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British home front in commercial press advertising**

Journal:	<i>Media History</i>
Manuscript ID	CMEH-2016-0007.R4
Manuscript Type:	Articles
Keywords:	Advertising, Propaganda < TOPICS, Second World War, Everyday life, Press < TOPICS, Material culture

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**BUILDING THE MEANING OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR ON THE BRITISH HOME FRONT IN COMMERCIAL PRESS ADVERTISING**

David Clampin

*Building on extant literature placing consumption as a dominant feature of British life by the interwar period, this article explores how commercial advertising drew on that position on the British home front of the Second World War to explain the part it played within the wider war effort. It reveals how advertising messages stressed free consumption as an indicator of democracy and as a symbol of British national identity. The advertisements analysed highlight how this, to date, overlooked channel of propaganda fell in line with the prevailing narrative of the war, supporting, reinforcing and perpetuating the common vision of that conflict. Whilst it is not suggested that these often fanciful representations were accepted unquestioningly at the time, it is argued that the widespread circulation of such an unequivocal version of events became the definitive, non-negotiable understanding of what Britain's war was about and how ordinary people could play their part within it.*

**KEYWORDS** Advertising; Propaganda; Second World War; Everyday life; Press; Material culture.

Histories of Britain during the Second World War record the vast array of socio-cultural forces which cast this moment in the nation's story in a very definite way. Notable factors in establishing that impression are numerous including the rich and, at times, relentless Government propaganda issued by the Ministry of Information (MoI) and associated bodies; a commercial film business which was thriving during the approach of war and through the war years; the visual arts, not least the planned output of officially sanctioned war art; wireless broadcasting; and the popular press. One feature in forging our understanding of Britain at war which has not been examined to date is commercial press advertising, that despite its widely pervasive nature and its obvious aim to alter perceptions and affect the frame of mind of the viewer. This article explores the nature of those advertising messages and how they complemented efforts being made elsewhere to explain and legitimate the war. From this basis it explains how the advertising industry was able to justify their continued existence irrespective of opposition which maintained that advertising urged consumer spending at a time when the government recommended saving in the national interest. What is revealed is a further elaboration of the work of Trentmann, Hilton and Daunton who argue that the interwar period witnessed the entrenchment of consumption practices in British society and the veneration of the consumer as an indication of the democratic ideal at the heart of British national identity. In relation to the history of British

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3 advertising, it extends the work of Schwarzkopf which argues that between 1900 and 1939  
4 advertising moved beyond simple instruction and information to construct stories, vignettes  
5 and scenarios relating to everyday life. In the campaigns examined here it is demonstrated  
6 how those tendencies were developed through the war to the point where everyday  
7 practices were fitted into the prevailing narrative establishing consumption as a national duty  
8 and in the interests of the war effort.  
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## 12 13 14 15 Introduction 16

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18 There is a well-established school of thought amongst historians which argues that in  
19 modern society an official, approved version of the past becomes established and  
20 subsequently prevails, often serving to 'muffle alternative memories': this is well  
21 demonstrated in relation to our understanding of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> For Connelly, this  
22 is distinct, rendering an impression that our understanding of those events is fixed and  
23 understood whilst Dawson claims there is a 'mythic version of World War II...that everyone  
24 knows'.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile Calder reflects on how the experience of the Second World War was  
25 both mediated and understood at the time and how it has subsequently been remembered,  
26 arguing that what stands is distinguished according to an 'aura of absoluteness, uniqueness,  
27 definitiveness'.<sup>3</sup>  
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34 That this should come about and accounting for the fact that it became so well  
35 established, if not immovable, grows in part out of the nature of that conflict. As Morgan and  
36 Evans highlight the war was as much ideological as it was territorial.<sup>4</sup> Those at the centre of  
37 this undertaking believed that there was a pronounced need to bring the nation together, a  
38 situation which had yet to be achieved as war broke out in September 1939. Added to this,  
39 the government was obliged to tell the story of the war in the face of wartime disruption and  
40 chaos and responding to a popular craving for instruction and interpretation to make sense  
41 of new lives. A variety of government agencies came into being to assist in that task, the  
42 Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Food, the Ministry of Transport. However, those  
43 efforts were assisted by the media more generally, including commercial press advertising  
44 which cast itself a role in organising wartime life, drawing ordinary people into the war and  
45 allotting tasks within it. Given that advertising stood out at this time as a recognisable feature  
46 of normal, peacetime life, ordinary and readily consumed, it was well placed to tell the story  
47 of the war.  
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56 That "story telling" or narrative role was something which had developed around  
57 advertising in the period from the turn of the twentieth century. By 1939, commercial  
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advertising in Britain had gone beyond merely selling goods to now play a part in establishing a particular type of society.<sup>5</sup> The sale of goods was orchestrated amidst a complex picture of 'constructed human and social values'.<sup>6</sup> Commercial advertising was now established as one of the means by which people 'came to make sense of the world they live in'.<sup>7</sup> The work of Schwarzkopf captures this well with reference to the relationship between the advertising industry and British society between 1900 and 1939. As early as 1916, key figures in the industry were casting advertising in the role of explaining, interpreting and teaching.<sup>8</sup> By the time of the Second World War, advertising was not just offering flat instruction but rather was playing its part in explaining, interpreting and teaching what the war was about and what it *meant*. Commercial advertising had a particular ability to set up the war as something 'natural' rather than exceptional which, according to Calder, was instrumental in it becoming widely accepted.<sup>9</sup>

