

Gentlemen Professionals and Men-about-Town: Occupational Personas amongst London Advertising Men, 1951-67

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The expansion of advertising employment in London in the 1950s and 1960s strengthened the close historical association between the advertising industry and the commercial geography of the capital city. The geographical concentration of the industry in London's West End and the lanes around Fleet Street towards the east of the city dated back to the establishment of the first recognisably modern service advertising agencies in the late nineteenth century. Whilst there were advertising agencies in Britain's other big cities, including regional offices of the large agencies, London was the unchallenged centre of advertising in the UK. This relationship was strengthened by the arrival in the late 1950s and 1960s of a swathe of US-owned advertising agencies who established subsidiary offices in the city. Like the British-owned agencies, these US companies located their offices in the tightly packed spaces of London's business districts, close to not only the headquarters of the consumer goods manufacturers in central London, but also within touching distance of the national newspapers, TV production companies, film businesses, the studios of photographers, designers and the West End theatre. Advertising's post-war growth, whilst it had a broader national and international significance, was generated from within the specific spaces of London's commercial geography.

This embedding of the advertising industry within the commercial and creative milieus of the city did much to shape the identities of advertising practitioners. Their public personas owed much to the cultural geography of London's West End as they assembled distinctively urban identities within the spaces of the capital's business and entertainment and leisure districts. In this paper, I explore the urban, metropolitan dimensions of the identities forged by London advertising men during this buoyant period for both the city and the industry. In doing so, I focus upon their appropriation of the persona of the gentleman and the associated codes of gentlemanliness, charting the influence of these patrician styles and dispositions upon London advertising men. Gentlemanliness had a particular currency within London life during the 1950s and 1960s, forming part of the City's distinctive parade of urban social types. The currency of gentlemanliness, as Frank Mort has shown, owed much to the continuing influence of the gentry and styles of patrician masculinity. Contesting established accounts of the decline of aristocratic influence after 1945, including assertions about their diminished political power and social status, Mort argues that these social elites transformed themselves to become key players in the making of London's post-war culture. He shows how patrician models of behaviour and public display, including the reappearance of the persona of the 'man about town', were reworked in forward looking ways and achieved a wider currency as they were appropriated by subaltern groups, most notably by working class stylists.

This paper explores the pull of patrician styles within London advertising amongst senior advertising men. The argument is carried through a brief study of the lives and careers of two notable advertising men who had climbed to senior positions within the industry by the early 1950s. They are Hubert Oughton and Ashley Havinden. Both men worked for the large British agency W.S. Crawford. The analysis that follows is necessarily provisional given the nature of the archival sources. Advertising people in the mid-twentieth century tended to leave few traces of their lives, in part because they were not deemed or did not deem themselves to constitute the kind of 'great' or 'notable' lives worthy of recording in literary forms and in part because of the poverty of the archives of British advertising. Nonetheless, the paper attempts to piece together elements of their personas from archives at the History of Advertising Trust and Scottish National Galleries, showing how gentlemanliness formed a key facet of their identities. I argue that gentlemanliness had a particular currency amongst

men like Oughton and Havinden because it offered them a way to elevate the social standing of their occupation. Anxiety over their public standing preoccupied many within the industry. As sociologist Jeremy Tunstall noted in his study of London advertising in the 1960s, many within the industry seemed to be haunted by an occupational inferiority complex. This critical climate meant that advertising people did not feel as central as some contemporary commentators saw them as being to the cultural life of London and the wider national scene. It pushed these advertising men into performing considerable cultural work to insert themselves into metropolitan life. Drawing on the codes of gentlemanliness allowed some of them to do this and at the same time to distance themselves from the tarnished image of advertising as sleazy, sensationalist and a refuge for hacks.

Such a strategy of occupational elevation had precedents. Since the late nineteenth century, professions like medicine, the law, engineering and architecture had consolidated their social standing by taking on some of the attributes and personal qualities of the leisured gentleman. This could involve aping the forms of public display associated with the gentry. Gentlemanliness, however, was also borne of an ethic of service, self-control, restraint and reticence. It was additionally marked out by its opposition to the instrumental, the coarse, the vulgar and the self-promoting. Tellingly, this placed the ideal gentleman professional above the grubby world of trade and commerce, superior to the vulgarities of the self-made man.

The codes and styles of gentlemanliness had purchase on the occupational personas of men like Oughton and Havinden for another reason. It allowed them, and the agency that they worked for, to emphasize their Britishness at a time when US advertising agencies were an increasingly powerful presence within London advertising. Fears about the Americanization of British advertising and wider British society often focused on the cultural effects of the brash styles of US commercial culture and the persona of the Madison Avenue 'huckster'. For men like Oughton and Havinden, drawing on gentlemanliness provided a way to assert their cultural distance from these American influences. As leading figures in the management of Crawfords, including its creative output, their self-presentation was part of a broader strategy to emphasize Crawfords 'classiness' and Britishness against the personal styles and communicative ethos of US advertising. They were not unique in doing so. It was a strategy pursued within the heartland of US advertising by the most famous British advertising man of the period, David Ogilvy. Ogilvy, a Scot by birth, built a career in New York by cultivating a public persona of the sophisticated, tweed-wearing, pipe-smoking English gent. The advertising that he produced and which became the trademark of his agency, OBM, was carried through restrained, understated forms of selling that drew upon his gentlemanly persona and was famous for its address to the status striving 'snob in you'. This played to an American idea of Britain centred upon its enduring aristocratic traditions and civilized gentility. The appeal of gentlemanliness to British advertising men in the 1950s and 1960s, then, whilst it formed part of multi-faceted occupational identities, was driven by the twin desires to raise the occupational standing of their profession and by the assertion of a distinctively British ethic of advertising in the face of US commercial power.

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