

'I Believe in Wallpaper': Examining Salesmanship through *The Wallpaper Magazine* 1920-1939



Fig. 1: *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-May 1927. Print. Photo by the author.

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Abstract

‘Mass production would be a shadow of what it is today if it had waited for the consumer to make up his mind’ pronounced *Fortune* magazine cynically in 1940.¹ Acknowledging that very fact, businesses across the USA and Europe devoted their energies in the early part of the 20th century to developing the science, and the art, of salesmanship. Coupled with the rise of persuasive advertising, salesmanship became an essential tool for any large company focused on the mantra of ‘better business.’ In Britain, The Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd, the dominant wallpaper company of the first half of the 20th century, sought ways to convey the teachings of the new science to the decorators at the sharp end of the business serving the customer in their independent shops. With no direct contact with these men WPM chose to launch a house organ in 1920 which would unite the industry and function as a conduit for channelling a steady flow of enthusiastic and at times intensely didactic advice on how to maximise wallpaper sales. This dissertation uses the 20-year lifespan of *The Wallpaper Magazine* as a means of mediating salesmanship, a neglected area of the production-circulation-consumption paradigm. It argues that the salesman was a significant contributor to reviving business in the wallpaper trade in the inter-war period. In examining both the science and the art of wallpaper salesmanship, it also sheds new light on both wallpaper consumption and the history and impact of trade journals.

¹ “The Great American Salesman.” *Fortune* 21.2 (1940): 74, qtd in Walter A. Friedman *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard UP, 2004) 10.

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Introduction

The history of The Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd (henceforward WPM) in the inter-war period is well documented in the company records,² the corporate history published in 1949³ and the work of wallpaper historians.⁴ These sources reveal much about company structure, day-to-day operations and the balance sheet. They say much less about how WPM's wallpaper was sold and consumed, and in particular the drive behind selling it. This dissertation aims to fill that knowledge gap with original research into *The Wallpaper Magazine*, the trade journal or 'house organ' of WPM from 1920-1939. I was first drawn to research into salesmanship by discovering copies of the magazine at MoDA.⁵ These small ephemeral objects contain a rich inner world of motivational advice columns, window dressing tips, enquiry pages, jokes and cartoons, wallpaper history, sports and social reports and general camaraderie, supporting the view that 'Magazines have often been viewed as unique historical resources for the historian because they record the incredibly complicated flow of life in a breadth of detail that is unavailable in any other medium.'⁶ Animated in *The Wallpaper Magazine* are the working lives of publicists and writers, directors, managers and associates, and indeed the salesman reader who is at the core of the magazine yet has the quietest voice of all. The questions I wanted to answer were: Why was the magazine launched in 1920 and what was its purpose? Who was writing and publishing it? What was the effect on the reader? Who was the wallpaper consumer? The magazines had never before been studied as a body and so offered the exciting opportunity to shed new

² Held at the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick.

³ The Wall Paper Manufacturers Ltd. *WPM: The Pattern of a Great Organisation*. (Manchester: WPM, 1949).

⁴ In particular *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper, New and Expanded Edition*, ed. Lesley Hoskins (London: Thames & Hudson, [1994] 2005).

⁵ The Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture at Middlesex University.

⁶ "Introduction," *Design and the Modern Magazine*, ed. Jeremy Aynsley and Kate Forde (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) 2.

light on the production, circulation and consumption of wallpaper and contribute to the study of wallpaper history.⁷

From the beginning it was obvious that the dominant theme of the magazine was salesmanship. I have therefore researched the history and culture of salesmanship in the inter-war period in order to contextualise WPM's approach to its reader - the distributor at the sharp end of the business running his own shop. Finding the full set of magazines at the British Library has enabled me to study how company relations with the salesman developed over a 20-year period and in particular how WPM planned to galvanise the wallpaper trade into action after World War I. This dissertation argues that the salesman was considered vital to reviving the fortunes of WPM after World War I and charts how the company absorbed and disseminated the new 'science' of salesmanship through its magazine.

Methodology

The magazine appeared quarterly or sometimes every two months. At 20 or more pages long it provides a wealth of insight into WPM but in order to have focus and depth this research looks primarily at content related to the education and perceived response of the salesman. The most time-efficient methodological approach has been sampling across the years. The written content of the magazine's spring editions (January-April) provides a direct comparison with the first ever magazine in April 1920 and offers an insight into the industry at a critical time of the year when the salesman was most needed to promote WPM's wares. Traditional spring cleaning gave wallpaper companies the opportunity to place the idea of redecorating at the forefront of the customer's mind. Comparing the same period each year has made it possible to trace the development of WPM's attitude to selling and align it with the worldwide growth in knowledge and understanding of salesmanship. The analysis of the cover designs, however, draws on the full number of covers in order to be comprehensive. In addition to the study of the visual and textual material, interviews have been carried out with

⁷ This fact has been recognised by the award of a grant, the Merryl Huxtable Prize, from The Wallpaper History Society.

people connected to the trade, notably Duncan Burton, former Sales Director of WPM.⁸

Structure

The dissertation starts with an overview of WPM company history in Chapter 1 in order to interrogate the need for the magazine. Chapter 2 follows with an assessment of inter-war retailing in Britain, a time when the high street, and wallpaper retailing in particular, was undergoing significant change with the rise of the multiples. Chapter 3 considers the magazine as a designed object, analysing the cover semiologically to assess what its changing designs and titles denote and gauge their perceived interpretation by the salesman. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the new 'science' of salesmanship evolving at the time, firstly considering how the magazine passed the learning down to the salesman in robust masculine language and subsequently how it attempted to analyse the female customer psychologically, with the constant aim of boosting trade. The dissertation therefore stands interestingly at the juncture of a number of disciplines and draws in particular on business and design history to make its conclusions. The excellent work of Friedman and Church on salesmanship, Weber's examination of the Protestant work ethic and Campbell's theory of modern consumerism have provided a strong framework and valuable insights, helping advance understanding of the salesman. If we are to believe the magazine, the selling of wallpaper required particular tact and skill. WPM's conviction of the power of wallpaper to transform an interior beyond simple aesthetic concerns needed a willing agent to convey this to the consumer. Therefore by mediating salesmanship through the magazine this research opens a window on how WPM sought to direct and shape the distributor and offers a fresh perspective on wallpaper history, raising the profile of the often-overlooked salesman.

⁸ Duncan Burton joined WPM in 1950 at the age of 21 and remained there all his working life.

Throughout, the wallpaper salesman may be referred to variously as a distributor, decorator or salesman, and the masculine pronoun will be used in line with the magazine's form of address. He should be understood as a man running independent retail premises. A decorator might simply sell wallpaper and also be responsible for hanging it, or might employ others to do the paper-hanging. The word 'salesman' does not refer to the travelling salesman; these were known as 'travellers' and will be referred to as such. The customer is referred to throughout with the feminine pronoun, for consistency and because the customer was primarily a woman.

The Wallpaper Magazine sometimes spelt 'wallpaper' as one word and sometimes two, as in 'wall paper.' I will follow their usage where relevant. In my own text 'wallpaper' will be spelt in the conventional way.

