounts that stress the debt to advertising in wartime posters, reflecting a longstanding, though not unproblematic, identification between advertising and modernity. Important recent work on First World War posters provides a sophisticated analysis of continuity and change, but is hampered by inattention to peacetime political postering.[8]

The chapter argues that relating First World War posters to peacetime political practice reveals important continuities, as well significant developments.[9] It shows how the exigencies of wartime could hark back to an allegorical register which political posters had largely jettisoned, and how fine art traditions came to seem more relevant in wartime than they had in peacetime politics. It analyses the ways in which the positive appeal, characteristic of many recruiting posters, drew upon commercial techniques less evident in pre-war political

posters, but emphasises the complex and changing relationships between political postering, advertising and cartooning in British visual culture before and during the war.

The rest of the chapter is divided into three parts. The first section examines the history of First World War posters. It begins with production, placing war posters in the context of pre-war precursors, reconstructing the visual vocabulary of wartime posters, investigating the relationship of word and image, and charting stylistic and rhetorical trends. It then turns to reception, exploring the contemporary response to war posters. The second section looks at commercial advertising. It notes how quickly advertisers adopted a patriotic appeal, seeking to sell goods by reference to the war. The response of contemporaries to wartime advertising is an elusive question, but some headway can be made. The chapter ends with brief reflections on the historical relationship between posters, advertising and the First World War.

Poster history and reception

Before the First World War, the political poster was flourishing in Britain. *The Times* noted that the January 1910 general election 'was characterised by a greater output of campaign publications of all kinds, posters, pamphlets and leaflets, than any which has occurred since the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832'.[10] There were more political posters than ever before, and those posters were larger, and increasingly colourful. Posters were produced in large numbers by political parties, but also by an array of extra-party organisations and pressure groups, from suffragists to the Union Defence League. Many posters, as they would be in the war, were purely textual, but picture posters were growing rapidly in number, encouraged by technical developments in printing.[11]

Pre-war political posters were controversial, accused by critics of compromising democracy with the methods of advertising. This view overstated the influence of advertising

relative to that of political cartooning, which was the prime supplier of iconography and visual motifs. The relationship between word and image was central to pre-war political posters as text played an important role, typically more so than in commercial advertising posters. Many political posters were fiercely critical of the opposing side, as exemplified in G. R. Halkett's often shrill posters for the Conservative party. The associational logic that characterised much advertising imagery – in which 'a bottle of sauce supports a reclining Shakespeare' – was widely present, but there was greater attention to the construction of pictorial argument than typically appeared in commercial imagery.[12] Advertising was certainly an influence upon the political poster, but it was far from the only or dominant one. Many working artists, such as John Hassall, drew both political and commercial posters, but they adopted differing approaches to each. Neither political cartooning nor commercial design was a static visual tradition; both responded to the emergence of cinema and its fascination with breaking the picture frame to engage the viewer.

A good way into these issues is provided by the most famous poster of the war, Alfred Leete's familiar image of Kitchener. Historians have differed sharply over the contemporary popularity of this image, and its 'unofficial' origins have been stressed.[13] There is good reason to think other posters were more heavily used at the time, but the question of its official status is perhaps less significant. As Andrew Thompson has noted, the propaganda machinery of 1914–17 operated not unlike that of the South African War of 1899–1902, with considerable reliance upon non-state organisations.[14] Furthermore, the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee (PRC) was built upon the expanded party apparatus that had developed in the previous thirty years alongside, and often working with, a panoply of extra-party organisations.[15] We will return to the afterlives of the image, but deal now with its visual character.

In a characteristically learned essay, Carlo Ginzburg has traced the long history of the key visual devices in the Kitchener image: the direct gaze towards the viewer and the foreshortened finger pointing out of the picture plane. He sketches a tradition of figures, usually all-seeing Christ images, but also archers, staring towards the viewer; he traces the foreshortened gesture through the work of Antonello da Messina, Michelangelo, and, perhaps most obviously, Caravaggio. While such pictorial conventions are a necessary deep background to Leete's design, Ginzburg finds the more immediate and effective visual context is provided by 'the demotic language of advertisement'.[16] But such imagery was scarcely confined to advertising. Consider, in particular, the cartoonist and journalist Edward Huskinson's poster for the 1907 London County Council elections, 'It's Your Money We Want'.[17] This foreshortened finger and staring gaze were plastered around London in March 1907, and were the subject of much discussion, not least in Graham Wallas's *Human Nature in Politics* (1908).[18] The same image reappeared at the 1910 LCC elections ('It's Still Your Money We Want'). As A. G. Gardiner noted, it closely resembles an illustration from *Change for a Half-Penny* – a comic look at the Northcliffe press – drawn by the cartoonist George Morrow, with the very phrase 'It's Your Money We Want'.[19]

