‘With her apron tied around his waist’. Being a man in wartime Britain, 1939 – 1945

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose is this paper is to examine the nature of masculine identity on the British home front during the Second World War.
Methodology/approach – At the heart of this research is a comprehensive analysis of every commercial advertisement that appeared in the weekly magazine *Picture Post* between 9 September 1939 and 29 September 1945 which featured men. Data was collected that accounted for the situation of those men illustrated and their environment. From here basic trends and commonalities could be identified with respect to recurring images and normative representations.
Findings – This research challenges popular representations of men at the time which suggested the widely pervasive idea of the ‘man at war’ had him in a military uniform and engaged in battle, as well as questioning the validity of Dawson’s (1994) work on the ‘soldier hero’. What is revealed is a much more varied representation and one which, generally, has the British man at war as a more tempered individual, frequently most at ease within a domestic setting. Thus, an overarching hegemony is denied in the face of a variety of different roles ascribed to men and which were deemed to be widely appropriate within that society
Research limitations – For the purposes of this paper, research was generally confined to the analysis of just the advertisements appearing in *Picture Post*. Further, the opportunities to make meaningful comparisons with representations of men in other nations at war were very limited.
Keywords – Masculinity; gender identity; Second World War; soldier hero; uniform; hegemony.

The place of men in wartime Britain is seldom considered, or a basic assumption is made which confers the ‘traditional’ characteristics of the man at war with the simple expedient of donning a uniform. This is clearly replicated in the extant body of literature around gender in wartime: there are dedicated volumes on the role of women in Sheridan (1990) and Summerfield (1984, 1998) yet no comparative volumes on men, whilst Minns (1980) implies that the ‘domestic front’ was a wholly feminine space. From the perspective of commercial advertising and consumption practices, this is clearly a short-coming given that the male played a significant role in the disposal of the household income and, indeed, was a direct target for advertisers as men were encouraged to consume their products, often with a view to enhancing their gender identity. Further, the underlying implication that the British home front was a wholly feminine space is challenged when the actual gender breakdown of that society is considered. Whilst there was clearly a shift in the ratio of men to women in Britain through the war, the *Statistical Digest of the War* records that for the full years of war, 1940 to 1944, 44 per cent of the civilian population was male, some 19.7 million individuals (1951, p. 1) [1]. This represents a significant audience to be reached and a market to be served. What is more, these men carried out a variety of tasks above and beyond serving in the armed forces with the majority of the male working population (on average, 52% for the full years of war, 1940 to 1944) being engaged in civil employment (*Statistical Digest* 1951, pp. 8-9). By virtue of this these men were active and engaged on the home front. They were likely to consume a variety of advertising messages which called to them, aimed to speak in their language, whilst identifying with and reflecting their circumstances. This paper aims to challenge this widely pervasive vision of the man engaged in war through an analysis of commercial press advertisements to establish how all-encompassing the monolithic representation of the ‘ideal’ warrior male really was on the British home front between 1939 and 1945.

The first problem encountered is that men are seldom explicitly 'present' in society, and especially from a historical perspective. As Roper and Tosh explain, whilst the 'public' man is recognised and lauded in history, his gender identity is seldom explored or explained. This becomes even more pronounced in wartime where men are ascribed a very definite and clear role, a distinction set out by wearing a uniform. Masculinity is presented as 'natural and monolithic' maybe even 'hegemonic' in the sense of a 'culturally idealised form of masculine character' (Donaldson, 1993, p. 646). Yet this denies the actual divergence, competing and '*changing* forms' (Roper and Tosh, 1991, p. 1). As Francis has suggested in his recent survey of research on nineteenth- and twentieth-century British masculinity, men seldom equate to such fixed, monolithic representations and, instead, for example, travel 'back and forth across the frontier of domesticity' (Francis, 2002, p. 637). This was most pronounced in wartime Britain where addresses to men varied according to the situation and the role they were expected to fill.

Within a highly circumscribed environment such as this, it might be imagined that hegemonies would become all the more pervasive as 'the greater part of the population' become persuaded that such constructs are 'natural, ordinary, normal': gender roles are clearly demarcated with an overarching narrative setting out how each specific gender is expected to perform (the male as life-taker, the female as life-giver) (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645). From this perspective, gender is less to do with individual circumstances and daily life, and more to do with an overwhelming, outwardly projected, social (hegemonic) structure. Via such means a clear outline is portrayed of what it means to be a man within that society. In essence, there is a perpetual, outward expression of normative masculinity which plays an important role in assimilating men into that society and thereby further perpetuating those norms. In this way, in Britain during the Second World War, according to Noakes,

> Masculinity became bound up with notions of honour and valour, as men went to war to defend the nation and the principles for which it stood. National identity, the ways in which women and men identified themselves as members of the nation in wartime, was shaped by gender (1998, p. 14).

However, by turning to the images presented in commercial advertising a more complex and diverse portrayal is presented.