By 1939, British society was characterised by the centrality of consumption in everyday life.<sup>10</sup> Hilton and Dauntton maintain that the worker had been eclipsed by the consumer, one's place within society was now largely determined not so much by your vocation as by the goods you conspicuously consumed, 'the ability to engage in private acts of consumption was a badge of citizenship'.<sup>11</sup> Further, the interwar period witnessed a battle to equate the activities of the private individual on the high street with the promotion of nation and Empire. During the interwar period shopping was mapped onto the national cause with propaganda and advertising playing a key part in articulating how the consumer's 'first duty was to the nation'.<sup>12</sup> The important part played by consumption in the regular functioning of British life was acknowledged by the government's reluctance in 1939 to move at once towards a command economy and by measures taken throughout the war to preserve personal, private consumption as a component of popular morale, such as the modicum of consumer choice evidenced through the points rationing scheme.<sup>13</sup> In effect, it was acknowledged that consumption practices at some level would be an important part in sustaining the home front in wartime, and even where those activities were severely restricted, the promise of a future world characterised by plentiful and unfettered consumption, would be an important driver in the war effort.

In the British case, what made these messages effective, as opposed to the didactic outpourings of government agencies, was the familiarity of their presentation and the fact that the war could apparently be engaged with via these regular, ordinary practices of consuming goods. The war came to the people as various cultural commentators cast ordinary people as players in this great undertaking simply by virtue of doing what they more or less had ordinarily done, simply carrying on. The variety, ubiquity and pervasiveness of

these representations served to give them great force to the extent that it might be argued that the history of the war became entrenched in the popular psyche not so much by virtue of the grand speeches and spectacles of the war but rather courtesy of the ordinary popular experience. For Eley,

the visual landscapes of the commercialized public sphere...become a rich resource – advertising and entertainment of all kind, but also posters and postcards, multifarious collectors' cards (accompanying cigarettes, bubblegum, packets of tea), commercialized bric-a-brac, all the commodified images of an expanding economy of consumption.<sup>14</sup>

The widespread nature of all such images and messages rendered them a great force in articulating what the war was all about, the progress of it and what its legacy would be. The events of the time were narrated within the popular domain and, at the same time, these populist channels were writing the history of the Second World War. As Eley notes, commercial culture was especially significant in this regard given the persuasiveness and pervasiveness of the messages circulated, making this particular version of events virtually impossible to escape.<sup>15</sup>

The story which commercial advertisers developed to explain and justify their approach is explored in the first section of this article. This also provides an insight into what they felt the war was about, subsequently reflected in the advertisements which appeared. Having established the context and approach of those working within the advertising industry, a variety of examples are drawn on to illustrate how the nature of wartime life was assimilated into the everyday and mundane. The examples used in this article are drawn from a survey of 3,522 commercial advertisements which appeared in *Picture Post* magazine between 23 September 1939 and 29 September 1945 and which made reference to the war, supported by detailed statistical analysis provided by the contemporary *Statistical Review of Press Advertising*.<sup>16</sup> Further context and insight is added via the private papers of the Advertising Association and the Incorporated Institute of Practitioners in Advertising held at the History of Advertising Trust, as well as the key trade paper of the time, *Advertisers' Weekly*. By these means it is possible to identify peaks and troughs in advertising activity, as well as to find recurring motifs and approaches in terms of how advertisers represented the war. One of the most outstanding features which emerges is the manner in which advertising tended to downplay the extraordinary events around them by bringing them under a common approach which would have been familiar to consumers irrespective of the war. Through the everyday explanation, interpretation and teaching that had become common practice in advertising by this time, the unexceptional was gently re-cast as exceptional providing a

rallying point for the British people. What is demonstrated is how commercial advertising situated individuals within 'historic' events, elevating the ordinary and every day to the 'heroic' and exceptional. In this manner, it is argued that commercial press advertising played a complementary part in interpreting, constructing and projecting the narrative of the Second World War as a by-product of their efforts to draw attention to themselves and identify their products with their consumers and their situation. What is shown is how commercial advertising was able to effectively describe the ideal wartime life and the war minded citizen.

Advertising at war

Commercial press advertising of the Second World War played a very deliberate and definite role in establishing and perpetuating the national narrative of the war. There were various reasons why this should be, not least, in common with so many others in the country at large, out of patriotism and a determination to defend the nation. However, advertisers were also keen to fit into the prevailing culture to ensure that their messages resonated with their intended customers (whether that be in selling them their products in the present or in a more bountiful and freer future world) and were in accord with the prevailing mood and attitude. Of course, there were a host of other reasons behind the scenes whereby advertising practitioners were determined to protect their livelihood but whatever the (genuine) motivation the result was a vast array of messages and representations of Britain at war which played a significant part in interpreting and making sense of that undertaking.<sup>17</sup> Keying into the prevailing, and widely accepted, national narrative was to some extent a foil to the underlying profit motive that drove private business on through the war years and ensured that the government was kept at arm's length. Britain's war effort was underpinned by private enterprise: fearful of provoking an adverse reaction, the government attempted to manage the economy on the basis of cooperation rather than compulsion. Private companies were largely left to define their actions according to the national interest as they saw fit and keenly articulating and explaining how their continued free practice was in the national interest.<sup>18</sup> Advertising messages were thus, to some extent, disingenuous. Whilst those advertisements may have been motivated by real patriotism and a genuine commitment to the war, there was also a wary eye kept on how the advertiser might be more widely perceived by the public and those in positions of power for fear that their liberty be curtailed. Parties with a vested interest in the establishment were keen to extoll the great commitment they were making to the successful prosecution of the war. This was pronounced in the case of the advertising industry where messages were deliberately constructed to give a particular impression, and to play a part in imagining what the war was all about, its meaning and establishing where the ordinary person fitted in.