Figures gazing and reaching out of the picture frame were increasingly common in Edwardian political imagery, and informed the ways in which the posters of wartime were seen. In November 1914, the Conservative MP J. A. Grant recognised the relevance of pre-war politics to the reception of war propaganda, arguing that the credibility of the recruiting drive was undermined for many as 'for years they have listened to equally impassioned appeals from partisan, political platforms, and seen even more flaming posters on the same hoardings'.[20] Likewise, in its journey from magazine cover to poster, Leete's image described a trajectory common to pre-war political posters, and reflected a visual culture in which such migrations were common. Historians have long noted the frequent translation of

press cartoons and illustrations into posters during the First World War, but this was simply business as usual.

The visual vocabulary of cartooning is apparent, for example, in the work of established *Punch* cartoonist Bernard Partridge. Partridge produced both political and commercial posters before the war, but it is the former, and the traditions of cartooning, upon which his wartime poster 'Soldiers All' draws, with its dependence upon text, dramatising a moment of conversation between soldier and workman.[21] The techniques of cartooning, not least caricature, were particularly relevant in the production of 'hate' posters, such as David Wilson's 1918 poster, 'Once a German – Always a German' (FIG. 1), which began life in the pages of the British Empire Union's *Monthly Record*. Wilson's cartoons for the *Daily Chronicle* had been used as political posters in peacetime, and his work had a sharp edge. 'Once A German' contains multiple scenes spread across the picture plane, combined with a 'split screen' device in which the portrayal of the post-war German businessmen visually echoes that of the German soldier, with pipe and briefcase in place of knife and grenade. Its use of 'Remember!', placed in the largest font, rehearses an injunction repeatedly issued through the war to 'Remember Belgium', or 'Remember Scarborough'. In a nice instance of old and new technologies combining, the drawing of 'Once A German' was animated in a film, as were a number of cartoons and posters.[22]

The campaign against waste frequently recalled the pre-war imagery of the fiscal controversy, albeit now with messages about eating less bread rather than arguments over its size and price. 'Save The Wheat / And Help The Fleet', now marketed by the Imperial War Museum as a jigsaw, displays a large loaf in the foreground on a background of battleships silhouetted against yellow.[23] The controversy over tariff reform and free trade had distributed images of loaves across the country before the war, and free traders especially had proclaimed the centrality, and sanctity, of bread to working class life.[24] Echoing such imagery aided

intelligibility, though the target audience in wartime very much included those accustomed to a more plentiful diet than that characteristic of pre-war working class life.

As Adrian Gregory has recently reiterated, and a generation of historiography has demonstrated, links between soldiers and civilians were strong, and concern for those in the trenches or at sea ubiquitous.[25] The demands of 'duty' were endlessly asserted in the war, invoking a widely and deeply held value, though for most Britons duties were multiple, with commitments to family looming large. A duty not to waste food was presented as a debt to seamen risking their lives to bring food to Britain. I. P. Beadle's 'A message from our Seamen' proclaimed that 'it's up to you not to waste' food.[26] The language of morality was, as Jay Winter notes, omnipresent in publicity that sought to locate the demands of wartime above the messy world of politics.[27] However, the appeal to morality, in particular to men's duty to protect women and children, was apparent in pre-war political posters, notably in free trade imagery, in which viewers were urged to 'Save The Children / From Tariff Reform'. The dignified 'manly' sailor of Beadle's anti-waste poster provided a wartime recasting of more positive pre-war representations of manual labour.

The legacy of the pre-war political poster was also apparent in those posters championed, at the time and subsequently, for their artistic ambition. In their influential post-war survey of posters 'distinguished by their artistic merit', Sabin and Hardie praised especially Frank Brangwyn and Gerald Spencer Pryse among British poster designers, while generally decrying the poor quality of British work compared to French, or more so, German posters.[28] Recent work stressing the preponderance of posters designed by anonymous printers distinguishes between their advertising-based designs, and a smaller body of self-consciously artistic work, within which Pryse and Brangwyn are located.[29] A poster like Pryse's 'The Only Road for an Englishman' certainly adopted a visual register quite distinct from that of an image such as PRC poster no. 35 'There is Still A Place for You in The Line'

in which identikit, almost mannequin-like soldiers are lined up in empty pictorial space, contrasting with the more animated figures, passing through a damaged cityscape in Pryse's poster. Pryse's wartime work descended from his pre-war Labour party posters, such as 'Forward! The Day is Breaking'. Such positive, and painterly, imagery was unusual in pre-war party politics, reflecting early Labour's desire to make socialists as much as win votes, and its self-image as a movement that stood above the petty strife of conventional two-party politics.[30] While Spencer Pryse's pre-war posters received acclaim from within the labour movement and the art establishment, it was perhaps the context of war that first gave his imagery a broader resonance.