This research, most notably alongside that of Rose (2003), seeks to challenge the extent and immutability of that impression of masculinity, questioning just how far references to 'hegemonic masculinity' are valid and useful. Indeed, Spicer, in examining the representation of masculinity in British cinema, extends this argument to encompass a Foucauldian perspective which sees gender roles as cultural performance, drawing on prevailing idioms to shape and influence that identity (Spicer 2001, 2). Clearly, as these influences shift and make new 'demands' in respect of what it means to be male within that society, then so too do the roles played by men. For example, a man is seldom simply a soldier or an RAF 'Flyer' but fills a variety of other roles alongside that which add huge variety to that masculine identity. For Nixon,

> In Foucault's terms, not only is there not one singular, totalizing version of masculinity, but the masculinity of individual men might be addressed by a range of discursive masculine identifications…Lived masculinities, then, are crucially determined by both the co-articulation of these discursive positions and the tensions and fractures between them (1996, 13-14).

It is ironic that, given that advertising is held up as being one of the vehicles by which hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated, that this analysis identifies a much more fragmented (and at times contradictory) portrayal that serves to undermine that alleged hegemony. Based on the survey presented here, masculinity on the British home front was never so simple as being what the outward appearance of a uniform might suggest but was, instead, characterised by a variety of roles, not least as advertisers called on men alongside their archetypal wartime roles, to maintain an attractive appearance, ensure that the household laundry is carried out to the highest standard, and be a gentle, caring father. Clearly, in defining masculinity, there is never one simple, all encompassing definition which sets out that role in terms of its nature and expectations but rather a spectrum of roles with society pulling and pushing men into certain positions according to 'need', whether that be in terms of imbuing in men the qualities it is thought are required to defeat an enemy in armed combat, or to achieve high volume sales of a specific hair care product. This was definitely the case in Britain during

the Second World War as witnessed by the huge variety of advertisements appealing to men and placing them in a wide variety of situations and scenarios.

In defining masculinity, commercial advertising takes on an enhanced importance given that the very practice that it seeks to promote, consumption, has historically been considered a gendered activity. As Roper argues, there is an established (traditional) appraisal which places production and consumption within a gendered setting: production is a male domain, consumption female. The process of consuming is taken to signify a degree of femininity (Roper, 1991, pp. 190-5). This stands in stark contrast to the archetypal Briton at war which ought to be the very essence of aggressive masculinity. However, commercial advertisers throughout the war represented men in a variety of guises and scenarios which were often far removed from that basic scenario and projected onto men a variety of different roles which challenge monolithic representations.

Methodology

The stimulus for undertaking this research was driven by that simple fact that histories of the British home front during the Second World War frequently disregard men, especially in domestic settings. From this perspective the author adopted an *a priori* position, seeking out the details of men's wartime role. The choice of commercial press advertisements was deliberate, based on the notion that consumption is generally considered to be a gendered activity (as per Roper above), thereby suggesting that men might either be excluded altogether from this domain, or set-up as hyper-masculine in direct opposition to practices that might be seen to undermine their merit as 'fighters'. Secondly, by using a popular, weekly publication, which spanned class and gender lines, and achieved good national coverage, shifts in representations over time could be accurately plotted.

The foundation of this research is a survey of every advertisement which appeared in *Picture Post* between 9 September 1939 and 29 September 1945 in which a man or men were portrayed. A database was constructed to record alongside essential information relating to product, size, etc., details relating to the scenario portrayed in each case. Thus, the approximate age and class of each main character was captured, along with their setting, any impression relating to vocation, their dress (especially where they appeared in uniform), whether they were in the company of others, and the gender of those others, and an impression of their general attitude. The result is a detailed database of 1,268 advertisements.

From this basis it was simple to report how frequently men appeared in uniform, and when versus time, which of the services that uniform represented; whether they were seen at work, for example in industry on the home front, whether they were shown in the field, or whether they predominated in domestic settings; and so on. By a simple appraisal of which categories appeared most significant, representations of men at war, the juxtaposition between men in the armed services and those engaged in the war effort out of uniform, and men in domestic settings, it was then possible to read those advertisements in depth to understand the nuances and particular nature of being a man in wartime Britain.

Men at War: 'Here's our Jack, breezy and bright'

The most obvious representation of the British man during the Second World War was the man in military uniform. The wearing of this could be taken as the ultimate manifestation of masculinity: the defender and protector, the life taker. This fulfils a long and well entrenched tradition in Western society that places the soldier as the ultimate expression of masculinity, as exemplified in Dawson's study of the 'soldier hero' where,

> Military virtues such as aggression, strength, courage and endurance have repeatedly been defined as natural and inherent qualities of manhood, whose apogee is attainable only in battle (Dawson, 1994, p. 1).