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3 In their public declarations, key advertising bodies clearly expressed that advertising  
4 was, in and of itself, precisely indicative of what it was that the nation was fighting for:  
5 freedom of choice in terms of consumption practices symbolised why the nation was  
6 standing up to the Nazi menace. If anything this was an admission of guilt on the part of the  
7 advertising industry as they recognised that their *raison d'être* went contrary to the supposed  
8 'People's War' which celebrated equality of sacrifice over selfish aggrandisement. However,  
9 the messages of advertisers were held up as beacons of hope spurring the nation on  
10 through the war and conjuring up a vision of a future, plentiful world far removed from the  
11 deprivation that many had suffered in the interwar period and which was now a necessary  
12 adjunct to being at war. Writing in *The Times*, Major G. Harrison, managing director of the  
13 London Press Exchange, at that time one of the country's largest advertising agencies,  
14 declared that competition was 'the life-blood of democracy' yet it had 'no place amongst  
15 Fascist peoples'.<sup>19</sup> From the outset, modern consumer culture was mapped onto what it was  
16 that the nation was fighting for, and advertising was held up as the bright beacon of  
17 democracy. In effect, every time the consumer made the choice of one good over another,  
18 informed and guided by advertising, they were exercising their democratic right. Advertising  
19 was said to be in the vanguard of the war effort and at the heart of the ideological battle that  
20 was at play. To reinforce this point The Advertising Association produced a series of  
21 advertisements in 1940 which were to be placed in various newspapers and magazines in  
22 order to make these connections absolutely explicit. Number five in that series spoke of the  
23 quality of the free economy in Britain in contrast to the Nazi system of regimentation. In  
24 ensuring that this system worked to best effect, advertising provided 'leadership and  
25 guidance'. This they argued was something 'too sensitive to neglect'.<sup>20</sup> In similar language  
26 Norman Moore, the President of the Incorporated Institute of Practitioners in Advertising  
27 (IIPA), declared that it was 'of national importance that advertising should continue'.<sup>21</sup> On  
28 this basis, press advertising was vociferous in capturing the ideological nature of this war, a  
29 key feature of this conflict and one that was constantly being reiterated across a variety of  
30 channels. However, advertising also had its part to play in highlighting the enormity of the  
31 undertaking and how a significant moment in the nation's story was being forged.

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48 If advertising in general is responsible for situating individuals within society and  
49 placing them in specific scenarios then this was most pronounced during the Second World  
50 War as they were cast into 'historic events'. As the nation moved onto a war footing, there  
51 were great efforts to place the war centre stage in everyday life. As advertisers subscribed to  
52 this broad narrative, taking the ordinary and mundane and situating this within these  
53 momentous events, the everyday and unexceptional was re-cast as exceptional. The  
54 Advertising Association claimed that the war had 'presented advertising with one of its most  
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exciting tasks'.<sup>22</sup> Those working within the industry were cognizant of this and aware of their broad responsibilities in engaging the nation in the fight. Harrison went on in his piece in *The Times* to state that,

Advertising will be a driving force during the war period...We are fighting for our lives, but equally for what we conceive to be individual freedom of action and thought. Do not give this up too lightly or too hurriedly our freedom to develop our personalities and our individuality in business.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding the self-serving rhetoric that imbued the outpourings of so many engaged in advertising, there were genuine efforts to highlight that history was being made, capturing and recording the various features of that history. This extended to placing the freedom of the press at the heart of the conflict. That freedom, it was argued, was a consequence of the rise of commercial advertising and the war was once again cast as an ideological crusade.<sup>24</sup> In a pamphlet circulated by the Advertising Association in 1942 it was argued,

In war the preservation of this freedom [of the press] is more necessary even than in peace; the example of France is warning of the fate that may befall a democracy when the press ceases to wield the power of free and open criticism, and thereby deprives people of their ability to control events and the actions of their leaders.<sup>25</sup>

By supporting a free and independent press, and by extension providing a brake on government through the exercise of public opinion, the nobility of the war was highlighted precisely in accord with the narrative that was being played out via other channels. Indeed this is a view that has subsequently been held up by Curran and Seaton and Conboy who praise the *Daily Mirror* for developing a genuine democratic rhetoric.<sup>26</sup> Those working within the business argued that the continued presence of commercial advertising in the press was an outward sign that newspapers in Britain remained free and independent, an illustration of the 'things for which we are fighting'.<sup>27</sup> Leslie W. Needham, Director of Advertising at the *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express*, argued that advertisers thus ought to take 'a rousing lead in their output'.<sup>28</sup>

The result of these attitudes, beliefs and opinions was an extraordinary array of advertisements throughout the war which deliberately and explicitly set out to organise, interpret, mediate, and project an ideal of everyday life in wartime. A convincing narrative was presented that called on people to find themselves within the scenarios displayed and identify themselves as historic actors. Commercial advertising was able to achieve this because it was placed outside the confines of the formal and was situated in the everyday. During the war the advertising industry understood this and seized on the prospect. Norman



Moore told the Annual General Meeting of Fellows and Associates of the IIPA in April 1940 that, 'Advertising had a special opportunity of serving the public by maintaining a spirit of cheerfulness. In helping the public it was serving the Nation's interests'.<sup>29</sup> The manner by which this would be achieved was expected to be via the simple instruction and advice that advertising could offer amidst the disruption of war and the highly unsettled retail environment. Advertising spoke of the everyday and could subtly weave the arrival of war into the day-to-day practices of the people. Lord Ashfield, the President of the Advertising Association, declared that the essence of advertising resided in its 'power in sustaining morale and developing our war effort on the Home Front'.<sup>30</sup> Thus, consumption practices and the representation of those goods were heavily laden with messages and meanings. Inanimate objects did not merely exist for utilitarian purposes but were woven into the broader fabric of wartime society and given meanings which extended and contributed to the prevailing culture. Thus, the official or grand story of the Second World War was played out alongside, and to some extent realised through, the ordinary, mundane and every day.