It is important to recognise that just as images were actively recycled, so poster designers often worked in a variety of media. Bernard Partridge's much-imitated 'Take Up The Sword of Justice' (FIG. 2) was the work of a long-standing *Punch* cartoonist, who also produced advertising and political posters before the war. Partridge's poster of Lloyd George as a golfer impeded by a peer was gently humorous compared to many of the hoardings in 1910, but its visual vocabulary was in keeping with developments in political posters whereby allegorical figures, with the exception of John Bull, were becoming less common. The grandness – the pictorial and textual high diction of 'Take Up The Sword' – was a conscious choice, reflecting the circumstances of the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Jay Winter has famously argued, largely in dialogue with the work of Paul Fussell, that much of the cultural response to war was characterised by the revival of 'older languages', and this is certainly detectable in posters.[31] While medieval motifs are less evident in British than German posters, an image like the PRC poster 'Britain Needs You At Once', with its intimation of stained glass and interlocking St George and the dragon, is closer in visual language to the murals of 1895 than 1910. Aspects of 'Britain Needs You At Once' – its font, the verticality of the overall design – can be seen as 'modern', but, like 'Take Up the Sword', its heightened visual rhetoric

departs from pre-war trends in visual mass media, whether advertising or political posters. It is scarcely surprising to see images of nationhood in a time of conflict, but personifications of the nation were also a standard feature of pre-war political posters, which nonetheless saw a decline in the use of many traditional allegorical devices (Britannia, Justice, the British Lion) that was reversed in wartime.

The kinds of choices made by poster designers are illuminated by the work of John Hassall. Best known now for the 'Skegness is So Bracing' image – one of a number he produced for seaside councils – Hassall was a prolific commercial artist, who was also responsible for a series of anti-budget posters in 1909–10. His 'Electors Don't Ruin Your Country' pictured capital as the soil that nourished the tree of labour, with John Bull upbraiding Lloyd George for removing the soil. His recruitment poster 'Hurry up! Boys Fill the Ranks', produced, as befits the illustrator of Henty, for the Public Schools Brigade – with its smiling, waving, open-collared soldier, surrounded by helmets of conquered Germans – was clearly closer in style to his commercial work. Compare, though, his 'Music in War Time' (FIG. 3) concert poster of 1915 for the Professional Classes War Relief Council. This starkly dramatic black and white design, in keeping with its subject matter, was much more aesthetically high-minded, harking back to the 'artistic' theatrical posters of the 1890s. By contrast, his 1916 Belgium Canal Boat Fund appeal adopted a much more 'realistic' and detailed style, with greater use of perspective and corresponding depth, rather than the more flattened picture space of 'Music in War Time'. The triangular arrangement of the mother and her two children recalls a kind of broken pieta, with the boy staring out of the picture, engaging sympathy and donations. Hardie and Sabin, who were largely dismissive of the advertising poster in Britain, found space for the Belgium Canal Boat Fund and 'Music in War Time' as amongst the 'best' British posters of the war.[32]