Chapter 1

The Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd: the Background to the Company

In order to understand why WPM felt it necessary to start a publication like *The Wallpaper Magazine* it is useful to look at the history of the company (see timeline in Appendix 1) in the years preceding the first issue in April 1920. These were years of great change for the wallpaper industry as machine-printing, which had been developed from calico printing, became more widespread and efficient and the era of mass production started its inexorable rise. This chapter will consider the fundamental transformation wrought on the wallpaper industry by the amalgamation of 31 companies which led to the formation of WPM, the economic climate within which it was operating, the damaging effects of World War I and the resultant struggle to restore the company's fortunes in the aftermath. Through an examination of the systems operating within the company and how wallpaper was brought to market, and a consideration of the tensions brought about by the amalgamation, it is possible to see the growing control WPM sought to exercise over its many branches. Setting this against the combined effects of economic depression and a design climate largely hostile to the majority of WPM's output with its predominantly popular appeal, it is possible to gain some context for the launch of the magazine.

The Formation of the Company

WPM was formed as a company in 1899 when the majority of wallpaper manufacturers of the time were brought together to form what is termed, in all sources consulted including WPM's own history, as an 'amalgamation', and sometimes referred to as a 'combine.' As WPM itself stated they 'decided to pool their resources and accumulated knowledge'⁹ so there is no indication of a takeover by any one company. However, the newly formed organisation of 31 manufacturers (Appendix 2), which included many of the leading names in the industry such as Allan Cockshut,

⁹ The Wall Paper Manufacturers Ltd, *WPM: The Pattern of a Great Organisation*, Foreword, no page numbers.

Lightbown Aspinall and C. and J. G. Potter,¹⁰ held a dominant position in the market 'so that competition was virtually eliminated'.¹¹ They were 'estimated to have more than a 95% share of the manufacturing capacity of the industry'.¹² The new company brought together a high degree of knowledge and expertise combined with a desire to raise the standard of wallpaper production to a level that would make WPM a world leader in the field. The company established its head office in London, at 125 High Holborn, where it remained until 1939 when the outbreak of war obliged it to move, along with all its records, to Holmes Chapel in Cheshire, close to many of its leading firms. After the war the office relocated to Manchester with a London sales office being retained for the convenience of customers in the south of England and those visiting from overseas markets. In 1906 the company established the Walpamur Company Ltd for paint and in the ensuing years acquired factories making brushes, paper and pulp, mica powder and moulding powders for the emergent plastics industry, thereby bringing many important raw materials in house and putting itself on a sound economic footing by means of a diverse portfolio of related manufacturers. This entailed a new sales strategy as Church, referring to Porter and Livesay's findings,¹³ explains:

The rise of the modern corporation and the trend towards oligopoly during the wave of vertical integration that occurred in the late 1890s and early 1900s contributed to an increasing concentration of markets[...]and witnessed an increasing reliance by manufacturers on salesmen.¹⁴

Throughout the many publications issued by WPM, from its self-published history of 1949, the company's 'Jubilee' year, to its many booklets offering practical advice and insights into wallpaper history, and similarly in *The Wallpaper Magazine*, there runs a

¹⁰ C. and J.G. Potter was known more colloquially as 'Potters of Darwen.'

¹¹ The Monopolies Commission, *Report on the Supply of Wallpaper* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, [1964] 1969) 6. Over the whole period of WPM's existence, although there were fluctuations, its share of the total manufacturing trade in wallpaper averaged 70%, leading to an investigation by the Monopolies Commission in 1963 and the winding-up of the company in 1965. Crown Wallcoverings is now part of Fine Décor Ltd which is owned by a US company, Brewster Wallcoverings.

¹² Mark Turner et al, *A Popular Art: British Wallpapers 1930-1960*. (London: Middlesex Polytechnic, 1989) 46.

¹³ Glenn Porter and Harold C. Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers: Studies in the Changing Structure of Nineteenth-century Marketing*. (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins, 1971).

¹⁴ Roy Church, "Salesmen and the Transformation of Selling in Britain and the US in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." *The Economic History Review* 61.3 (2008): 720.

reverence and a passion for the product itself. Although the company was clearly financially astute and deeply entrepreneurial, a genuine love of wallpaper and a fascination with its history are evident, and it is no coincidence that the early histories of English wallpaper were written by directors of the company such as Eric Entwisle and Alan Sugden. The fact that Entwisle considered it worthwhile to research and publish *A Literary History of Wallpaper*,¹⁵ a volume detailing all mentions of wallpaper in works of literature, in 1960, speaks volumes about his enthusiasm for the product itself, way and beyond its status as a commodity. In a 1934 article in the magazine he describes wallpaper as 'our salvation – the essence of life and happiness, and the background of our existence.'¹⁶ This is important to bear in mind in any analysis of the magazines because of the profound zeal for wallpaper also manifested in them. As the company history points out: 'Those who work in the industry are fortunate in being so closely associated with such an interesting and colourful form of production...it seems as if this daily contact with an article which is not only useful but contains so much of beauty, has due effect upon the skill and assiduity with which the workday task is accomplished.'¹⁷

The Structure of the Company

Despite the creation of a large corporation with overwhelming control over the industry, WPM allowed its individual branches and subsidiaries to retain their trading names and a certain degree of independent control over their affairs. Branches owned their own mills, retained their design departments and travellers and were allowed to produce their own sets of designs and colourways, known as 'ways'. However, bulk purchasing of materials, advertising, sales promotion and transport were centralised. Only manufacturers involved in high-end block-printed papers, such as Sanderson, were allowed complete independence from the parent company in terms of day-to-day operations. They also showed under their own names at trade fairs. Many mills were longstanding family concerns with the baton of management being passed down

¹⁵ Eric Entwisle, *A Literary History of Wallpaper*, London: Batsford, 1960.

¹⁶ Eric Entwisle, "Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On: A Wallpaper Fantasy," *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-Jun. 1934: 11.

¹⁷ The Wall Paper Manufacturers Ltd. *WPM: The Pattern of a Great Organisation*. No page numbers.

through the generations, and reports of long-service awards appear in the magazines, under the auspices of WPM.¹⁸ Many branches saw the workforce as part of a larger family and demonstrated genuine concern for their welfare, both bodily and socially. It was common for clinics to be established on site to enable workers to have health check-ups free of charge at a time before the NHS existed. This had the obvious benefit to the company as well, minimising time lost to medical appointments and sick days. Sports teams abounded and social interaction was encouraged through canteens and clubs, while an annual arts and crafts competition displayed the ingenuity and skills of employees, with prizes awarded accordingly.¹⁹ These, along with the triumphs of the sports teams, are regularly reviewed with pride in *The Wallpaper Magazine*.²⁰ Coach trips were organised and at Holmes Chapel a model housing estate was built close to the mill. WPM was guided by its belief that 'The development of community spirit is perhaps the most important factor in the welfare of the worker.'²¹ The same spirit imbues *The Wallpaper Magazine*, a determination to unify the company in one goal to further the aims of the industry through efficiency and greater sales, and to include the independent decorator in the group effort. WPM encouraged healthy competition between the branches, believing that this provided the necessary spur to technical innovation and fostered a sense of pride.²² At the heart of WPM, though, was a desire for oversight of the industry, aided by senior management holding seats on various employers' associations and trade conferences.²³ Similarly, the voice of the magazines, claiming to speak for the industry as a whole, is almost synonymous with the voice of WPM.