#### 'Big little victories'. The ideal of everyday life in wartime

The war became a widely prevalent theme in commercial advertising as soon as hostilities commenced: looking through the pages of newspapers and magazines at the time, it would have been difficult to avoid the wider struggle at hand as a significant proportion redesigned their advertisements to make reference to the conflict. The practice of dressing up otherwise unconnected or innocuous advertising messages in wartime fatigues became common practice from early in the war. Thus, in September 1939 Fry's chocolate employed a policeman in a tin hat as their spokesman and by November 1939, Master O'Kay, the familiar brand ambassador of *Mason's O.K. Sauce*, was similarly sporting a tin hat and carrying a gas mask.<sup>31</sup> Commercial advertising was active in situating individuals within these 'historic' events and elevating the unexceptional to the 'heroic' and exceptional. A good example of this is to be found in the advertising of Lever Brothers of 5 October, 1940. Under the rubric of a very general awareness campaign, Lever highlighted the importance of their brand heritage in parallel to the heritage of the nation which thereby suggested that despite the overwhelming facts of the time, the nation would prevail. This advertisement was full of allusions to the past and made frequent reference to how history was being created in the present. It stated,

Today we are all, in our various ways, helping to write a great page of Empire history. For the work we do, whether it is that of a housewife at home or a worker in industry, or a member of the armed forces, is all part of the united effort towards victory.<sup>32</sup>

The advertisement states, 'the story is continuous. The pages that tell of yesterday's enterprise read on to the present page of Empire-wide effort and tomorrow's tale of final victory'. Further, the unexceptional and ordinary nature of these channels of communication, known, familiar and well established before the war began, ensured that the messages were readily and easily consumed and made perfect sense.

Advertisers drew on such a discourse and is so doing hinted at the permanence of the nation and how it would prevail. This was often achieved by drawing attention to the long-standing nature of well-known brands and their durability as a distinctly British phenomenon. An advertising campaign for *Schweppes Table Waters* which ran between April and June 1943 recounted how this brand had stood the test of time, even if the concentration of the production of soft drinks meant that they were anonymised under a national brand for the time being.<sup>33</sup> The French Revolution, the Battle of Valmy (1792) and the introduction of the Convoy system in 1790 are promoted as symbols of the permanence of both the Schweppes brand and the nation.<sup>34</sup> The case was made more explicitly by the food canners Poulton and Noel who explained, 'It is in the past that Great Britain's solid foundations were laid, foundations of strength, courage and tolerance. These qualities are Britain's real heritage, her present greatness, her guarantee of the future'. Under the cover of selling tinned soup, the national story could be reiterated and expanded, adding to the stirring invocations being played out elsewhere.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

What is distinctive in such cases is the manner in which the innocuous cover of everyday goods, under the known and familiar banner of beloved brands, expanded and developed the story. What is more, the communication of such representations and ideas via established and unexceptional channels lent the story further creditability.<sup>35</sup> This is well illustrated in *Cadbury Bourn-Vita's* 'New Lives – New Needs' campaign which ran between October 1940 and September 1941. This advertiser had a well-established approach to promoting their malt drink in its ability to aid restorative sleep and they were able to project that onto the new wartime environment, presenting its effectiveness as a contribution to the war effort. In this example of December 1940 we encounter an artist shifting roles to become an A.R.P. rescue worker.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

The simple purchase of a malt drink is reimagined to initially herald this as the drink of choice of the artist, and then to show the sacrifice and commitment of that artist to the war effort. By implication, the consumption of Bourn-Vita is a part of the war effort, removed from

the debased nature of acquisition and purchase: thanks to *Bourn-Vita*, 'On the Home Front, battles are being won every day – big little victories over tiredness, irritability, nervous strain'. The difficult balance which advertisers were required to strike through this time was not necessarily to drive consumption of a specific brand but rather gently suggesting that spending a little was a good thing which made a contribution to the war effort and that, perhaps, the consumption of certain goods might just enhance one's performance in the war.