As Hassall's range of commissions suggests, posters were employed in wartime for a range of causes. The output of the PRC has understandably attracted much attention, reflecting the sheer quantity of posters produced, though the widely quoted figure of 2.5 million in its first year was not dissimilar to the volume of postering across the two general elections of 1910. A focus on the PRC has tended to reinforce emphasis upon the impact of advertising, since it was, as Hiley observed, within the PRC campaign that the most overt adoption of advertising tropes and techniques is apparent, especially in idealised and sanitised images of a single, often smiling, soldier.[33] Aulich and Hewitt have rightly drawn attention to the role of non-state actors, covering a wide range of organisations from charities to newspapers, whose output demonstrates the diversity of wartime posters. The National Mission of Repentance and Hope was the Church of England's response to the challenges and the opportunities of wartime, intended to revivify religion by harnessing the sense of duty and sacrifice it thought had been awakened by the conflict. The Literature Committee, persuaded that 'many of those whom the Church is seeking will perhaps be first reached by the appeal to the eye', released a poster by the war artist Eric Kennington (the son of T. B. Kennington whose picture 'The Battle of Life' had been turned into a pre-war Conservative poster). The Mission poster was set in an industrial town, and pictured Christ opposite a large crowd, including 'a soldier, sailor, airman, Red Cross nurse, workmen, clergy, beggars, women and little children' above the text 'Jesus said, The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the Gospel'.[34] The Church presented the Mission as 'war work of the highest kind', and the poster's release was reported in both *The Times* and New Zealand's *Poverty Bay Herald*.[35] The Mission was alive to the full range of visual media, noting that 'experience has proved the value of a badge in many great movements'.[36] The Mission did not eschew the textual appeal, casting its work as war work through placards quoting the imperial hero Lord Robert's words, 'What we want is the Nation on its knees'.[37]

The device of personifying groups, usually occupational ones, found in Kennington's poster was widely used in First World War posters. Baden-Powell's 'Are YOU in this?' (FIG. 4) offers a well-known example and includes a soldier, sailor, Boy Scout, nurse, woman munitions worker, and male blacksmith. As Gregory has noted, it clearly pictures the shirker, and by implication the viewer, as middle-class. Gregory reads the image as 'disturbingly modern' in its portrayal of the interlinking of civilian and combatant, men and women.[38] Yet its emphasis on active volunteering (most apparent in the figure of the Boy Scout) extended nineteenth-century ideals of civic participation into wartime circumstances, while its depiction of interdependence was compatible with communitarian currents in pre-war political thought. Its visual vocabulary was one familiar from pre-war imagery, notably that of the fiscal controversy, in which archetypes of different social groups (workmen, clerks) proliferated in posters and cartoons.

As Susan Sontag noted long ago, visual shorthand, and references to other images, are central to the pictorial language of posters.[39] The German helmet, the *Pickelhaube*, was a recurring motif that developed both added meaning and familiarity through its repetition, coming to symbolise German 'militarism' in action. In some ways, this translated into wartime the role of hats as social signifiers both as worn, and as pictured in posters and cartoons. Paul Fussell compared the British helmet to the bowler hat 'with its familiar associations of normality and domesticity'.[40] In Partridge's 'Soldiers All', the Tommy's cap is visually paired with the workman's flat cap, conveying a shared democratic authenticity, albeit with the soldier positioned visually and rhetorically above the 'disaffected workman'. The accretion of meaning, not least through representations of hats, was a well-developed feature of pre-war visual culture. Gregory argues that the term 'profiteer' was pioneered by the labour press before achieving wider circulation in 1915.[41] Similarly, it was the labour press, especially Will Dyson in the *Daily Herald*, that first visualised the profiteer.[42] The

appearance of the profiteer, not least his shiny top hat, followed the Edwardian personification of the 'Trust' in W. K. Haselden's *Daily Mirror* cartoons attacking the 'Soap Trust', and in the cartoons and posters of the 1907 London County Council election.[43] Meaning became condensed, and the top hat came to signify the profiteer. In a *John Bull* cartoon of 1917, Frank Holland placed it on leeches shown attacking the British workman.

In their valuable study of wartime posters, Aulich and Hewitt pay particular attention to the physical location of posters and the symbolic ownership of urban space. They rightly observe that wartime posters entered civic space and town squares, and contrast this with the more specialised location used by commercial bill posters. However, these civic spaces were much coveted by Edwardian political activists seeking to claim ownership of symbolically significant public spaces for their party. Contemporary statements about the omnipresence of war posters simply reiterate earlier comments about the ubiquity of electoral posters. Similarly, the use of posters as a backdrop for speeches, and their incorporation more generally into the visual theatre of wartime campaigns, was very much a continuation of pre-war political practices. This is unsurprising given the grounding of the PRC in the existing party machinery. In his letter donating the minutes of the PRC to the British Library, R. Humphrey Davies contrasted the collaborative work of the Committee with the situation 'prior to the war', when 'party feeling ran very high, not only in the Houses of Parliament, but also in the constituencies'.[44] Posters were very much part of the fiercely contested world of Edwardian politics, and were often ripped down, replaced or amended in the struggle for votes and for public space.