The System of Distribution

Underpinning care for the workforce was a determination to create and maintain a wallpaper powerhouse to rival the overseas market. The system of distribution was

¹⁸ For example *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-Jun. 1932: 17.

¹⁹ For example *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-Jun. 1933: 12.

²⁰ For example *The English Wallpaper Magazine*, Jun-Jul. 1931: 10.

²¹ The Wall Paper Manufacturers Ltd, *WPM: The Pattern of a Great Organisation*. No page numbers.

²² The Wall Paper Manufacturers Ltd, *WPM: The Pattern of a Great Organisation*. No page numbers.

²³ These included the Wallpaper Makers' Industrial Council, The Wall Paper Manufacturers' Employers' Association and The Wallpaper Trades Conference Committee.

key to this endeavour. In the early decades of WPM's existence wallpaper was sold mainly via merchants and decorators, rather than directly through retailers.²⁴ Each autumn, merchants selected the designs they wanted from the 'mill sets' for the following selling season in January, just ahead of the spring-cleaning months. They based their choices on a close knowledge of their market and bore most of the cost of the pattern books, paying for the paper and negotiating a deal on the book-binding with the mills.²⁵ Any paper selected for a pattern book attracted a minimum order of rolls which had to be stored at the merchant's premises, so careful choices inevitably meant conservatism. This was not a system that encouraged innovation and it prevented the mills from appealing directly to the end consumer. Though the mills sent out their own travellers to visit the merchants in person, they were there to persuade rather than coerce, and to report back on the health of the merchant's business. Pattern books were distributed in January by the merchants to the decorators with whom they had a trading relationship, with the decorator showing them to his local clients and then returning to the merchant to place the orders. Samuel suggests that merchants looked down on decorators, considering themselves to be professionals while the decorator was merely 'trade'.²⁶ Merchants also dealt directly with customers, but the well-heeled ones. In a more affluent area a merchant might have a showroom fitted with carpet and tasteful upholstered settles where his customer could sit at her leisure whilst the salesman showed large samples of the latest papers from stands. In summary, the merchant operated as a 'clearing house where the products of widely separated mills are gathered, sorted and distributed to a large number of user firms in the areas which the merchant covers.'²⁷ Some wallpaper was sold through department stores, and cheaper papers known as 'starred ways' were available through small retailers such as hardware stores. Later, as WPM increased its own portfolio of retail outlets this system was to change fundamentally,

²⁴ Merchants were wholesalers to the trade, but some had showrooms and sold direct to the public.

²⁵ "Merchants' Book Arrangements," Internal Commercial Regulations 1930s-1950s, The Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick. MSS.424/10/2, 61.

²⁶ Raphael Samuel, "The Middle Classes between the Wars: Part Three," *New Socialist*, May-Jun. 1983: 30.

²⁷ "Our Ceilings and Walls," *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-Jun. 1932, 5.

with nearly 80% of wallpaper being supplied directly to the retailer by 1938.²⁸ This is discussed more fully in Chapter 2. This was to have a fundamental effect on the relationship between WPM and the end user, giving WPM far more control over sales.

Competition and Control

From the 1890s onwards wallpaper manufacturers sought to gain coverage in the press as well as advertise in trade and decorators' journals. The majority of firms advertised to attract the popular market and competition based on who could offer the lowest prices and the widest range of stock was intense. WPM was created in part to end competitive undercutting of prices and to restore order in a saturated market where wallpaper had been sold for as little as a penny a piece.²⁹ Prices were strictly controlled and merchants were subjected to restrictions in their dealings with the mills. WPM drew up seven-year trading agreements with merchants with 'discounts... graded according the amount of business done with the Company.'³⁰ Discounts which they had previously sought individually with separate mills were now controlled by WPM and depended on merchants limiting themselves to WPM products. In 1915 WPM went a stage further, creating a monopolistic one-year agreement 'confining Merchants' purchases to the Company's productions',³¹ a sure sign of declining trade. Even companies independent of WPM were persuaded to enter into 'working agreements' with WPM thus consolidating its hold not just over its incorporated partners but over the trading of wallpaper itself.

After the wave of success which had sustained the wallpaper industry in the latter few decades of the 19th century and rendered it almost immune to foreign competition, a new age dawned in which trade started to falter. Competition came from Denmark, Switzerland, France and, in particular, from Germany, which saw a rise in output from

²⁸ James Bavington Jefferys, "Chart 1," *A Summary of "The Distribution of Consumer Goods"* (National Institute of Economic and Social Research, Study No.IX, ed. Paul Bureau (London: News Chronicle Publications, 1950). No page numbers.

²⁹ A.V. Sugden and E.A. Entwisle, *Potters of Darwen: A Century of Wallpaper Printing by Machinery 1839-1939* (Manchester: G. Falkner & Sons, 1939) 68.

³⁰ "Build-up of Allied Interests," The Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick. MSS.424/9/15.

³¹ "Build-up of Allied Interests," MSS.424/9/15.

60m pieces in 1900 to 100m in 1932,³² mainly in mass-market machine-printed papers. Although WPM's output in 1900 was slightly higher at over 64m pieces,³³ this figure remained more or less level up until World War I, dropping to just under 61m in 1914. This would explain the new more restrictive agreement imposed upon merchants in 1915. In spite of WPM's professed enthusiasm for the new amalgamated company, not everyone was happy with the new centralised control. According to Potters, 'Old rivals do not readily sit down together as partners.'³⁴ Potters noted that mills resented the control of a London-based head office and customers started to miss the close relationships they had with individual firms. The workforce was unsettled by the changes and the lack of access to familiar management. WPM, which had handed control of all pricing to a single person in Head Office, was thought to have set prices too high and the restrictions imposed on the number of sets and new designs was unpopular. A sense of unity was sorely needed.

The Effect of Design Critics and World War I

In addition to navigating the choppy waters of the new amalgamation, increasing foreign competition and declining sales, WPM found itself operating in a hostile design climate. After the heyday of pattern in the 1890s the tide in artistic circles turned against the use of patterned walls. Architects and critics, inspired by the plain and panelled walls of Tudor, Stuart and Georgian periods, now looked for honesty and simplicity in wall coverings. In seeking to emulate simple British and colonial styles they recommended a return to antique furniture, preferably no older than 18th century, with plain walls as a backdrop. This historicist reading of the home, encouraged by the Arts and Crafts movement, had enormous appeal to the more sophisticated consumer and so demand for patterned papers began to wane. Although plain papers were still selling, there was a rise in the use of paint for interior walls. Pevsner later took issue with this design orthodoxy saying that 'To abuse or ridicule

³² Sabine Thümmler, "Unsteady Progress: From the Turn of the Century to the Second World War. The Continent of Europe," *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper, New and Expanded Edition*, ed. Lesley Hoskins (London: Thames & Hudson, [1994] 2005) 184.

³³ "Build-up of Allied Interests," MSS.424/9/15.