The role of advertising during the Second World War is hence accorded its place in supporting, reinforcing and perpetuating the common vision of the war and what it meant, even if many people through the war merely gave that lip service rather than wholly adopting it as credo to live by as typified by the black market which Zweiniger-Bargielowska characterises as being the scene of 'vehement public condemnation and universal private indulgence'.<sup>36</sup> Advertising at this moment played an important role within the national struggle by reinforcing the pervasive image of the significance of the war within the national story: the viewer is called on to imagine 'New Lives'. As Connolly observes, there was a pervasive understanding of the Second World War in the 'sheer homogeneity of...popular cultural artefacts'.<sup>37</sup> Thus, in the *Bourn-Vita* campaign we witness secretaries, tea-shop waitresses, show girls, cinema ushers and pottery designers all shifting roles in order to join the war effort and highlighting the totality of the nation's commitment. The meaning, understanding and the history of the Second World War is thus captured in the mundane, every day and common. Whilst this may be far from the actual case, the impression is given that this understanding is *natural* and comes from the bottom up rather than being imposed from above. For Norma Knight, all she need do is use *Knight's Castile Toilet Soap* thereby 'keeping cheerful and attractive...we can help to keep up national morale'.<sup>38</sup>

In wartime Britain press advertising was relentless as a 'meaning-producing process' via graphic representation.<sup>39</sup> What is more, these representations produced by erstwhile free and independent bodies accorded very precisely with the prevailing narrative of the war which became the "official" vision of that conflict both at the time and subsequently, according with Noakes and Pattinson's muffling of alternative realities and Dawson's 'mythic version of World War II...that everyone knows'. It is argued that commercial advertising was particularly effective in this fashion by presenting unequivocal representations and clearly designating the 'kind of viewers they intend us to be' though we may actually be no different at all.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the *Bulmer's Cider* workman of July 1941 still appears unchanged from peacetime but acknowledges that he now finds himself in a 'queer new world' and, by default, a member of the 'Civilian Brigade'.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

Much of the power of advertising resides in its ability to assimilate itself with society and the prevailing culture and in so doing both reinforces that culture and magnifies it.

Within these various efforts the common people are placed at the centre and ordinariness triumphs, in the end the war was being fought by them, and it was argued, for them. In the much repeated and widely circulated expression of the time this was the 'People's War'. Popular representations of the war and images of the battle being played out mapped the heroic struggle onto the often mundane and ordinary; perhaps unlike earlier conflicts this was not a war of grand figures and big name Generals but rather was the war of the everyman. Thus, the everyday practices of the people and their otherwise innocuous goods were re-appropriated and dressed up in wartime fatigues in order to suggest the totality of the war and its all-encompassing nature. The war was supposedly being won simply by the people carrying on, ideally with a smile on one's face. Everyday practices were now part of the war effort according to advertisers: your contribution to the war might thus be enhanced by the application of *Cherry Blossom Boot Polish*.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

Advertisers were relentless in showing ordinary men and women going about their everyday business yet casting these activities into the war and according to them a contribution to the war effort. This was also reflected in wartime cinema with Hurd observing how popular films constructed 'an image of popular national unity...which placed ordinary men and women at its centre'.<sup>41</sup> Further, the nuanced representation played out in cinema did not necessarily exalt the common people or stress their exceptionalism but rather tempered the view to focus on the everyday: the common experience became the key motif. This was further established by highlighting how this latest challenge to the nation was a part of an ongoing story, not necessarily a bolt out of the blue, but instead spoke to the nation's destiny. All-in-all, the British people were not being called upon to reinvent themselves but rather to simply carry on being British based on a traditional approach to what that was imagined to be.

A campaign for *H.P. Sauce* which appeared between April 1940 and April 1941 presented a series of vignettes of the day-to-day lives of 'ordinary people', defined relative to the war and casting them as historic actors within that enterprise. Thus, a young couple taking a picnic are shown to be war minded by only going as far as Epping Forest rather than the Coast as they normally would: they are saving petrol coupons and helping the war effort. Fishermen are cast as 'heroes' perhaps on a par with the men of the Royal and Merchant Navy.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, the humble grocery delivery boy is shown to be adaptable and unfazed, determined to carry on despite the rubble and destruction around him.

[INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE]

In their campaign 'Munitions for the Home Front' which ran between April and November 1940 *Murphy Radio* presented a number of scenarios inviting viewers to find themselves in such scenes whilst subscribing to the labels, designations and attitudes found therein. In these advertisements the ordinary and mundane is exalted and placed within the context of the historic struggle under way. Thus, the 'civilian's job in wartime' is to 'work hard, avoid grumbling and save all he can'.

[INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE]

A role it is acknowledged it is not easy to achieve but nevertheless, by implication, an important one. The stay-at-home mother is held up as a central feature of the war effort,

carrying on till their men come home; carrying on with sadly depleted incomes; facing difficulty and loneliness – but sure of one thing – that it is their job to keep the family going whatever happens, and that they can and will do it.<sup>43</sup>

This apparently cheerful, smiling mother is portrayed as an exemplar and as a central feature of 'the Second World War'. Further, and more direct, allusions are made in 'Gran'pa versus the submarines' where ordinary and mundane activities are placed directly in the frontline, 'another two hours' work done on the old allotment; another two hours' worth of food to beat the Nazi submarine'.

[INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE]

Yet this might be nothing new, the impression is conveyed that 'Gran'pa' has had an allotment for some time but now this activity is mediated and interpreted through the prism of being embroiled in war: 'Gran'pa' is now fighting the Kriegsmarine on his allotment.

Commercial advertising is significant in its power to validate personal thoughts, reflections and memories simply through this public articulation and the suggestion that these are shared and widespread. This is well demonstrated in a campaign for *Kellogg's Corn Flakes* which ran between August 1941 and February 1942. In these advertisements a highly empathetic approach is taken through an extended use of dialogue that tries to put words into the mouth of the viewer. These advertisements seek to make sense and condition the public attitude placing a basic breakfast cereal within a much broader context. In 'Overheard in High Street', the 'Second Shopper' remarks, 'I miss the 30-Second Breakfast...But we're all in the same boat...' However, this lamentation which might have been frustration in the 'real' shopper is put in perspective when she goes on, 'Just think of

the thousands and thousands of war workers there are in the country now! And every one of them probably like to start the day with a 30-Second Breakfast'. Leaving the 'First Shopper' to reflect, 'Yes, I must say they need it more than we do. So I, for one, won't grumble'.<sup>44</sup> And so a perfect image of the 'People's War' is conjured up: the nation is united, the people are willing to make sacrifices in the interests of the greater undertaking, and they do so cheerfully! Within the context of a rather dull conversation about shopping, the grand narrative of the war is set out and shoppers are shown as playing their parts in this grand enterprise alongside the munitions worker and the fighting man.