Thus, military service was broadly projected as a crucial manifestation of masculinity. Rose observes, 'Being visibly a member of the fighting services was necessary to the performance of wartime masculinity' (Rose, 2003, p. 178). Yet, in terms of the advertisements featuring men that appeared in *Picture Post*, there was but a slim majority (51%) which depicted men in uniform suggesting that this was not the exclusively 'appropriate' role for men in wartime Britain. Nevertheless, where men were depicted in uniform, which, of course, encompassed a range of roles such as Civil Defence, fire service and police, the most pervasive uniforms depicted were those associated with the three main armed services: the army, navy and air force. However, those depictions rarely subscribed to those 'natural

and inherent qualities of manhood’, even when men were shown explicitly as members of the army, navy or air force, most of the time (69%) they were shown in more domestic settings rather than being engaged with the war in an overtly aggressive or macho fashion. Where men are depicted in a combat situation, their machismo is tempered by a cool and rational approach. Thus, whilst Wills’s Gold Flake cigarettes use the setting of an aircraft carrier at sea, the ‘action’ is actually centred on finding the ‘force and direction of the wind in the upper air by means of a sextant compass and a balloon’ (*Picture Post*, 2 March 1940, p. 6). In this respect, those natural inclinations towards the destruction of the enemy, and even overt signs of aggression and courage, are displaced by a more nuanced and measured response. Irrespective of the idea of the ‘soldier hero’ as being quintessentially aggressive as the ultimate, and necessary, expression of manhood, what is presented in these advertisements suggests that the British ‘soldier hero’ of the Second World War was a more complex and multifaceted being. After all, seldom, if ever, do advertisements present men in the war zone clearly expressing their macho instincts; the British character is much more refined. Where advertisements do show men directly in the war zone, they are clearly separated from death and destruction: the focus instead is on a ‘surgical’, dispassionate execution of duty. In a rare example depicting soldiers in the field on behalf of Ever-Ready Razor Products, the focus is not on the target but on the British infantry man operating ‘equipment’. In ‘WE’RE NOT SHOOTING A LINE…’ two infantrymen are firing a P.I.A.T. anti-tank projector, preoccupied in the task of ensuring a ‘direct hit’ (*Picture Post*, 21 April 1945, p. 2). There are a number of significant features regarding this exceptional advertisement: the men are shown in the field and clearly might be said to be in a dangerous situation which denies the chirpy, cheerful execution that is so prevalent elsewhere; they are depicted carrying out their task with precision, implying that collateral damage will be minimal, and pointing to the very measured terms via which British servicemen carry out their duties. Finally, this advertisement appears very late in the war when, it might be suggested, the outcome of the war is known and a more measured appraisal is more feasible. Such representations are thrown into even sharper contrast when compared to the manner in which American servicemen were represented in commercial press advertisements; these were frequently more akin to the ‘ideal’ soldier hero. For example, in 1943, Canned Florida Grapefruit Juice depicted three Marines, two stripped to the waist, muscle-bound and with teeth gritted as they relished firing a ship-borne machine gun with apparent abandon into the air. The copy reads,

> Just ask a Jap what it feels like to be up against men who are fortified with “Victory Vitamin C”
> You bellowed it forth to the world, Mr. Tojo – a year or so ago. “*Americans have grown soft.*” Tell that to your Zero pilots today. Tell ‘em if you dare! Or find a survivor from Guadalcanal – and ask him what it feels like to meet a U.S. Marine! How well every Jap knows the truth today…for he’s up against men with iron wills and nerves of steel – and bodies hard as nails (see Heimann, 2001, p. 441).

The contrast is stark, not least in the vitriolic references to the enemy which were almost entirely absent throughout all British commercial advertising, but also in casting men in such unequivocal terms, virtually relishing the death and destruction: such ‘blood lust’ was never a part of the make up of the British male during the Second World War.

The British man at war was defined via these advertisements, as elsewhere, with reference to a number of key features relative to the immediate past and also relative to representations of the enemy widely abroad. The key distinction was that the British male was not an automaton or a faceless component within the war machine. In relation to the enemy male, the Nazi or Japanese ‘robot’, the British man pressed into the armed services was crucially a more sensitive and sensible individual capable of possessing a range of emotions. There appears to be a deliberate effort throughout the range of British propaganda to represent men as softer than elsewhere, or if not softer, those natural masculine inclinations were shown to be tempered and conditional. This is a crucial distinction in respect of the British male during the Second World War: the majority of those who found themselves in the armed service were not career military men but merely there for the duration. Ultimately their values were those of the civilian society to which they would one day return. This is clearly demonstrated in the example cited above for Ever-Ready Razors: these men are calmly and rationally going about a job of work. For Noakes,

During the war, men in the armed service were encouraged to view themselves as fighting men, yet men who were doing their duty rather than simply giving free rein to supposedly masculine impulses (1998, p. 50).

Source: *Picture Post*, 23 December 1939, p. 8.

Plate 1. Cavanders Limited Ad

Rose (2003) has extended this perspective to characterise British men as 'temperate heroes' whereby, whilst not denying that they were in possession of all the manly qualities required to take on the enemy in combat, these were not always allowed to predominate and, instead, the inclinations of the solider hero were tempered. This was, in part, a propaganda construct which clearly sought to position the British male/soldier in contradistinction to the enemy where the enemy was portrayed as the unbridled hyper-masculine. Indeed, government posters rarely offered direct representations of fighting men or even men in uniform. When men did appear in government posters in uniform they were usually placed in domestic settings which once again reflected their more sensitive and caring side [2]. The contrast of the British man-at-war in relation to the German 'other' was blatantly set out in Korda's 1939 film, *The Lion Has Wings*, most notably when the respective aircrews are being briefed for their mission: the British airmen lounge around in the briefing room, making quips and jokes as they depart whereas their German counterparts stand to attention in serried ranks, receiving their orders without emotion, 'a striking contrast to the friendly atmosphere that is Britain's way', we are told.