³⁴ Sugden and Entwisle, *Potters of Darwen*, 68.

any nostalgia for ornamentation can only deter people from studying the modern style and from trying to appreciate it.³⁵ Even twenty years later when visiting WPM manufacturers, he noted that new designs were never created for expensive hand block-printed papers and that sampling costs deterred manufacturers from experimentation for volume production. He found that historically manufacturers shrank from employing artists and architects as designers, claiming 'their outlook is too uncommercial and their taste too at variance with popular demand.'³⁶ So although WPM was holding its own with the middle ground it was failing to keep pace with the needs of the design-conscious. Once sophisticated taste started to turn away from wallpaper it would be a long time before it returned. As Mark Turner sums up: 'Thus began a fashionable prejudice against wallpaper which was to last until the 1930s.'³⁷

Despite a flourishing trade among the less discerning lower-middle and working classes who favoured cheap machine-printed papers, the wallpaper industry struggled to regain its earlier form and was dealt a serious blow when war broke out in 1914. Components crucial to the manufacture of wallpaper, such as dyes from Germany, became unavailable and therefore colours could not be matched for existing designs. Paper was rationed and, according to Potters, there was an attempt to use substitutes such as newspaper and reed pulp, but these muddied the colours and reduced the quality. Even flour paste was banned because of food shortages.³⁸ On top of this there was a very significant shortage of labour. In 1918 the British government introduced a form of wallpaper rationing by quantity, based on a customer's purchases in the corresponding month of the previous year. Only rejects and overmakes were off the ration.³⁹ In addition to this constraint, according to Potters, much of the export trade to Australia, New Zealand and South America had been lost to American firms. After the war ended paper shortages persisted and there was naturally insufficient labour to

³⁵ Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1937), 8.

³⁶ Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*, 69.

³⁷ Mark Turner, "Unsteady Progress: From the Turn of the Century to the Second World War, Britain and the United States," *The Papered Wall: The History, Patterns and Techniques of Wallpaper, New and Expanded Edition*, ed. Lesley Hoskins (London: Thames & Hudson, [1994] 2005) 194.

³⁸ Sugden and Entwisle, *Potters of Darwen*, 76.

³⁹ Sugden and Entwisle, *Potters of Darwen*, 77.

hang wallpaper, a factor that particularly affected upper and middle-class households who were not accustomed to hanging their own paper. Hanging wallpaper was a skilled job at this time as paper selvages needed to be trimmed by hand before hanging and paste had to be carefully applied as spills could stain. By contrast, the working classes hung their own wallpaper, in fact it was even taught to young women (Fig. 2), but their orders were for cheaper papers and WPM needed the more lucrative orders for higher-quality papers. The design sensibilities of the WPM directors must surely have been piqued as well: priding themselves on their knowledge of historic wallpapers and discernment in terms of style and quality, they were doubtless deeply unwilling to be categorised as purveyors of budget designs to the working classes.

Ultimately, faced with weakening sales, overseas competition, an unfavourable design climate and the need to recover quickly from wartime shortages, the conditions were ripe for WPM to launch an offensive on the market. Despite the powerhouse they had created, their distribution system meant that the one aspect of the business they were not in direct control of was sales. They needed to sell more and better wallpapers and they needed to get the message out to the distributor on the high street.

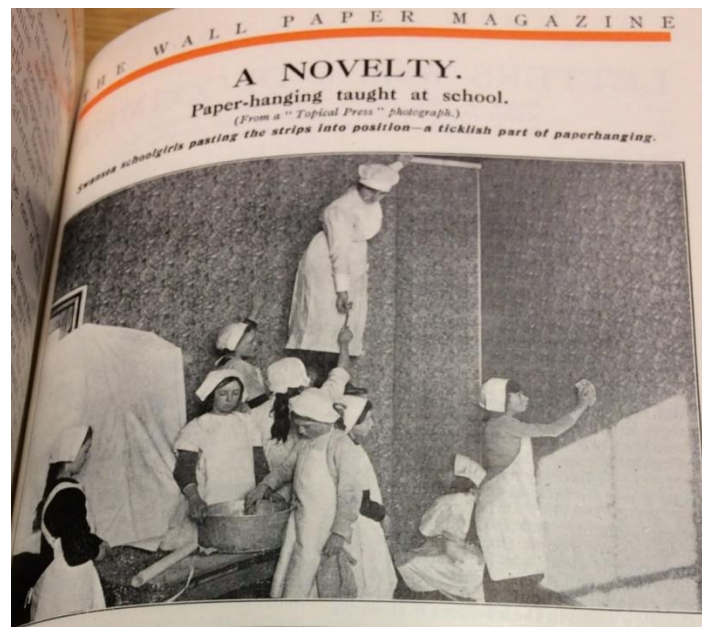


Fig. 2: Paper-hanging taught at school. *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Jun-Jul. 1921, 7. Print. Photo by the author.

Chapter 2

Selling Wallpaper in the Inter-War Period

The studies of the high street carried out by J.B. Jefferys in 1938 and Hermann Levy in 1947 have proved invaluable in examining the background to wallpaper retailing in the inter-war period. As Jefferys acknowledges: ‘the methods and costs of distributing consumer goods sold in the United Kingdom have been one of the least analysed segments of the British economy,’⁴⁰ but as his work incorporates statistical information about wallpaper retailing, which would otherwise be very challenging to find, it is especially helpful in charting the significant changes which took place over the period in the type of shops purveying wallpaper. This chapter will consider how unprecedented housing development and population growth helped aid the recovery of the wallpaper industry and explain how WPM attempted to maximise the opportunities and communicate with individual decorators.

Society and Consumption

The economic and social climate of the inter-war period was completely different from that experienced before World War I and bore witness to significant changes in housing and the high street as a result, both visibly and in the structure of the distribution systems used. Between the mid-19th century and World War I Britain had experienced rapid industrialisation based on the expansion of basic industries such as coal, iron and steel, textiles, engineering and shipbuilding, which in turn had influenced and complemented secondary industries such as wallpaper production. Technological developments had enabled large-scale production but also required significant capital investment in both labour and machinery and so led to the establishment of large enterprises and the subsequent overproduction of consumer goods. Wallpaper production was a case in point. One of the main reasons for the creation of the WPM

⁴⁰ James Bavington Jefferys and Paul Bareau, “Chart 1,” *Consumer Goods. The Methods and Cost of Distribution. A Summary [by Paul Bareau] of “The Distribution of Consumer Goods,” by J. B. Jefferys, Etc. [With Tables.]*” (London: News Chronicle Publications, 1950). No page numbers.

combine was to control the means of production across the industry, thereby reducing costs and increasing efficiency.⁴¹ However, after World War I the nation's prosperity became more dependent on the growth of other trades such as consumer goods, boosted by the post-war housing boom which saw the expansion of the suburbs, with many new estates being built around major cities generating significant population growth. This was particularly true in London and the Midlands: 'These two areas, which contained some 44% of the total population in 1921, accounted for some 88% of the total increase in the population between 1921 and 1938.'⁴² After death duties on large homes and estates worth more than £2m were raised to 40% in 1919, many of them were broken up, demolished or sold for development and their owners absorbed into the middle classes, swelling their number and increasing their wealth. *The Wallpaper Magazine* saw the opportunities this would present, telling its readers in 1921: 'Thousands of houses are going to be built. Everyone is getting bigger wages than pre-war; that means smarter homes, more wall paper. We are a house-proud race and always will be.'⁴³ This was a sound judgement as between 1914 and 1938 owner-occupied homes grew from 10% to 32% of housing stock and municipal housing, provided for former slum-dwellers, from 1% to 10%, mainly due to new developments.⁴⁴ The wallpaper industry was offered a chance to sell to all social classes, from the doctor in his £1200 detached villa to the middle and lower-middle classes on the many new estates of modest suburban homes, where a typical house featured three bedrooms. Family sizes were shrinking so it was common to have only one or two children, and as the middle class was growing in number and also 'receiving higher, and more secure, incomes,'⁴⁵ there was money in the household budget to spend. With fewer mouths to feed, trends suggest there was a decline in the proportion of household income spent on food and an increase, particularly between

⁴¹ Duncan Burton, personal interview, 25 Jun. 2019.