Historians have differed markedly in their accounts of the contemporary reception of First World War posters. In part, this reflects larger debates about the power of propaganda, and diverging assessments of voluntary recruitment. While many have seen the impact of advertising on war posters as increasing their influence, others have suggested that affinities

with commercial imagery were unpalatable and reduced their impact. By relating wartime posters more closely than hitherto to pre-war political precursors, it is possible to clarify aspects of their reception. Liberal intellectuals who detected, and generally overstated, the influence of advertising upon pre-war political publicity attacked its allegedly debasing vulgarity. Wartime debates about the efficacy and morality of posters recall pre-war discussions. Important recent writing about the war stresses the role of events, notably German violation of Belgian neutrality and the bombing of the East coast, in shaping public attitudes, and argues that the level of distortion in British propaganda has been overstated.[45] Claims about the relative efficacy of visual propaganda in different countries are difficult to test, and there were significant commonalities in the character and content of propaganda. More frequent use of medieval motifs, such as Gothic scripts, in German posters may simply have reflected the greater resonance of the medieval past in Germany, while the story-telling tendencies of British posters – bemoaned by Hardie and Sabin – might just be an instance of a broader fondness for narrative, evident in other media, such as illustrated books. It does, though, seem plausible to argue, as Winter has for propaganda more broadly, that the civil society origins of many British posters, and the continuities with pre-war popular and political culture, made posters intelligible to their audience, and visually 'contained' some of the strains of wartime.[46]

Widespread patriotism, and the common conviction that Britain's cause was just, conditioned how war posters were received. However, pre-war traditions of disruption did not disappear, with posters in Glasgow subject to defacement, and Sinn Fein producing their own parodies of Irish recruiting posters.[47] Some bemoaned the 'shrieking' character of war posters, but others defended their tactics, arguing, as Tennant did in the House of Commons, that 'appeals must necessarily be addressed to meet the most varied tastes'.[48] As with product advertising, there is evidence to suggest that soldiers were more troubled by the often highly

romanticised and deeply unrealistic portrayals of conflict, especially the persistence of cavalry posters. Over time, posters came to focus less upon securing volunteers for the forces. The arrival of Lord Derby, followed by the onset of conscription, redirected pictorial posters away from recruitment towards loans, and the home front more broadly.

First World War posters have become a mainstay of museum shops and websites.[49] They are presented and perceived as tokens of a culturally and emotionally distant past, full of naive appeals to duty. They can be consumed as kitsch or, as with Lumley's 'Daddy, What Did You Do in the Great War?, experienced by many as alien exercises in emotional blackmail. While institutions like the Imperial War Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum have sought to historicise the imagery of war, First World War posters are still too often wrenched from the visual and political culture out of which they emerged.

Commercial advertising

The immediate response of commerce to the war was deep anxiety about the economy. Early evidence of rising newspaper circulations led to revival, though advertisers argued for lower prices out of concerns that reach would not translate into sales. As it became clear that economic dislocation had been averted, demand for many goods came to exceed supply with much production geared to war, and firms found less need to spend on advertising. Paper restrictions grew over the course of the conflict, reducing the availability of space in newspapers and limiting the size of posters. Enhanced press readership, along with the higher cost of paper, and a smaller total volume of advertising space, intensified competition between posters and print to attract advertisers. As the war went on, competition from abroad for the domestic market in industries focusing on war production led to adverts encouraging consumers to defer purchases until the struggle was concluded.[50]

Advertisers swiftly sought to use patriotism to sell goods. Such adverts now seem culturally distant, and even bizarrely trivialising. 'Zog' paint cleaner, readers of *The Times* were told in April 1915, would 'Make Dirt Fly' and the accompanying illustration showed the miracle product removing dirt Zeppelins, and dirt German soldiers, easily identifiable from their spiked helmets.[51] The widely and deeply felt desire to help the troops – to be worthy of their sacrifice – was mined by advertisers. Female readers of *The Times* were alerted to the free postage through which Horlick's Malted Milk flasks could be sent direct to 'YOUR soldier' in the trenches (the only possible evidence of any fighting pictured at a safe distance), so saving 'the strength of the soldier when he most needs it'.[52] Bovril issued a poster with a single male munitions worker, staring out of the picture frame, drink in one hand, hammer in the other. The persuasive power of the poster was attested in a newspaper advert with a quotation from, and photograph of, Arsenal employee Leon Clark (FIG. 5). Clark is quoted as saying he had seen the poster the previous year, and resolved 'to put it to the test', and, after twelve months of regular consumption of the branded drink, 'can safely say with the poster, "Bovril Gives You Strength To Win"'. The photograph showed an impressively muscled Clark in the precise pose of the poster. This 'patriotic' tribute to 'the body building power of Bovril' was a striking amalgam of science ('proved by independent scientific investigation'), photography, and consumer voice, celebrating the power of advertising, and thus itself.[53]