When it came to commercial advertisers representing the men of the armed forces, the vast majority adhered to this picture of the 'British Tommy' as the happy-go-lucky type with a cheerful demeanour and a rather cavalier approach to those in positions of authority. Clearly, the British man at arms was not considered to be so highly disciplined and dispassionate in the style of his German opposite. On the contrary, the whole process of being at war was portrayed as being 'a bit of a lark', with Cavanders Limited branding their lively characters the 'Army Clublets', seen here at play in the 'tub'. Elsewhere, the British man in uniform was seen 'Taking it easy' with Cherry Blossom Boot Polish or, on behalf of Eucryl Tooth Powder, as 'our Jack, breezy and bright' (both *Picture Post*, 18 November 1939, p. 62, and 13 April 1940, p. 53, respectively). Such an impression fits into a wider narrative that conjures up the British people in wartime as a jocular bunch, laughing in the face of adversity, not taking life too seriously and generally muddling through, a view given currency during the war, reinforced subsequently in the official history of Titmuss (1950), then recycled and reworked most notably by Taylor (1965), Marwick (1976) and Pelling (1970).

Whilst it might be argued that the adoption of such portrayals by commercial advertisers was, in part, a result of necessity and a means by which Britain's parlous state of preparation and the, at best, lacklustre performance of her armed forces in the first years of the war could be justified and refocused into something of a positive, in much the same way as the Dunkirk evacuations were characterized, they also set out something of the actual male spirit and attitude when faced with war in 1939. Summerfield makes reference to the experience of the First World War, and the period of reflection on this in the inter-war period, to explain this tempered sense of masculinity that typified the male attitude in the Second (1998, pp. 116-7). She maintains that the 'classic' masculine role as soldier hero, aggressive, strong, courageous, persistent, was reconsidered in the light of the experience of the First World War. The idea of the man as the focussed, determined and emotionally reserved soldier had been seen to fail in trench warfare: by the time the Second World War came around the stiff upper lip was beginning to wane as British men were encouraged to show a greater range of emotions. Further, the appetite for adventure and challenge that might be embodied in the British adventurer who built the Empire, and which proved a strong rallying cry for recruitment in the first years of the First World

War, was less in evidence by 1939. This is clearly reflected in the lack of volunteers into the armed services as war approached which forced the Chamberlain government to introduce conscription in April 1939. As Gardiner observes,

> The majority of those drafted into the Army regarded the war as an unpleasant but necessary job that they had to despatch before they could get on with their lives. Few had any ideological commitment to an anti-Nazi crusade, any particular hunger to 'kill the Hun', or even any very clear idea precisely why Britain was at war and who were her Allies (Gardiner, 2004, p. 68).

Thus, commercial advertisers depicted the British man at arms not as a coldly efficient killing machine, and not even as the disciplined and focussed military man, but rather as a more detached and temperate individual going about a job of work whilst retaining much of his fun-loving spirit. That is not to suggest that they were not up to the job at hand, or that they were not capable of executing their duties in combat but rather that they were calm and rational, refined and tempered. As seen in the examples for Wills's Gold Flake and Ever-Ready Razors, they were often portrayed as executing their duties with precision and efficiency, as Summerfield highlights, military masculinity was frequently 'linked with technology' (1998, pp. 116-7). Most importantly the British male stood in contradistinction to the enemy. The British male possessed not just physical might, which of course it was suggested that there was a natural reservoir of, but a sense of 'decency' and 'fair play' alongside that, what Rose refers to as 'moral toughness' (2004, p. 183). The British man at arms was represented in a more nuanced fashion compared to the monolithic representation of the aggressive, military male, and this extended into commercial advertising. There was more to the British male in wartime than an exclusive focus on destruction, indeed most of the time that men were represented in advertisements they were not 'at war' but in entirely different settings and displaying a range of different interests and occupations.

Only the brave deserve the fair

If the men of the armed forces were portrayed as more sensitive and considered than their German counterparts, then the majority of advertisements which featured men not in the fighting forces certainly subscribed to this impression, frequently placing them in a domestic setting and attributing to them concerns and interests apparently far removed from the exigencies of warfare. Of all the wartime advertisements in *Picture Post* featuring men, 20 per cent advertised products from the toiletries and cosmetics sector. This stands out as exceptional given that of all advertising expenditure recorded in the contemporary *Statistical Review of Press Advertising* for the full years of the war (1940 – 1944) just eight per cent was for toiletries and cosmetics. Clearly, personal appearance was considered to be a major concern for men in wartime. In terms of advertising activity, the greatest concern for men during the war was dental hygiene, with one third of advertisements being for these products. The rationale behind such promotion linked in directly to the basic masculine instinct of attracting a mate and such commercial advertisements played on the anxieties that might be associated with men being away from home, for whatever reason, illustrated below. Within this scenario Jill suggests breaking off her engagement to Ken on account of his halitosis. Irrespective of those advertisements appealing to women and the underlying narrative that appealed to women to do all they could to attract and hold onto a man, Jill is shown to have a more cavalier attitude. Further, the war is placed firmly in the background: despite the fact that Ken is merely home on leave and due to depart imminently, Jill is not prepared to take this into account in dropping her bombshell. This advertisement highlights a number of interesting features around appeals to male identity and masculinity during the war. Not least that, irrespective of the overt masculinity inherent in being a part of the war effort, a defender and protector of the nation, the need to take care of one's appearance and actively court women remains a constant. Thus, male identity was not as simple as to be, for example, a soldier and then let all associations flow from that, the British male had also to be attentive, kind and caring. In a similar manner, there was a profusion of advertisements for hair dressings.