Conclusion

Commercial advertising was one of the institutions which interpreted the Second World War, presenting a very definite impression, largely acceded to at the time, and which subsequently became fixed in the popular imagination. Given that this was as much an ideological war as it was a territorial one, deliberate efforts were taken to ensure that the total and all-encompassing nature of the war was widely understood and that it inveigled its way into every aspect of life. As part of this, normal everyday practices were dressed in wartime fatigues with commercial advertising being instrumental in this.

Yet, the advertising industry had to argue for its place in wartime Britain and went to deliberate efforts to explain where it fitted into the war and how the mere presence of advertising could serve to articulate certain key features of the war. Whilst this may have been characterised by posturing and rhetoric, it formed a part of the rich discourse being played out which cast the war in ideological terms. The unique contribution of commercial press advertising was that these messages were grounded in the ordinary and every day, making such representations largely accessible and apparently requiring little real change or adjustment. As far as advertisers were concerned, you could express your commitment to the war simply through the judicious selection of a variety of goods. The power and effectiveness of commercial advertising in the Second World War was achieved by virtue of the fact that it dealt in the natural, ordinary and mundane, and propagated messages via familiar, well known and trusted channels. As such, commercial advertising in the press played a significant part in giving form and meaning to the 'People's War', a significant component within the propaganda machine which is often overlooked.

<sup>1</sup>Noakes and Pattinson, "Introduction: 'Keep calm and carry on'", 6.

<sup>2</sup>Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, 3; Dawson, "History-Writing on World War II", 1.

<sup>3</sup>Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 1.

<sup>4</sup>Morgan and Evans, *The Battle For Britain. Citizenship and Ideology in the Second World War*, 15.

<sup>5</sup>See McFall, *Advertising. A Cultural Economy*, Ch. 1.

<sup>6</sup>McFall, *Advertising*, 20.



<sup>7</sup> Dyer, *Advertising as Communication*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> See Charles Higham, "Scientific Distribution", *Daily Mail*, 15 August 1916, 1 in Schwarzkopf, "Respectable Persuaders: the Advertising Industry and British Society, 1900 – 1939". PhD diss., Birkbeck College, 2008, 146.

<sup>9</sup> Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> See Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*; and, "Knowing Consumers – Histories, Identities, Practices: An Introduction", in Trentmann (ed.), *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*.

<sup>11</sup> Hilton and Daunton, "Material Politics: An Introduction" in Daunton and Hilton (eds.), *The Politics of Consumption. Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Rappaport, "Drink Empire Tea: Gender, Conservative Politics and Imperial Consumerism in Inter-war Britain" in Rapport, Trudgen Dawson and Crowley (eds.), *Consuming Behaviours. Identity, Politics and Pleasure in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 142. See also Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, and Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising*.

<sup>13</sup> See speech of Sir John Simon introducing the first war budget to the House of Commons, H. of C. Deb. Vol. 360, Col. 84 (23 Apr. 1940).

<sup>14</sup> Eley, "Foreword", xvii.

<sup>15</sup> Eley, "The Past Under Erasure?", 557.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the methodological aspects of this survey see Clampin. "The Role of Commercial Advertising in Britain During the Second World War." PhD diss., Aberystwyth University, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> For a full review of the workings of the advertising industry in wartime Britain, and their relationship with the Government, see Clampin, *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II*.

<sup>18</sup> See Mackay, *The Test of War*, Ch. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison, "War-time Trade", *The Times*, 21 September 1939, 10.

<sup>20</sup> The Advertising Association. "protect your BRAND NAME".

<sup>21</sup> Moore, President's Address, 20 April 1942.

<sup>22</sup> *The Newspaper World and Advertising Review*, 10 July 1941, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Harrison, "War-time Trade", *The Times*, 21 September 1939, 10.

<sup>24</sup> By the time of the Second World War the print press and advertising were well established in a state of mutual dependency. The press were dependent on advertising as a vital source of revenue; advertisers depended on the press as one of the few means by which they could communicate their messages irrespective of the war. This was a situation which persisted with advertising an important revenue stream both in the present but also with an eye to a post-war return to "business as usual". To this extent, the newspapers and magazines referred to in this article were only too happy to carry the advertisements discussed: proprietors of the press throughout the war they remained committed to the commercial imperative upon which their empires had been built (see Bromley, 'Was it the Mirror wot won it? The Development of the Tabloid Press during the Second World War' in Hayes and Hill (eds.), *'Millions Like Us'? British Culture in the Second World War*; Clampin, *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II*; Thomas, "A Cloak of Apathy": political disengagement, popular politics and the Daily Mirror 1940 – 1945', *Journalism Studies*).

<sup>25</sup> The Advertising Association. *Advertising in War-Time*.

<sup>26</sup> Curran and Seaton, *Power without Responsibility. The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*, 82; Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture*, 128.

<sup>27</sup> The Advertising Association. *Advertising in War-Time*.