⁴² James Bavington Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain, 1850-1950: A study of trends in retailing with special reference to the development of Co-operative, multiple shop and department store methods of trading* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1954) 46.

⁴³ "Letters from a Decorator," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Dec-Jan. 1921: 6.

⁴⁴ Peter Scott, *The Making of the Modern British Home: The Suburban Semi and Family Life between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013) 7.

⁴⁵ John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain 1880-1980* (London: Longman, 1994) 25.

1920 and 1928,⁴⁶ on that spent on consumer goods such as bicycles and electricals, furniture and furnishings, sporting goods and toys, all suggesting a rise in living standards and an emphasis on home as the centre of existence and heart of leisure activity. A new home required decorating either by the builder or the new owner, and orders for WPM's wallpapers over this period held up well, despite uneven retail demand across the country.⁴⁷ In contrast to the relative prosperity and increasing home ownership in the South, this period also saw mass unemployment in formerly prosperous areas. The rate of unemployment varied hugely – for example in 1936, it stood at 28% in South Wales as against only 6.5% in London.⁴⁸ Yet even among communities where joblessness was high, the huge variety of goods flooding the market and the proliferation of advertising on billboards, at the cinema and in newspapers and magazines promoted a desire to buy. People of different social classes were now rubbing up against each other more frequently and in consuming the same media were subject to aspirational advertising that led everyone to feel entitled to new goods for themselves and their home, for many the demonstration of their standing in society. 'This growth of homogeneity in social behaviour clearly widened the possibilities of national marketing by manufacturers and of the use of similar selling policies and techniques by large-scale retailers in different parts of the country.'⁴⁹ Over the inter-war period WPM moved to establish itself as a retailer in order to take advantage of these marketing opportunities.

Where Was Wallpaper Sold?

Between the wars in Britain there were four main types of retailer: the department store, the multiple or chain store, the co-operative store and the unit retailer or independent shop. From 1920 to 1938 there was rapid growth in the number of variety chains, such as Woolworths and Marks & Spencer, from around 300 stores in 1920 to

⁴⁶ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 42.

⁴⁷ "Pieces ordered 1900-1961," The Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick. MSS.424/9/15.

⁴⁸ Gary Cross, "Was There Love on the Dole?" *The Consumer Society Reader* ed. Martyn J. Lee (Oxford: Blackwell 2000) 192.

⁴⁹ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 42.

1200 by 1939.⁵⁰ This threatened household goods stores. In addition, multiples, defined as 'a firm, other than a Co-operative Society, possessing 10 or more retail establishments'⁵¹ also saw significant expansion due to large-scale production methods and the trend towards homogeneity of demand across the country. Multiples were typically located in main shopping streets and characterised by large, bright window displays, an important factor in generating sales. They offered lower prices than department stores and a focus on standardisation and value, rather than experience shopping. In the 1920s it was still relatively easy for multiples to buy a site on a main street, which had a significant effect on the wallpaper trade in town centres. Prior to 1920 wallpaper had been sold mainly in independent stores, often alongside paint, pottery, glass, china and general household wares, but newer specialist stores started to emerge in the inter-war period, 'the most important of these ...[being] the group of firms that specialized in the sale of wallpaper, paints, distemper and brushes.'⁵² Whilst only 10% of the total number of household goods multiples in 1920 had specialised in wallpaper, by 1930 this had risen to 30% and by 1939 43%.⁵³ WPM started building up its retail presence by establishing Wall Paper Stores Ltd in 1906⁵⁴ and increased the number of shops it owned from 31 in 1928 to over 215 in 1939.⁵⁵ Clearly growth in home ownership and the variety of papers available to the consumer had increased demand but WPM's efforts to integrate production and distribution, alongside increased use of the 'Crown Wallpapers' branding had no doubt also helped this expansion. Jefferys suggests that most large multiple wallpaper shops had close links with manufacturers and 'In the case of some firms over four-fifths of the goods sold by the retail branches were produced by the parent manufacturing company.'⁵⁶ Although he does not name WPM directly, given their near-monopolistic control of the industry it would be reasonable to assume that this applies to them. By 1938 the estimated consumer spend on wallpaper of £1.7m was generated only partly through

⁵⁰ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 69.

⁵¹ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 465.

⁵² Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 438.

⁵³ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 438.

⁵⁴ The Monopolies Commission, *Report on the Supply of Wallpaper*, 13.

⁵⁵ Turner et al. *A Popular Art*, 47.

⁵⁶ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 438.

wholesaling (22.5%) and far more (77.5%) from goods delivered directly from producer to retailer.⁵⁷ This would suggest that WPM had made enormous progress since 1920 in managing to ease the grip of the merchants on the distribution system by increasing the numbers of its own multiple, Wall Paper Stores Ltd, or dealing directly with the unit retailer. Linoleum and paint showed a similar pattern. 80% (£7.7m sales) of linoleum went directly from producer to retailer and 65% (£2.7m sales) of paint by 1938.⁵⁸ This strongly suggests that linoleum and paint were stocked alongside wallpaper under one roof by a specialist, what Levy refers to as the 'technician-shopkeeper',⁵⁹ one who not only sells but also offers skill and advice. As he states: 'Decorators may sell decorating material and at the same time related goods of all kinds.'⁶⁰ As has been previously discussed, wallpaper was also sold by merchants through their own high-street premises. However, although the growth in the multiples was significant for the wallpaper trade they still only accounted for 12% of wallpaper sold in 1938. Although some historians suggest that wallpaper was sold in department stores, Jefferys states that the remaining 88% (along with 81% of paint) was purchased at unit retailers.⁶¹ Wallpaper was exceptional in still being sold predominantly in this way – only vacuum cleaners enjoyed a higher proportion of sales through unit stores. There is a strong case to suggest this was because of the need for specialist selling staff. Small wallpaper retailers and decorators were typically sited out of town where they could retain a loyal local customer base attracted by their skill in selling, advising and hanging wallpaper, coupled with personal service. This favoured their independence and for WPM it offered a direct route for the magazine to reach the salesman.

⁵⁷ Jefferys and Bareau, "Chart 1," *Consumer Goods. The Methods and Cost of Distribution*, no page numbers.

⁵⁸ Jefferys and Bareau, "Chart 1," *Consumer Goods. The Methods and Cost of Distribution*, no page numbers.