Along the lines adopted by the makers of dental care products, those manufacturers of hair dressings also stressed the need for men to maintain their appearance, in part to ensure they remained attractive to the opposite sex but also because they equated care for personal appearance with being able to carry out one's duties effectively and efficiently and as an important contributor to good morale. By far the largest advertiser in this sector was Brylcreem, who advertised throughout the war. Their underlying message was that, 'Men of Action need BRYLCREEM'; in the same way that

women were urged to care for their appearance as a direct contributor to the war effort, so men, in this

Plate 2. Colgate Dental Cream Ad

Source: *Picture Post*, 17 February 1940, p. 4.

case in the armed forces, were advised that personal grooming was an important facet of their carrying out their task (*Picture Post*, 16 March 1940, p. 52). In this respect, the exigencies of the war effort which demanded self-sacrifice and a selfless approach, appear to give way to a more individual and self-centred attitude. In keeping with the broader evidence, it frequently appears to be the case that the unity of spirit and need for personal sacrifice seemed to be undermined by these advertisers and, arguably, is more broadly reflective of prevailing attitudes. The meaning of the uniform was also challenged and reinterpreted in these advertisements. The express purpose of uniform is to eliminate the exercise of individual choice and distinction: the right to determine appearance in the armed forces was a right reserved for those in command. Variance and variation in uniform was not to be tolerated given that it suggested deviance from 'conformity to both the institution as a whole, and to its image of the masculine ideal' (Colville, 2003, p. 115). The formality and strict regulation of appearance via

uniformity of dress was taken as an expression that 'the wearer exercised special powers of self-control, that his emotional and intellectual life had special qualities of rigour and discipline' (McCracken, 1997, p. 452). Yet here, it was less a leveller designed to bring a corps of men together as much as a fashion statement to be used as a mark of distinction. Advertisers aimed to generate a range of anxieties in men during the war that suggested if they wanted to attract a partner then care for individual appearance above and beyond the smartness of a uniform was required. This is in much the same way that women were cautioned not to 'let themselves go' and use the demands of war as an excuse for a slovenly appearance, or even a more masculine mode and form of dress. This might key into the idea that uniforms serve as a great leveller, in this case making all members of the armed forces look essentially the same whereas to be attractive required an individual and distinctive trait. This point was reiterated by Brylcreem throughout the war and is graphically illustrated in this example from January 1940 (below). Alongside the prevailing narrative that called on every man to 'do his duty', another scenario called on men to maintain their appearance, not merely in keeping with military regulations but in pursuit of more personal objectives and a pervasive demand that they ought to look attractive and thereby attract and retain a partner. Thus, there was 'no denying the smartness of your service uniform – but you want to have your hair smart to match'.

Plate 3. Brylcreem Ad

Source: *Picture Post*, 20 January 1940, p. 48.

This focus on norms within society remained a durable feature of the British home front: irrespective of the magnitude of the task at hand, and the ideological nature of the battle, for many, motivations for engaging in the war remained private, idiosyncratic and grounded in the ordinary. If the maintenance of gender stability was an important pre-occupation for women, this was no less the case for men. Indeed, the traditional bonds, pursuits and patterns of life alluded to in these advertisements were central to the morale of the British people throughout the war. Whilst the men in the armed forces might have been fighting to defeat an evil enemy, they were equally fighting to return to a normal life as soon as that was possible.

However, these distractions pertaining to personal appearance and attractiveness were the preserve of those in the armed forces, when it came to men who were not in uniform they were not portrayed in the company of women or courting their attention. Of all advertisements featuring men that appeared in *Picture Post* in the period under consideration, there were only two occasions where non-uniformed men were seen in the presence of a single female who appeared to be their wife or partner. Turning the maxim of P & B Knitting Wools on its head, it would appear that it was only the brave that deserved the fair (*Picture Post*, 13 April 1940, p. 56). Overall, when it came to representing men who were not in uniform, the portrayal tended to be much more serious and in greater earnest. Summerfield observes how soldiers were 'depicted as fit young men who assumed the identity of the soldier wholeheartedly…wartime heroism and masculinity were embodied in the military man', leaving her to

wonder where that left the civilian male worker (1998, p. 119). Indeed, she notes, there was little done to counter the impression that the civilian worker was less in earnest than his military counterpart, industrial workers were seldom explicit in propaganda posters. Drawing on the contemporary appraisal of J. B. Priestley, it is suggested that the 'soldier was serious, a hero, the civilian man was comical' (Summerfield 1998, p. 119). However, representations in commercial advertising seem to contradict that picture: as illustrated above, it was the men of the armed forces who were depicted as laid-back and flippant with their civilian counterparts tending to be more serious and earnest.