The unfolding realities of the war supplied numerous opportunities to remind consumers of the new relevance of a variety of goods. As early as October 1914, Heal's was emphasising that the 'hygienic' quality of their beds made them especially suitable for convalescents.[54] A year later Burberry was assuring readers of *The Bystander* that its 'Trench-Warm' coat was 'impenetrable, for excessively severe weather', 'a distinguished coat, a veritable safeguard', as sported by a dashing soldier standing jauntily in a trench with his head visible above ground level: trench warfare as Sunday stroll.[55] Charles Packer and Co.,

goldsmiths and silversmiths, enterprisingly marketed 'military badge brooches' in 15 ct. gold for the affluent readers of *The Bystander*.[56] Newspapers were alert to the opportunities offered by public interest in the conflict, with *The Graphic* in October 1915 advertising its pictorial map of the Dardanelles 'the most striking and intelligent war map yet produced', available for 6d. Soap manufacturers were traditionally heavy advertisers, and this continued in wartime. Adverts, firmly aimed at women, proclaimed, 'Send him Soap', in the words of Wright's. Combining a large bar of soap with images of fresh-faced soldiers, Wright's Coal Tar was the right choice whether 'your soldier friend is fighting in FLANDERS or the DARDANNELES [sic]'. Maps of both locations were helpfully provided, including the line of the trenches snaking from France into Belgium.[57]

Advertisers were adept at incorporating the war into their branding. 'Black and White' Scotch whisky referenced its name pictorially, not through the monochrome dogs used since the 1890s, but by a 'study in black and white' of a British destroyer whose searchlight picks out a looming black Zeppelin, with the brand name in white lettering in a modern font against the night sky.[58] John Walker and Sons of Kilmarnock proclaimed the quality of their blended whisky with the aid of the Johnnie Walker 'striding man' logo created in 1908 by the comic artist Tom Browne. Retaining the slogan 'Born 1820 – Still Going Strong', the war found Johnnie Walker presenting his passport to the French military, proving that 'he go anywhere'.[59] Manufacturers in the motor industry were equally willing to link their products to the war, with Dunlop claiming to be 'the "make" that is doing the most for the nation, and will do the most for you' (FIG. 6). Picturing the four national saints of the United Kingdom in the manner of stained glass windows, Dunlop hymned 'Nationality' as 'a vital thing these days for the country, individual and firm', insisting – heavy-handedly even by the advertising standards of 1915 – that 'if there is any merit in morality, if there is any merit in patriotism, if there is any merit in nationality, your tyres should be British and Dunlop'.[60] 'Noiseless Napier

Motor carriages' were presented as the choice of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Munitions, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster – 'truly a happy combination of a British Cabinet and a British Car'. Photographic portraits of the four politicians – of the familiar oval, head-and-shoulders kind – surrounded a central image of the car, confidently described as 'the World's Proved Best Car'.[61] With slightly more modesty, Sunbeam announced that 'by gaining distinction in the present war by sheer force of achievement, the Sunbeam car has proved itself to be the equal of the highest class of cars and the superior of most'. Aimed at a less wealthy clientele, Sunbeam were already in 1915 suggesting that purchase would be considered 'when the war was over'. Consumers were expected to warm to the punning assurance that 'Sunbeam Coatelen Aircraft motors are helping to maintain the ascendancy which distinguishes the flying services of the Allied Forces.'[62]

The use of politicians to sell goods was not a wartime innovation. Indeed, the war sorely tested political reputations, and not just those of individuals: in late 1915, when Napier were advertising in *The Bystander*, a columnist in the magazine asked 'Have the politicians failed?' before bemoaning the absence of 'super-men' like Gladstone or Disraeli.[63] The flow of ideas and influence between propaganda, including political propaganda, and advertising moved both ways, and this traffic continued into the war. 'Sanitas' disinfectant's advert, 'Your House / Should be Made Sweet and Healthy' displayed an apron-wearing young woman, whose gaze and foreshortened finger clearly mimicked Alfred Leete's Kitchener poster.[64] The 'Bovril Gives Strength To Win' poster, already touched upon, similarly referenced and appropriated the patriotic appeal of recruiting posters, seeking to convert consumption into a signifier of war-winning virtue. The new-found significance of the home front, and the importance attached to morale, in a war of such scale, character and duration, offered the possibility of casting cheerful consumption as appropriate non-combatant

behaviour. It may not be fanciful to detect in the adverts for cleaning products, like Sanitas, an implied contrast with the mud of Flanders: maintenance of the cleanliness, and hence sanctity, of the home as recognition of the soldier's sacrifice.

