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Advertising in the *Illustrated London News*

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Various source media, *Illustrated London News* Historical Archive 1842-2003



Introduction

This essay does not claim to offer a history of adverts in the *ILN*. It is, rather, a series of suggestions for how they can be studied. Neither the wealth of adverts in the *ILN* nor their importance to it can be overestimated. Their very cultural and economic centrality means that to attempt to do them justice in a brief piece like this would misrepresent them very seriously.

Art and Advertising

It was Ingram, the owner of the *ILN*, who bought Millais's *A Child's View of the World* that would later become the famous advert for Pear's Soap. The *ILN* brought the painting to public attention and, incidentally, shows how the painting was known as "Bubbles" from the first. Other paintings used for adverts include Bacon's *The Wedding Morning* by Sunlight "Soapmakers to Her Majesty the Queen" – coinciding, as is by chance, with the wedding of Marie Princess of Edinburgh to Ferdinand Prince of Romania.

Furthermore, one can follow dominant visual styles through the adverts. While one can see how nineteenth-century realism (e.g. John Brinsmead and Sons' pianos) and the neo-classical give way to aesthetic, the pared-down minimalism of deco (e.g. Bentley, Canadian Pacific or Elizabeth Arden) and thence, in the 1930s, to photography that often imitates stills from movies (Grant's; Player's tobacco) and so on, the aesthetic of adverts was always much more complex than any notion of "progress" might suggest. The 1897 advert for Beecham's Pills, for example, belongs to a hallucinatory allegorical tradition that has little to do with gallery art of the period but

whose proto-surreal style was common in ads (see also e.g. Homocoea; Ogden's). Then again, some adverts that were running as late as the 1950s would not have looked out of place 60 years earlier (see e.g. Sandeman's Whisky). The aesthetic history of adverts has never been linear or always allied to what is happening in contemporary art.

Advertising vs. Copy

Of course, artistic connections are not the only ones to be made. In fact illustrated adverts are rare in the *ILN* until the 1880s – a decade after they had become common in more downmarket publications. This curiously late adoption was perhaps due to a wish to avoid rivalry with the *ILN*'s own exploitation of images to sell itself.

The first four issues of the *ILN* do not contain formal advertising as such. This was probably because Ingram had not approached an advertising agent (perhaps surprisingly, agents had existed since at least the 1790s). But if we think of advertisements less as a form than as a type of communication (which agents were already doing by the 1840s), then many other possibilities open. For example, what are the possibilities of the "The Fashions", a column that begins in the first issue? No firms are named in that first number yet the potential for such a column to advertise, or at least to cross-relate with formal adverts elsewhere in the paper, becomes very apparent later on. In the first issue, too, we find reviews of theatrical performances. If not legally or formally adverts, how far do they *function* as adverts nonetheless? The same goes for book reviews (these

begin in the *ILN*'s fourth issue), art exhibitions (the Royal Academy Exhibition in May was promoted every year from 1842, though extensive coverage only begins the following year) and listings in general. The Greta Garbo vehicle *Anna Christie* has a long and favourable review, complete with stills from the film, as part of the long-running series "World of the Kinema" (afterwards "Cinema"). Later in the same issue, there is a feature contrasting antique and "Modern Timepieces" extolling the virtues of named makers and a page addressing collectors that faces a full-page ad for an art dealer. Feature articles were drawn early into advertising, though the practice was nowhere near as integral to magazines and newspapers as in the late twentieth century when lifestyle articles became a staple: we find it perfectly normal to read a feature on Morocco – with a rider telling us how to book the holiday or on Diana Princess of Wales which refers in 1986 to her fashion designers. If not quite as commonly, the Victorians read features on the delights of the Royal Sea-Bathing Infirmary at Margate and the wedding presents (with prices and whence they were purchased) of Alexandra Princess of Wales in 1863.

Advertising the *ILN* itself

From the start, the *ILN* frequently advertised and commented on itself. The last page of the very first issue has an image of 200 signboard men carrying notices of the *ILN* while marching up and down the streets of London. In a significant position (because of the way it was folded, the bottom back page was as good for display in shop windows or on news-stands as the front), the *ILN* makes a feature of its own advertising. Straight away it renders its own advertising a media event and a vigorous projector of sensational

modernity. This is very clear in an illustration from 1845 accompanied by a humorous poem celebrating the *ILN*'s methods of distribution. But the *ILN*'s most spectacular form of self-promotion lies perhaps in its many supplements celebrating special occasions which, beginning with the opening of Parliament in 1843, also include anniversary issues (the 50th of 14 May 1892, the 150th anniversary of May 1992: the centenary special number in 1942 could not go ahead because of paper rationing). These provided not only opportunities of advertising the *ILN*, but also, of course more space for other advertisers.