Perhaps in an effort to counteract the impression that those not in the armed services were not effectively serving the nation, commercial advertisers went to great lengths to depict civilian men in general as wholly committed to the war effort, prepared to make great sacrifices and strenuous in their efforts. The virtues of serving the war at home were extolled at length, and in detail. A welder, speaking for Kruschen salts declared,

> It's a fine thing to be a skilled man these days – though this job's as tough as they make 'em. I wouldn't work these hours in peace time for a large gold clock (*Picture Post*, 11 May 1940, p. 4).

Attempts to make the contribution of such workers important and valued were explicit, in such representations there was no time for jollity or tomfoolery in the style of the 'Army Clublets', the men shown in these advertisements were wholly focussed on productive output. This might be taken as a clear and deliberate manifestation of masculinity. Albeit based on a later period, Roper's study of managers who entered British industry during the 1940s and 1950s found that physical involvement in the production process was a key distinction in setting out their masculinity (Roper, 1991, p. 195). A point reiterated by Mosse who observes that a key feature of the ideal male is his capacity to engage in productive work (Mosse, 1996, p. 152). As if to stress this point, and ensure that those working on the home front felt valued, commercial advertisers were persistent in making such points explicit, perhaps in a hope to assimilate themselves with an important group of potential consumers. Advertisers were unequivocal in placing men working on the home front at the centre of the war effort, and in a much more explicit and concerted manner than they ever did for those in the armed services. They were styled 'conscientious workers' by T.C.P., 'apt to disregard a slight cut or graze, in order to 'get on with the job'', while Bulmer's Cider were keen to point out how, 'No less an active part is the "Civilian Brigade"' (both *Picture Post*, 23 October 1943, p. 6, and 28 June 1941, p. 7 respectively). Such esteem and praise was not reserved for those most directly involved in industrial production of munitions, the dedication of those men whose connection to the war was more tenuous were also held up as an example. Horlicks, in their advertisement 'Grass Widower' of December 1941, take the example of the 'chief working partner' of a firm of builders and house decorators who initially saw his business dwindle with the onset of war, only to have it revived with work from the 'Town Hall' for factory extensions and concrete shelters. Being 'knee-deep in work again', this individual works tirelessly around the clock observing, 'I revelled in it, and found time to do Home Guard duty once a week too' (*Picture Post*, 13 December 1941, p. 26). Contrary to the idea that 'the only 'real' men were servicemen', an impression that might have been conveyed via official propaganda, commercial advertisers triumphed the lot of the civilian worker and placed them at the heart of the war effort (Summerfield, 1998, p. 121). Any impression that those men not in the military had fallen short or had failed in some way was effectively countered by advertisers. There was none of the frivolity and amorous pursuits that characterised representations of those in uniform, as 'Andy the riveter' declares, 'We've no time to waste these days! If the old country wants more ships then we'll see she gets 'em' (Lifebuoy Toilet Soap, *Picture Post*, 6 June 1942, p. 27).

'There's no place like home…'

Irrespective of the herculean efforts of these men left on the home front, there is one characteristic that was most pronounced across all representations of men in wartime advertisements, that relating to their core values and essential characteristics. As suggested above, much of British male identity was set in opposition to the hyper-masculine nature of the German male with British masculinity being tempered and subdued. As if to reiterate the innate British qualities, commercial advertisers frequently represented men as being domesticated in the sense that they were devoted to the home, home life and family. For Rose, the British soldier is contrasted to 'Jerry' who, 'shoots and smashes everything with 'men' who would rather 'try to talk to Ma – or mend things for the kid'' (Rose, 2003, p. 154). Where the British servicemen was rarely seen in action on the battlefield, there were many occasions where he

was seen in a domestic setting and engaging himself with matters far removed from the death and destruction of war. This is well illustrated in the Rinso advertisement, 'Her sailor son insisted'. In this case the 'sailor son', home on leave, is insistent that his mother joins him for a day out only to be told, 'I can't dear! I've a huge wash to boil'. However, the son is sufficiently familiar with the nature of laundry, that he is able first to recommend that she use the Rinso 'no boil method' and then manages to acquire some for her. The end result is that the sailor is able to take his mother out to tea (*Picture Post*, 27 January 1945, p. 5). Throughout this vignette, the sailor is not only shown to be loyal and dedicated to his mother but also prepared to engage in domestic arrangements. Ultimately, he seeks pleasure in the company of his mother rather than in the presence of his friends and peers. This gentleness of character is a recurring motif in advertisements that clearly show that the British male is a kind and gentle spirit. That homeliness and domestic outlook was held up to embody what it means to be 'a Good Man':

> quiet, stay-at-home, good, ideal husbands, good neighbours, but not forceful and not leaders ('What is a Good Man', 'Living Opinion', 24 April 1941, BBC Home Service quoted in Rose, 2003, p. 158).

Irrespective of the propagandistic nature of such portrayals, they clearly were designed to appeal to an extant set of beliefs and understandings about what it meant to be a British man during the war.