<sup>28</sup> Leslie W. Needham, "Where are our Crusaders?", *Advertiser's Weekly*, October 26, 1939, 67.

<sup>29</sup> Moore, President's Address, 16 April 1940.

<sup>30</sup> Ashfield, "Foreword", 9.

<sup>31</sup> 'A minute of a stand-up meal', *Fry's Sandwich Chocolate*, *Daily Express*, 13 September 1939, 3; "I always put my best 'fruit' forward", *Mason's O.K. Sauce*, *Picture Post*, 4 November 1939, 7.

<sup>32</sup> 'A PAGE OF HISTORY', Lever Brothers, *Picture Post*, 5 October, 1940, 40.

<sup>33</sup> See Clampin, *Advertising and Propaganda in World War II*, 136.

<sup>34</sup> *Schweppes Table Waters*, all appear in the *Daily Mail* on these respective dates: "Since 1790...", 10 April, 1943, 4; "Since the Battle of Valmy", 5 May, 1943, 2; "Since 1790...", 3 June, 1943, 2.

<sup>35</sup> See McFall, "A Mediating Institution?", 315.

<sup>36</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 157.

<sup>37</sup> Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> "We're all in it together", *Knight's Castile Toilet Soap*, *Picture Post*, 5 October, 1940, 36.

<sup>39</sup> Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*, 3.  
<sup>41</sup> Hurd, "Notes on Hegemony, the War and Cinema", 18.  
<sup>42</sup> H. P. Sauce, "Picnicking in Epping Forest", *Picture Post*, 15 June, 1940, 35; "Food for the fishermen", *Picture Post*, 21 September, 1940, 34.  
<sup>43</sup> "The Folk at HOME", *Murphy Radio, Picture Post*, 11 May, 1940, 36.  
<sup>44</sup> "Overheard in High Street", *Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Daily Mail*, 19 December, 1941, 2.

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**David Clampin**, School of Humanities and Social Science – History, Liverpool John Moores University, John Foster Building, 98 Mount Pleasant Liverpool L3 5UZ, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. E-mail [d.j.clampin@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:d.j.clampin@ljmu.ac.uk)

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## *"All our **PAST** proclaims our **FUTURE**"*

It is in the past that Great Britain's solid foundations were laid, foundations of strength, courage and tolerance. These qualities are Britain's real heritage, her present greatness, her guarantee of the future.

It is in the past, too, that the tradition of **POULTON & NOEL** was laid. A tradition that means high quality foods in glass and tins. For more than seventy years, because of this, people have been buying Poulton & Noel's products. Such a tradition is in the nature of a public trust, that's why to-day Poulton & Noel continue to maintain the same high standard in foods; that's why they will continue to maintain it. And though supplies of some things may be short, there are always others to take their place; other Poulton & Noel products that are delicious to eat and full of nourishment.

For that is, after all, what the Poulton & Noel label stands for; the continuance of a tradition of high quality — past, present and future.

FAMOUS FOR GOOD FOODS SINCE 1869

*This label is  
your guarantee*



Poulton & Noel Ltd., Belgravian Works, Southall, Mddx.

PNO 62A-151

Figure 1: 'All our PAST proclaims our FUTURE', Poulton & Noel Ltd., Picture Post, 2 August, 1941.

160x257mm (300 x 300 DPI)



NEW LIVES-NEW NEEDS



ARTIST— *toiling  
night and day in*  
RESCUE SQUAD



'What did you do before the war?' Ask some of our A.R.P. heroes, and you'll get some interesting answers. We know a rescue worker who was an artist — exchanged leisurely hours at his canvas for desperate toil amid the debris. What a fearsome change — yet thousands like him have also got to stay the course — sometimes night after night.

ON the Home Front, battles are being won every day — big little victories over tiredness, irritability, nervous strain. Nature's own tonic, sound *natural* sleep (whenever you can get it)

is the best thing ever for your new wartime lives. A warming cup of Bourn-vita, *still at the old peace-time price*, will help you to get your essential ration of body- and - mind - restoring SLEEP.

Bourn-vita is a night food-drink with special nerve - soothing properties that bring sleep very quickly.

See panel for analysis of Bourn-vita

**NO SUGAR  
NEEDED**

Get the best out of your sleep with —

CADBURY'S  
**BOURN-VITA**  
*Still at Pre-war Prices* 1/5 PER 1/2 LB.

Figure 2: 'NEW LIVES - NEW NEEDS', Cadbury's Bourn-Vita, Daily Mirror, 21 December, 1940

231x529mm (300 x 300 DPI)