⁵⁹ Hermann Levy, *The Shops of Britain: A Study of Retail Distribution* (London: Routledge, 1948) 8.

⁶⁰ Levy, *The Shops of Britain*, 8.

⁶¹ Jefferys and Bareau, "Chart 4" *Consumer Goods. The Methods and Cost of Distribution* no page numbers.

The Independent Retailer

The Retail Trade Committee Report of 1942 noted in its sample surveys of towns that 'less than 30 percent of the shops by number are congregated in the main streets and over 70 percent are spread over the remaining and very much larger areas of the town.'⁶² Although department stores tended to be located in city centres and offered female shoppers the opportunity for a whole day out where they could not only browse and buy but have their hair done and meet a friend for lunch, the new thriving suburbs had actually led to the depopulation of city centres and many women were reliant on their local shops for their needs. Although the average turnover of a department store at this time was £300,000 and that of a unit shop in a side street only £1500, unit retailers still accounted for around 67% of consumer spending in 1938 as against 19% for multiples and 6% for department stores.⁶³ Town planning in the 1930s limited the number of shop sites in the new suburbs so small shops were not threatened by the arrival of larger competitors. Independent retailers offered advantages that the larger more distant stores were unable to – they saved customers the costs of going into town and offered convenience and personal service, as well as knowledge of the local area. Many also offered credit and hire-purchase schemes, which Levy refers to as 'a bulwark factor of advantage to the small retailer as against the large store.'⁶⁴ Hire purchase transformed the inter-war years, making purchases for the home available to a wide range of customers, although in Benson's view 'hire purchase was regarded as essentially a working-class form of credit.'⁶⁵ It allowed for instant gratification and the maintaining of standards in the home, a matter of serious importance in the aspirational suburbs. The rise in the use of motor transport meant that local retailers were able to visit and deliver to their customers, with Jefferys estimating that having a motor van trebled the radius of operations compared to the traditional mode of horse and cart. This would have been of particular advantage to the decorator for taking pattern books round to his clients' homes for them to view. At

⁶² W. Craig Henderson and Great Britain Board of Trade, *Retail Trade Committee. Third Report. Concentration in the Retail Non-food Trades*, 1942: 34-35, qtd in Levy *The Shops of Britain*, 26.

⁶³ Jefferys and Bareau, *Consumer Goods, The Methods and Cost of Distribution*, no page numbers.

⁶⁴ Levy, *The Shops of Britain*, 8.

⁶⁵ Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society*, 211.

the same time he could measure up and then later deliver and hang their chosen papers. A car or van offered him the opportunity to sell beyond his shop premises and, in seeing inside a client's home, the chance to build a relationship with them and to make useful notes for when the new season's wallpapers came out. By knowing a client's home, a decorator could be on the front foot when it came to selling to her on a regular basis and therefore offer an unrivalled service. It may also have helped to win over the type of difficult male customer described by one decorator. He wrote to complain that the publicity he had sent to 'gentlemen's homes' in his area had failed to attract any customers because the gentlemen assumed he sold poor quality goods and felt it was 'beneath their dignity to enter a suburban shop.'⁶⁶

Customer Service

The inter-war years saw a huge emphasis on service in retail. Following the introduction of Resale Price Maintenance and trade associations to fix prices and control supply in many areas of consumer goods in the 1930s, firms were able to prevent price cutting and deny wholesalers the advantage of negotiating variable prices with retailers. Many small shops were able to continue trading because they were protected from competition, although this created a problem of surplus shops in some trades. Price competition was replaced by competition in service. The rise in the standard of living had led to a more discerning and sophisticated customer, with higher expectations. The wide variety and quantity of goods available to buy meant that a good salesperson was needed to help the customer navigate through the choices. This was particularly relevant to the wallpaper trade - the small retailer had the time and flexibility to spend as much time as was needed with his customers. Some customers appreciated the individual attention and enjoyed divulging details about their families and home life. For the housewife 'in a life so self-enclosed, a visit to the local shops could count as a major expedition.'⁶⁷ Handling this with discretion was the sign of the experienced salesman and the magazine is full of lessons in how to find the balance

⁶⁶ "Extract from a Letter Received from One of our Readers," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Apr-May 1922: 11.

⁶⁷ Samuel, "The Middle Class between the Wars: Part Three," 30.

between personal attention and overfamiliarity. When a salesman got it right, the rewards could be long-term: 'There would appear to be little doubt[...]that in those trades which remained highly skilled[...]the personal qualities of the owner had a significant influence on trade.'⁶⁸ There was also possibly an element of class snobbery at play and a need to signify one's status as Benson notes:

middle-class shoppers continued to patronise specialist stores which, although – indeed because – they were old-fashioned and expensive, offered an agreeable combination of long opening hours, free home delivery, generous credit facilities, and expert and obsequious service. It was a combination which, whatever its other merits, helped to confirm the class identity – and class superiority – of the stores' customers.⁶⁹

Such customers were demanding, with their 'hunger for attention and respect'⁷⁰ but 'an enormous amount of prestige was attached to serving 'better class' customers'⁷¹ and the small retailer was expected to adopt high standards of display and cleanliness, refresh his stock and his window displays regularly and offer a pleasant and comfortable interior to his clients. For many wallpaper distributors, who might also be offering a number of other services such as plumbing, building, glazing or even undertaking (Fig. 3), their premises struggled to live up to expectations, prompting the magazine to advise: 'so much can be done by little deft touches of artistic arrangement, a few comfortable chairs, perhaps a strip of carpet, a fresh green fern or two, and a little white paint here and there.'⁷² The magazine acknowledged that the decorator could not compete with the merchant's large showroom but assured him that 'cleanliness is the most important factor' and that 'brightness gives an air of prosperity.'⁷³ Thanks to the wave of new magazines about home and style, such as *Homes and Gardens*, first published in 1919, *The Ideal Home* (1920) and *Good Housekeeping* (1922) customers were now much more aware of changing styles and the importance of fashion. Seeing the bright and beautifully decorated windows of the

⁶⁸ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 92.

⁶⁹ Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society*, 206.

⁷⁰ Raphael Samuel, "The Middle Class between the Wars: Part One," *New Socialist*, Jan-Feb. 1983: 32.

⁷¹ Raphael Samuel, "The Middle Class between the Wars: Part Two," *New Socialist*, Mar-Apr. 1983: 30.

⁷² "The Trade Value of an Attractive Window Display," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Aug-Sep. 1920: 15.