This less adventurous, more cautious attitude might be attributed to the reaction in the inter-war period to the experience of the First World War. During that conflict, the idea of emotional repression and a sense of manly stoicism had been shown to fail leading to a more open display of a range of emotions. Further, men became more inward looking, taking up interests around the home and becoming more connected to their family, a 'suburban paterfamilias', frequently the subject of comic interpretations between the wars: 'dull and predictable, obsessed with order and routine, and caricatured as 'the pipe-smoking, slipper-loving archetype'' (Samuel, 1983, p. 29). Rose describes this as the 'anti-heroic' mood of the inter-war years: 'Men became more 'homely', and the private, domestic sphere became the heart of the nation' (2004, pp. 179-80). The First World War largely dispelled the Victorian characteristic of emotional repression, the stereotypical 'hard' male in preference for a softer and more domesticated persona. Francis notes,

> The possession, as opposed to the denial, of heightened sensibility was celebrated as an essential quality of the national character at war (2008, p. 127).

Such characteristics were celebrated in commercial advertising throughout the war which displayed men as softer and more caring members of society. This is made explicit in a 1943 advertisement for Sunlight Soap entitled 'Home'. Within that scenario, the wife greeting the sailor home on leave has her plans for a 'gay time' thwarted by a bout of 'flu, curtailing their trip to the cinema. However, he immediately adopts the role of carer as 'Carefully and tenderly he took her home':

> Next day he insisted on her staying in bed. With her apron tied around his waist he worked away in the kitchen, cooking and getting meals ready, whistling happily all the time.

Not only is this sailor (although still depicted in uniform) placed within a more feminine zone, he even has his uniform desensitised by donning the apron. What is most important for this British man is not the all out destruction of the enemy but, in this instance, keeping home. Clearly no impression is given that this does anything to undermine his authority or his place in the hierarchy within that domestic setting but it displays a character of greater depth who is happy to adopt what might be considered to be a feminine role. This also feeds into a broader narrative around what it was that these men were fighting for, the extent to which this was an ideological war to defeat an evil enemy and restore liberty, or whether motivations were more personal, private and idiosyncratic: what proved most important was protecting one's own home and family. The sailor in this execution has no taste for adventure, 'I've done all the sightseeing *I* want on convoys. There's no place like home, you know'. In the final paragraph the case is set out unequivocally:

> When a wanderer returns, when a woman has been waiting, it is home that holds them, that binds them closer together. There is comfort and companionship in the old familiar surroundings. Yes,

> the old sayings are still the truest. There *is* no place like home! (*Picture Post*, 23 January 1943, p. 2).

Whilst there may have been need to have a more assertive sense of masculinity as war was declared, this was always portrayed as playing second-fiddle to a more refined and tempered sense of manhood. The 'People's War' was being fought to return, as soon as possible, to a normal, ordinary and mundane life. Frequently, the war effort was spurred on by reference to traditional, peacetime gender roles with a clear focus on the importance of family life. In a letter left for his parents by air-gunner Eric Rawlings, killed over Germany in 1942, there is no doubt regarding what it was that he was fighting for: private obligations to 'the things which I revere and esteem most in the world – my family and my home' (quoted in Francis, 2008, p. 123).

The man's role within the family was also celebrated in numerous advertisements that placed the father figure not as some distant patriarch but as an active and involved constituent, once more promoting the softer side of the British man at war. The father is displayed as an approachable, amiable character, happy and prepared to engage with his children, as seen in this example for H.P. Sauce:

Plate 4.
H.P. Sauce Ad

Source: *Picture Post*, 6 April 1940, p. 57.

Meanwhile, Fry's has the father within their 'happy family' taking a personal interest in household provisions, endorsing his wife's decision to make up for the deficit in diet created by the absence of bacon with cocoa (*Picture Post*, 9 March 1940, p. 60). Fry's were persistent in placing men at the heart of the family and directly engaged with the bringing up of children, their version of masculinity painted a soft and caring image of the man, even in uniform. Through a series of advertisements which appeared between October 1943 and July 1945, British men were shown to be gentle and caring, with limited ambitions focussed on home and family life and spending time at one with their children, as seen in the examples below. There is a very clear message specifically in these advertisements but also common to a range of advertisements featuring men, that is that it is the male role in Britain not as an aggressive warrior but as a protector of home, of women and children. Whilst this might be a very definite construct in relation to the hyper-masculine German other, it also speaks of the sensibilities and motivations of men in Britain during the Second World War. There was little or no ambition

amongst men to prove themselves as might have been the case in the first years of the First World War. The approach of war and its actual declaration was not embraced with any enthusiasm but with a weary sense of inevitability. The rush to the colours that had characterised Britain in 1914 was altogether absent in 1939: as war approached the government struggled to recruit volunteers into the

Source: *Picture Post*, 9 October 1943, p. 4.

Source: *Picture Post*, 6 November 1943, p. 28.

Source: *Picture Post*, 19 February 1944, p. 28.

Plates 5, 6, 7. Fry's Cocoa Ads

armed forces, meaning that they were reluctantly obliged to introduce conscription in April of that year. Throughout the war, commercial advertisers reflected this underlying popular mood, this very measured response to the war, and presented a very honest appraisal of what it was that the men were fighting for, be that in the armed services, or serving the country in other ways: men were grounded in the ordinary and mundane, what they were fighting to protect was a 'normal' way of life. Their ambitions were limited and they were inclined to do what was required to achieve that goal and little else. What is presented here is a clear picture that the quintessential British male, 'dull', inward looking and with limited ambitions, did not cease to exist as war was declared but remained largely intact. These were, indeed, 'temperate heroes'.