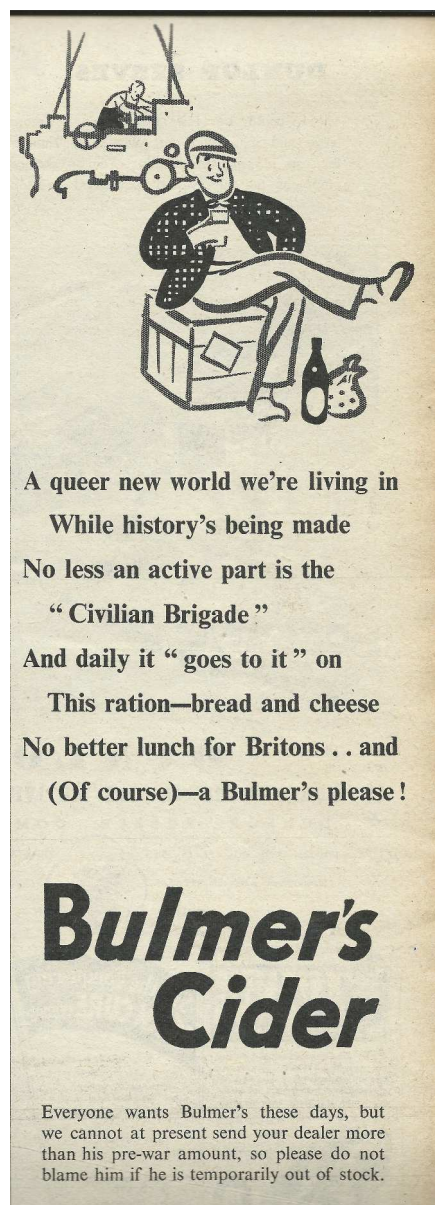


Figure 3: 'A queer new world', Bulmer's Cider, Daily Express, 10 July, 1941.

289x804mm (300 x 300 DPI)

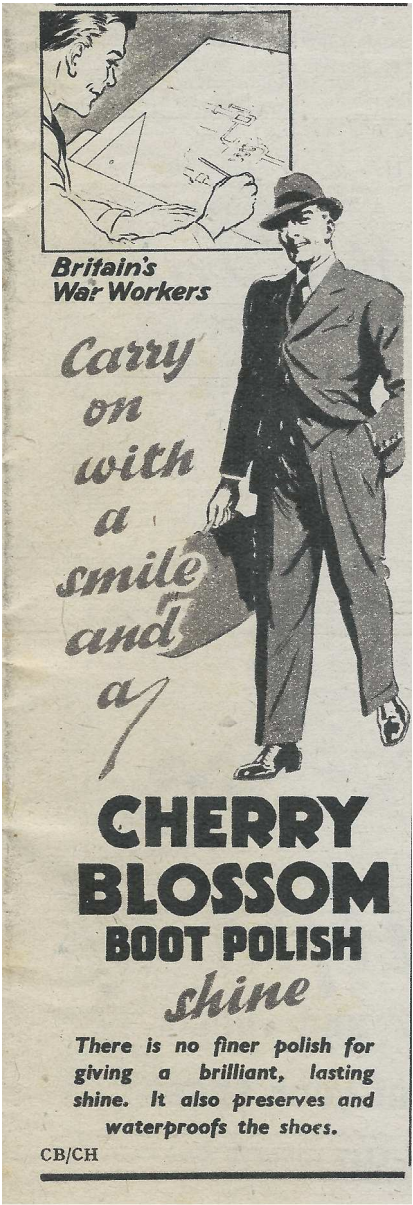


Figure 4: 'Britain's War Workers', Cherry Blossom Boot Polish, Daily Mail, 30 August, 1944.

156x457mm (300 x 300 DPI)





Figure 5: 'Changing Face!', H.P. Sauce, Picture Post, 4 January, 1941.

153x240mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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# A CIVILIAN'S JOB IN WARTIME ...

... is to work hard, avoid grumbling and save all he can. Not very heroic, eh? No, and not always very easy.

In millions of homes the humble wireless set is doing good work today, keeping mothers and fathers, wives and children, cheerful and of good heart. A good wireless set is indeed a "defence weapon" for the Home Front. The sets we make are going to be fit for their job.



## MURPHY

### MUNITIONS

#### FOR THE HOME FRONT

**90 STANDARD TABLE SUPERHET.** This all-wave make superb will get an extensive range of stations as you could possibly want. Reception on short waves is of an unusually high standard. Simple tuning and keen sensitivity make the set easy to operate. The three wavebands are controlled by push buttons, and on short waves a "logging scale" enables a given station to be re-tuned accurately. Recent improvements in loudspeaker design make possible extraordinarily fine reproduction. Other features include: continuously variable tone control and extra loud-speaker works. The cabinet is highly polished with an all-wood front, except for the black bakelite switches carrying the scales and controls.

Cost Price: D.C. & C. WIRELESS £37.50 A.C. WIRELESS £41


THIS PROPAGANDA TRADING WAS AVAILABLE ON ALL MURPHY SETS

Figure 6: 'A CIVILIAN'S JOB IN WARTIME', Murphy Radio Ltd., Picture Post, 20 April, 1940.

296x533mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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**GRAN'PA**  
VERSUS THE  
**SUBMARINES**




... that's another two hours' work done on the old allotment; another two hours' worth of food to beat the Nazi submarine. And now home for the nine o'clock news and let's hope it's a bit better. And whether it is or isn't, we'll smoke another pipe, and listen quietly to a little cheerful music on the old Murphy, and then to bed and sleep, ready for another day. To bed, young man, I said, where you ought to have been an hour ago.

*In days like these a radio set is a comfort and a standby. Use it not only for news, but to refresh your mind and fortify your heart. Every day the Ministry of Information and the B.B.C. are giving us help, encouragement, advice, opinion, music, something to cheer us. Make the most of it.*

E. J. POWER  
Murphy Radio Ltd.

\* The set illustrated is the All-Wave Standard Table Superhet with press button controlled waveband. Special short-wave logging scale enables a given station to be re-tuned accurately. Cash Prices: A.G. MODEL £11. 10s. D.C. & C. MODEL £12. Prices shown do not apply in Eire.



**MURPHY**  
**MUNITIONS**  
FOR THE HOME FRONT

Figure 7: 'GRAN'PA VERSUS THE SUBMARINES', Murphy Radio Ltd., Picture Post, 27 July, 1940.

296x873mm (300 x 300 DPI)