⁷³ "The Advantages of a Showroom," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1924: 19.

large department stores raised expectations of the local retailer. A well thought-out and attractive window display became an essential weapon in the salesman's armoury and remained so throughout the 1920s and '30s as evidenced by the window dressing competitions organised by WPM through the magazine. The attempt to woo the customer started at the window and was capitalised on once they had been lured inside. As Jefferys explains: 'The developments in the techniques of selling took the form of transforming the fixed shops from units that existed solely to fulfil customers' wants to units designed and planned to attract customers and create wants.'⁷⁴

Advertising and Publicity

WPM provided many selling aids for order through the magazine. These included price tickets, window cards and wallpaper display material, as well as stock blocks of printed designs that could be overprinted with the decorator's name and address. Templates of circular letters and designs for letter headings were offered for order from Head Office, and numerous columns with titles like "Help with Your Publicity Problems"⁷⁵ and "The Letter as a Business Getter"⁷⁶ reinforced the constant need for publicity. In its early days, the magazine also encouraged decorators to advertise at their local cinema to catch the regular audience of women who went several times a week. One 1922 edition offers him the necessary lantern slides for purchase, assuring him that his name will soon become 'as much a household name as Mary Pickford!'⁷⁷ As the 1930s neared, not only was the decorator competing with his fellow local retailers but was also subject to pressure from producers of goods who urged him to sell their branded goods over those of their competitors. As Jefferys explains:

personal visits to the retailer by the travellers of wholesalers and manufacturers became an accepted part of the machinery of selling, and the retailer was inundated from every quarter with 'information' as to what goods were available; finally, many manufacturers provided

⁷⁴ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 37.

⁷⁵ *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Jun-Jul. 1927: 6.

⁷⁶ *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Jun-Jul. 1927: 4.

⁷⁷ "Lantern Slides," *The Wallpaper Magazine* Apr-May 1922: 16.

advertising material and dummies for the retailer's window display, and some even provided the services of expert window dressers.⁷⁸

A decorator sold not only WPM products but those of other manufacturers too. As branded goods became increasingly the norm, publicity material was sent out to promote the brand names. As soon as WPM had registered the Crown trademark, around 1931, it likewise sent window bills and labels bearing the name, and urged the decorator to promote the brand rather than 'quality English wallpapers'. This was another way of exercising control over selling and consumption. Since before World War I larger manufacturing firms had been looking to create sales departments to manage the specialist marketing of their goods on a national scale. This 'had become a common discussion point at meetings of sales managers, and bypassing the wholesaler was becoming a growing practice in some trades.'⁷⁹ This was certainly true of the wallpaper industry. Furthermore, growth in amalgamations and combinations among firms made it possible to limit the output of goods and therefore the costs of distribution. The general rise in living standards in the 1930s and the wider choice of consumer goods available had led to a rise in costs of distribution generally, with wallpaper no exception. The cost of wallpaper distribution stood at 55% of the value of consumer expenditure in 1938, higher than for the similar products of linoleum or household textiles.⁸⁰ As Levy states, 'It is a curious fact that with increasing technical progress the way from the producer to the final consumer has not been shortened but lengthened, and the stages of transit have not decreased but multiplied.'⁸¹ Manufacturers sought to reduce the complexity and cost of distribution by going straight to the retailer with their products and, in the case of WPM, through their house organs as well.

In the lifetime of *The Wallpaper Magazine*, the high street changed fundamentally with a significant move away from independent retailers to multiples, co-ops and chains. Retail products came to be defined by their brand names which required

⁷⁸ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 94.

⁷⁹ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 12.

⁸⁰ Jefferys and Bareau, "Chart 2," *Consumer Goods, The Methods and Cost of Distribution*, no page numbers.

⁸¹ Levy, *The Shops of Britain*, 19.

nationwide advertising to support them. However, if there was one industry which somewhat bucked the trend, it was wallpaper. The independent distributor survived for far longer than retailers of other products and WPM recognised the need to continue to energetically pursue the relationship with him through the magazine. The magazine was intended to be vibrant, friendly and a source of education as well as a business tool. The next chapter will consider how its visual impact helped in that pursuit.

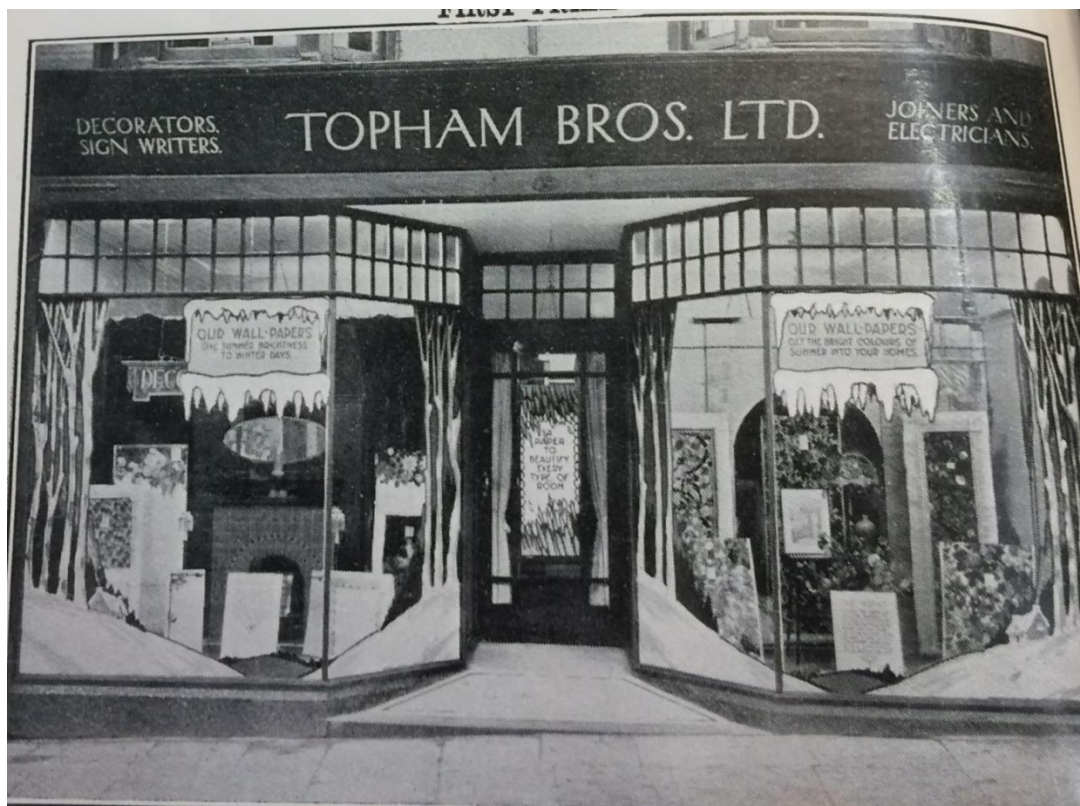


Fig. 3: Topham Bros. Ltd, winner of the Window Dressing Competition 1925 and a typical example of a decorator's shop. *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Mar-Apr. 1925, 12. Print. Photo by the author.

Chapter 3

The Wallpaper Magazine as Designed Object: Launch and Impact

This chapter will consider the magazine as a designed object, linking it to the aims of the magazine at its launch and in the years that followed. It will look at the possible visual impact the design of the magazine had on the salesman and its intended effect in promoting better salesmanship. In arguing that 'magazines deviate from other printed sources in both content and appearance because editorials and advertisements, pictures and words are constantly competing for our attention,'⁸² Aynsley and Forde confirm the need to focus on a salient element in magazine research. Therefore, because of the wealth of detail in the magazine this analysis is confined to the cover design, the first feature to meet the salesman's eye. It will consider the cover from visual, historical, semiological and commercial viewpoints, looking at the ideas and people which might have inspired its design, as well as assessing how it changes over 19 years and what that reveals about WPM as a company. Although the magazine is a designed object with a graphic language conveyed through layout, colour, texture and dimension, arguably it has a third dimension, namely a voice, numerous voices in fact, representing those within the trade and without, which speak directly to the reader. For the cover and design a diachronic study has proved most suitable as over the magazine's lifetime a number of changes occur abruptly because of historical events or promotional necessity. The different iterations of the magazine do not always occur in the January-April issues so it has proved useful to look at the entire collection to interpret its visual mode of address. This will create a frame into which the full picture of the magazine can later be inserted. Before that, it is relevant to investigate the magazine's original aims.