Looking at the advertising of 1914–18 it is not hard to see why Niall Ferguson called the First World War a 'carnival of vulgarity'.[65] An image like the Pear's Soap advert 'An incident of the trenches' in which soldiers under fire retrieve a bar of soap – Tommy: 'Line up, we must have it', 'They got it, and had the wash of their lives' – seems to us offensively banal.[66] Yet it is not totally incomprehensible that those on the home front, distant from the immediate stench of trench warfare, perhaps guiltily aware of some of its tribulations, should wish to do something, however desperately inadequate, for those on the front line. The willingness of business to adopt such marketing strategies reflects the pre-existing advertising culture of spectacle and bold assertion, along with the commercial imperatives and opportunities of wartime. The duration of the war, and the stalemate made visible in maps of the front line, meant that it became a constant, everyday reality. The scale of loss was unintelligibly vast compared to previous conflicts. The very banality, and familiar boosterism, of advertising may have served to 'normalise' and to contain the unfolding reality of industrialised mass conflict. For instance, the tank made a powerful appeal in city centres as a backdrop for the war loans campaign; it was also a hugely popular toy.

It would, of course, be a mistake to assume that adverts necessarily found a ready response. Trench newspapers found them irresistible objects for satire. One asked, 'Are you going over the top? If so be sure to first inspect our new line of velveteen corduroy plush breeches. Be in the fashion and look like a soldier'.[67] The *Wipers Times* included mock notices for Christmas boxes and must-have items like "Our Latest Improved Pattern Combination Umbrella and Wire Cutter".[68] Conversely, *The Bystander* included Bairnfather's cartoons alongside adverts for cars and soap. These cartoons are generally seen as showing

the 'stoical determination' of the ordinary soldier, and this is not wrong. There was, though, an edge to his 'Where To Live – advert'. It pictured a 'well-built dugout' helpfully located 'three minutes from the German lines', featuring 'all modern inconveniences – including gas and water' and standing 'one foot above water level, commanding an excellent view of the enemy lines'. Particulars of late tenant available 'Room 6, Base Hospital'.[69] Similarly, the magazine featured cartoons by Sub-Lieutenant Arthur Watts, who had already begun his career with *Punch*, which punctured the claims of gossiping civilians to be in the know.[70] The perspective of soldiers was communicated in a host of ways, whether it be cartoons, or letters and visits, to those on the home front. Will Dyson sharply criticised bloodthirsty advertising through his *Daily Herald* cartoon.[71] The widespread hostility to profiteers that emerged from 1915, while principally driven by price rises, may have owed something to the making of outsized profits while insisting on the 'patriotic' duty of consumers to buy.

Concluding Reflections

The effort to preserve and commemorate the posters of the First World War began during the conflict itself. It has, in many ways, been a greater success than its originators could possibly have hoped. Some of the images have become, to borrow an over-used word, iconic. The popularity of Leete's Kitchener image since the war considerably exceeds the original poster's visibility during the war. The advertisements of the war have not achieved the same level of recognition, and the 'lions led by donkeys' interpretation that became dominant in the 1960s made it less usable than the more recent and – widely perceived as more justified – Second World War.

Both posters and advertisements, however, need careful contextualisation. The posters have been understood through narratives about the birth of state propaganda and the modernising force of advertisements that underestimate the pluralism and complexity of

British political and visual culture both before and during wartime. Neither the posters nor adverts of Britain's war were wholly forward-looking, and aspects of what has been termed reactionary modernism need to be placed alongside genuine continuities with pre-war practices, and widespread appeals to tradition. In some respects, British visual culture was both more modern in 1914 and less modern in 1918 than is often realised. Contrasts between modern and older visual languages can distract from changes within and exchanges between visual languages. It is through an historical account of the relationships between the established, yet evolving, languages of advertising, the political poster, and cartooning that we can best understand the popular visual culture of the war.

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[3] Jay Winter, 'Propaganda and the Mobilisation of Consent', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War*, ed. by Hew Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 216; 'Progress of Recruiting', *The Times*, 21 August 1914, p.5.

[4] 'The Mile End Contest', *The Times*, 19 January 1916, p. 5.

[5] James Thompson, ''Pictorial Lies?' Posters and Politics in Britain, c. 1880–1914', *Past and Present*, 197 (2007), 175–200.