Conclusion

When it came to commercial advertisers reflecting and projecting issues of masculinity on the British home front, representations of men, and especially men in uniform were not as unequivocal or hegemonic as might be imagined. What particularly stands out is the dominance of advertisers from the toiletries and cosmetics sector who were determined that their products provided the means whereby men could by clearly demarcated as men.

Advertisers highlighted how the use of toiletries and cosmetics stood at the heart of the gender divide as a means to attract and retain a mate. Irrespective of the difficulties and challenges that individuals might face in adhering to pre-war standards of appearance with the loss of distinctive character that came with wearing a uniform, the employment of women within non-feminine roles and the difficulties of obtaining such goods, there was an overwhelming discourse that placed the maintenance of gender identity at the heart of British society. This served to compliment the government's own efforts to try, as long as possible, to keep a 'masculine' war well away from women, and adhere to the centrality of home and family as a vital factor in the war effort. Advertisers further sustained this argument by suggesting that there was more to this need to take care over one's appearance than the mere exigencies of courting, and that the use of their products made a direct contribution to the war effort.

Men were urged to take care of their appearance given that this would make a direct contribution to the successful execution of their duties. Clearly, to do so was in the producers' best interests in an effort to sustain product sales but this tied into that discourse which suggested that taking pride in one's self made a direct contribution to your effectiveness. This was not just a shallow attempt on the part of advertisers to hype their products but fitted in with propaganda elsewhere that urged people to take care of themselves to sustain morale and help the war effort. Thus, far from the selfless spirit that,

in certain quarters, was promoted as the ideal wartime 'community', there was a contrary narrative that promoted a focus on self and the maintenance of a distinctive character.

Where representations of women may have been very clearly set out, and fitted into a pre-existing picture of femininity, it is argued here that the idea of masculinity that is presented is less clear cut and less 'traditional'. The first point to note is that men in uniform did not dominate the advertisements appearing in *Picture Post*. Where it might have been expected that the only man in wartime Britain was the man in uniform, this advertising would seem to suggest that there was room for a range of representations and a range of roles. Secondly, where men were seen in uniform they were not depicted as the archetypal warrior.

In most cases, where advertisements showed men in uniform, they were not seen in the field, and certainly not in violent combat situations, but rather in domestic settings. An impression is thus conveyed of the British man in uniform as a much more measured and nuanced individual, especially relative to the enemy and even American servicemen. Yet, one of the limitations of this research to date is that it has focussed exclusively on representations of British men in British press advertisements. The impression thus conveyed, alongside extant secondary literature, has it that is a distinctively British phenomenon and that men within other combatant countries were much more akin to Dawson's 'soldier hero'. Whilst a brief sample of American advertisements would seem to bear this out, there is scope for much more detailed research to really provide a meaningful comparative analysis. Nevertheless, the British advertisements reviewed would seem to wholly support Rose's description of the 'temperate hero': men merely doing their duty in a very measured fashion rather than giving free-rein to their aggressive impulses. This equates with their motivations and objectives: certainly they were committed to the war effort, especially in the case of the civilian workers portrayed in these advertisements, but they were motivated by the private, ordinary and idiosyncratic.

British men were frequently represented as being soft and caring; they were pictured in the home, and with the home being at the centre of their being, caring for their partners or children. This commercial advertising portrays the domesticated male. Whereas this might be entirely expected given that many of the products advertised were to be found and used in the home, it does not necessarily hold true that this was the only way in which such products could be represented. In the case of British advertising, there were instances where 'domestic' products ranging from sparking plugs, refrigerators and camera film were shown directly in the frontline, but these formed a minority and, what is more, when those products were shown in a domestic setting, there appears to be no reticence in having the man of the house present and using them. Clearly this feeds into a broader narrative around what is was that men were fighting for and what it was that motivated them and, indeed, sustained the nation.

Representations of men seem to reinforce the idea that the British nation was sustained through the war by the overwhelming desire to retain as much of the ordinary, normal and mundane as was possible. In relation to gender, much of morale centred on keeping up appearances, trying to avoid wholesale change to the nature of everyday life despite the war. Hence the idea that despite taking on more masculine roles women were encouraged to retain their femininity and hold onto the ultimate objective of being a partner and having a family and home. The same holds true for men who were encouraged to maintain their appearance, attract a partner and care for the family. Family and home lay at the heart of these advertising messages: with the family and home established, 'all's well'. The message that comes from these advertisements focussing on gender is that 'normal' relations are the mainstay of society and at the core of the war effort.

Notes

1. This figure is actually smaller than the actual number of men in Britain between 1940 and 1944 given that it excludes members of the armed forces serving at home.
2. See for example posters forming part of the MoI's 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' campaign such as the well known 'Keep mum, she's not so dumb!' and 'Tell NOBODY – not even HER'. Rare exceptions to this style of representation can be found in the graphic battle scenes shown in the series of posters that appeared under the various titles, 'BACK THEM UP'/'THE ATTACK BEGINS IN THE FACTORY'/'THE DOWNFALL OF DICTATORS IS ASSURED'.

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