Quantitative Analysis

There are various well established research methodologies that can be used to analyse adverts. Quantitative methods – which involve counting – can be used to determine various aspects of the relationship between adverts and the *ILN*. The inclusion of advertisements had been a major revenue stream for newspapers since at least the late eighteenth century. The proportion of income from adverts to income from cover price can roughly – very roughly – be gauged from the proportion of column space devoted to adverts compared to editorial matter. Thus we see that the 12 May 1860 issue comprises roughly 16% advertisements; that for 10 May 1890 c. 25%; for 7 May 1910, c. 32%; for 10 May 1930 38.5%. After a dip to around 20% during WWII because of paper and type-face rationing (in common with all newspapers), the amount of advertising returned to around 40% by 1960 (the Royal Wedding number of 14 May 1960 comprises 39.7% adverts). By 3 September 1990 the percentage of obvious advertising had dropped to 31.66% (excluding listings and features); by the last issue it took up just

16.5%, suggestive of serious loss of revenue (and indeed, readership). Quantitative methods can also be used to determine what and what kind of adverts dominate in a particular time frame. Thus in the 1840s publishing has a significance in the *ILN*'s classified advertising columns that domestic consumables will have in the 1890s and luxury spirits and travel in the 1990s. With the commercialisation of Christmas and later of the opportunities for leisure provided by Bank Holidays, seasonal variation needs to be taken into account in any such research. Historical events in general are also key. During both World Wars, for example, luxury goods, formerly associated with the *ILN*'s upmarket readership, were eschewed in favour of utilitarian (and patriotic) clothing and household items.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative methods often but not only involve the close interpretation of individual or of a small numbers of texts. Thus we might focus on just the one advert for rhetorical analysis, say that for Ford cars from 1930. We will note the heavy use of anaphora (the repetition of a word or words at the beginning of a sentence or line), the streamlined subordination of every word to the prime concepts of "comfort, safety and beauty" (even though "safety" is omitted from the top strapline), while in the illustration the tennis-playing, streamlined woman looks up admiringly at the man who looks at his streamlined cabriolet motor with cool pride. In the background a faceless male tennis player waits while his partner is beguiled by the car: an Oedipal triangle perhaps. If the copy stresses rational reasons to buy, the illustration relies rather on the irrational. Such psychoanalytic interpretations, however crass, are

nonetheless perfectly in accord with an industry that in the 1920s was newly alive to psychology and psychoanalysis.

The Advertising Industry

Whatever methods we use to research adverts in the *ILN*, we must consider the effects of the organisation of the advertising industry and of relevant regulation by the state. The result of the 1892 *Carlill versus The Carbolic Smoke Ball Company* case is still a key piece of legislation. The company, whose adverts not only appear extensively in the *ILN* between 1890 and 1897 but are even promoted in "The Ladies' Column" by Florence Fenwick-Miller in 1891, offered £100 to anyone who, after using their smoke ball, caught influenza. Mrs Carlill claimed the £100, was refused, took the company to court and won with the result that, ever since under UK law, an advert constitutes a legally binding offer capable of acceptance (see the brief account in the *ILN*). Later regulation includes the banning of people smoking in print media cigarette adverts in 1986. This, together with a shift in the habits of the *ILN*'s target readership, seems to have lowered the quantity of cigarette advertising quite considerably (though the famous Silk Cut series continued to enjoy key positions).

Brand Images

The *ILN* offers an enormous number of products whose changing brand image and indeed, whose product design, can be explored. One example where brand image can be tracked with particular ease (partly due to the comparatively low number of adverts) is Viyella, a brand of cloth and clothing that first came on the

market in the 1890s. Its initial promise was that it did not shrink. Later adverts added health and comfort to its core values. During WWII, the adverts show interesting, if typical, variations. One from 1940 for men's shirts explicitly harks back to Viyella advertising from WWI (not, alas, represented in the *ILN*). It thus associates itself with allied victory and patriotism. The following year, Viyella advertises, already marketed as for HM Forces officers (hence for the expected class of *ILN* readers) were making links with the war effort in Africa. The idea that the shirts were suitable for any climate soon solidified into the slogan "cool when it's hot – warm when it's not". An advert from 1945 depicts an officer writing a letter home to (presumably) his wife thanking her for insisting on the purchase of Viyella shirts and "proving" the truth of the slogan. This finally makes clear that the adverts all along had been aimed at women buying for their men. An advert the following year looks forward to a time after rationing – when Viyella pyjamas will be available again. This continues for several years. But it takes Viyella almost twenty years to reappear in the *ILN*, now, in 1966, as an up-market, quintessentially British men's shirt made from "the most natural fabric in the world".

Product Design

A good deal of product design history can be researched through *ILN* adverts. The typewriter promoted by Perry in 1885 would be unrecognizable as a predecessor of Remington's Portable in 1923, for example. Only products at the luxury end of the market tend to be represented: thus vacuum cleaners are only advertised between 1909 and 1912, after which they become too common for the *ILN*'s readership. Similarly, it is possible to research the advertising

history of individual firms such as Mappin & Webb, Liberty's, or Selfridge's. However, there are also other possibilities for research, looking not for individual products but for spaces for their use or consumption. Tracing the term "kitchen" through adverts in the "Advanced Search" option, for example, reveals how the *ILN*'s readership begins with a concern for pots and pans to climax in the 1980s with lifestyle experience and serviced apartments whose kitchens, hardly used, have metamorphosed from places to prepare food to branded symbols of status. This is consonant with the changing nature of advertised services. Travel, which starts with uncomfortable rail journeys, ends with the pampering of P&O cruises and the Orient Express.

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