[6] John Bourne, *Britain and the Great War* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), p. 203.

[7] Susan Sontag, 'Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity' in *The Art of Revolution: 96 Posters from Castro's Cuba, 1959–1970* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), ed. Donald Stermer, pp. vii–xxiii (pp. x–xi).

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[9] On the war's relationship to pre-war political culture, see David Monger, 'Familiarity Breeds Consent? Patriotic Rituals in British First World War Propaganda', *Twentieth Century British History*, 26 (2015), 501-28.

[10] 'Some Election Posters', *The Times*, 30 November 1910, p. 7.

[11] Thompson, 'Pictorial Lies', pp. 191–4.

[12] Clarence Moran, *The Business of Advertising* (London: Methuen & Co.), p. 51.

[13] George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 106; Nicholas Hiley, '"Kitchener Wants You" and "Daddy, What Did You Do in the Great War": The Myth of British Recruiting Posters', *Imperial War Museum Review*, 11 (1997), pp. 40–58; James Taylor, *Your Country Needs You: The Secret History of the Propaganda Poster* (Glasgow: Saraband, 2013).

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[15] Kathryn Rix, 'The Party Agent and English Electoral Culture, 1880–1896' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001).

[16] Carlo Ginzburg, ''Your Country Needs You': A Case Study in Political Iconography', *History Workshop Journal*, 52 (2001), pp. 1–22 (p.12).

[17] Edward Huskinson, 'It's Your Money We Want' (1907), Guildhall Library.

[18] Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London: Constable & Co., 1908), p. 109.

[19] A. G. Gardiner, *John Benn and the Progressive Movement* (London: Ernest Benn, 1925), p. 356; Charles Graves and Edward Lucas, *Change for a Half-Penny* (London: Alston Rivers, 1905).

[20] Letter from J. A. Grant, *The Times*, 25 November 1914, p. 9.

[21] Bernard Patridge, 'Soldiers All', Imperial War Museum, Q80318.

[22] David Wilson, 'Once A German – Always A German', Imperial War Museum, Q8147.

[23] 'Save The Wheat and Help The Fleet', Imperial War Museum, Art. IWM PST 4470.

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[26] I. T. Beadle, 'A Message from Our Seamen', Imperial War Museum, Q 31443.

[27] Winter, 'Propaganda and the mobilisation of consent', p. 216.

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[33] Philip Dutton, 'Moving Images? The Parliamentary Recruiting Committee's Poster Campaign, 1914–1916', *Imperial War Museum Review*, 4 (1989), 43–58; Hiley, 'Myth of British Recruiting Posters', 48.

[34] *Bulletin of the National Mission of Hope and Repentance*, 15 August 1916, pp. 2–3.

[35] '"A Nation On Its Knees"', *The Times*, 15 August 1916, p. 5; '"Nation On its Knees"', *Poverty Bay Herald*, 26 September 1916, p. 4.

[36] *Bulletin of the National Mission of Hope and Repentance*, 15 August 1916, pp. 3

[37] *Bulletin of the National Mission of Hope and Repentance*, 15 August 1916, pp. 3–4.

[38] Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 71.

[39] Sontag, 'Posters', p. ix–x.

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[47] Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, p. 125.

[48] See the exchange in the House of Commons between L. G. Chiozza Money and H. J. Tennant reported in *The Times*, 11 June 1915, p. 10.

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[52] *The Times*, 9 April 1915, p. 12.

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[54] *The Times*, 26 October 1914, p. 4.

[55] *The Bystander*, 6 October 1915, p. viii.

[56] Ibid., p. 41.

[57] Ibid., p. 35.

[58] *The Bystander*, 3 November 1915, p. 205.

[59] *The Bystander*, 6 October 1915, p. 33.

[60] *The Bystander*, 13 October 1915, p. 81.

[61] *The Bystander*, 20 October 1915, p. 113.

[62] Ibid., p. vii.

[63] 'Have The Politicians Failed?', *The Bystander*, 27 October 1915, p. 125.

[64] *The Bystander*, 27 October 1915, p. xvi.

[65] Ferguson, *Pity of War*, p. 234.

[66] *The Bystander*, 3 November 1915, p. x.

[67] Robb, *British Culture and the First World War*, p. 183.

[68] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 66.

[69] *The Bystander*, 6 October 1915, p. 14.

[70] *The Bystander*, 13 October 1915, p. 57.

[71] *Daily Herald*, 17 October 1914, p. 6.