⁸² Aynsley and Forde, *Design and the Modern Magazine*, 2.

The Launch of the Magazine

The Wallpaper Magazine was published and launched by Charles Higham (1876-1938), a publicist and advertising consultant who ran his own agency, Charles F. Higham Ltd.⁸³ He started his business a few years after his return in 1908 from many years of living in America, where he had studied and absorbed the new approaches to publicity brought about by mass production on the other side of the Atlantic. As a member of the British government Committee on Recruiting Propaganda he brought his expertise to bear on army recruitment publicity in World War I and was also responsible for War Loan advertising. He served as Conservative MP for Islington South from 1918-1922 and was knighted in 1921 for his services during the war.⁸⁴ Higham's agency also ran a stable of house organs, and was responsible for launching *The Wallpaper Magazine*. In his own company magazine *Higham's Magazine*, the house organ was defined as 'a medium in the form of a monthly or quarterly magazine,'⁸⁵ and viewed as a useful means of communication between manufacturer and consumer, manufacturer and agent, or manufacturer and employee. Its so-called 'elasticity,'⁸⁶ in giving a voice to both the company and its distributors, offered not only the opportunity for the exchange of ideas and dissemination of news from head office but also for the 'gingering up'⁸⁷ of the salesman, a concept dear to WPM's heart as it meant better business:

Think of the money there would be in it for you if you could *do business personally* with all your customers. But what if you can't? You can maintain personal contact with them and hold them, with a monthly, personal House Organ that talks service and friendliness.⁸⁸

Higham also ran a design studio of commercial artists (Fig. 4) so it can be assumed that every aspect of publication, except printing, was undertaken in-house. The fact that

⁸³ The tiny line at the bottom of page 24 of *The Wall Paper Magazine* Apr-May 1922 reading 'Designed and carried out by Charles F. Higham Ltd and printed by Cartwright and Rattray Ltd, M'ch' spurred further research which revealed Higham to be the publisher.

⁸⁴ "Advertising Expert: Death of Sir Charles Higham," *The Scotsman*, 27 Dec. 1938: 14.

⁸⁵ H. St George Ogden, "House Organs," *Higham's Magazine: A Business Magazine for Progressive Men*, May 1919: 8.

⁸⁶ Ogden, "House Organs," 8.

⁸⁷ Ogden, "House Organs," 8.

⁸⁸ *Higham's Magazine*, Nov. 1919: V.

Charles F. Higham Ltd had its offices in Imperial House, Kingsway, the same building in which WPM had its London headquarters at one point, no doubt facilitated conversation and the exchange of views.⁸⁹ Higham believed that the publication of house organs should be entrusted to professionals, with the customer providing the necessary information and the publisher putting it into shape, looking after the block making and printing and running the publication from start to finish. In his opinion the house organ's destiny 'must be controlled[...]not by any man in the office who has some time to spare, but by an expert editor who has a thoroughly sound knowledge of all its requirements.'⁹⁰ No doubt Higham was a popular choice for WPM not only for his experience but also because of his evangelical zeal for the power of publicity and proven track record in attracting army recruits at a time when WPM needed badly to recruit an army of salesmen to its own cause.

The stated aims of the magazine, according to its inaugural editorial column in April 1920, were as follows:

For some time, in fact ever since the wall paper trade began to recuperate from its inevitable war-time slackness, there has been a need for a publication which would not only further the interests of the trade in the general sense, but which would prove a source of practical help to all engaged in it; which would, in short, deal more *intimately* with the distributor's difficulties than the wall paper publications already in existence...We want the distributor to feel that in this little magazine he has a personal friend which will always give him information and advice, and to which he is heartily welcomed to write of both his experiences and his problems.⁹¹

This warm overture to the reader suggests a mission to be a source of help and support to the salesman, reaching out with a hand of friendship to its unseen readers. Even Higham reviews it as 'a concrete example of a house organ published by a manufacturer for the express purpose of rendering service to that part of the trade

⁸⁹ The offices of the publisher Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons and of *The Decorator* magazine were also in this area, marking it out as a thriving publishing location.

⁹⁰ J. A. Porteous, "House Organs," *Higham's Magazine*, March 1920, 5.

⁹¹ "Foreword," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, April 1920: 1.

represented by the distributors.’⁹² However the prevailing business climate demanded the full cooperation of those on the selling side of the industry, many of whom were not directly employed by WPM but ran their own independent wallpaper business, and the phrase ‘further the interests of the trade’ indicates a powerful imperative on the part of WPM to use the magazine to improve profitability. Even its small size (20 x 14 cms), designed to ‘just naturally gravitate’⁹³ to the pocket, was calculated to position it close at hand. The main publication ‘already in existence’ to which distributors turned was most likely *The Decorator*, first published in 1902. Billed as the ‘official organ of the London Association of Decorators’⁹⁴ this much larger and thicker magazine⁹⁵ (30 x 23cms) comprised about 20% advertisements, largely devoted to paint and associated products, and provided information and technical advice apparently aimed at the jobbing decorator rather than the salesman. Its cover consisted uniquely of multiple small advertisements (Fig. 5). However it did review the new wallpaper pattern books and promoted decorative schemes for papered walls. In the early 1920s the only WPM products being advertised in *The Decorator* are Anaglypta and Lincrusta⁹⁶ and Walpamur paints, but by 1924 advertisements for WPM patterned wallpapers appear, promoting their quality and soliciting the cooperation of decorators in selling it in a ‘common cause.’⁹⁷ This move towards collaboration supports the view⁹⁸ that *The Wallpaper Magazine* was established in the spirit of friendly co-operation, to be a unifying force between the disparate branches of WPM, an attempt to generate cohesion and harmony after the disruption of the 1899 amalgamation and the acquisition of ten more firms in 1915.⁹⁹ This is a convincing argument, as the magazine contains many reports from the individual branches and details of sports and social events which have brought employees together, but it appears to have ambitions to reach distributors across the whole industry and position itself as the voice of the

⁹² “A New House Organ,” *Higham’s Magazine*, May 1920: 12.

⁹³ *Higham’s Magazine*, Nov. 1919: V.

⁹⁴ *The Decorator*, 22 Jul. 1920.

⁹⁵ Approximately 74 pages to *The Wallpaper Magazine’s* 26.

⁹⁶ These were embossed papers that could be painted over.

⁹⁷ *The Decorator*, 22 Nov. 1924: 345.

⁹⁸ Burton, personal interview.

⁹⁹ The Monopolies Commission, *Report on the Supply of Wallpaper*, 7.

trade. According to the Directors, the magazine was to be issued free of charge to 13,000 'distributors of wallpaper,' and was timed to take advantage of the extensive house-building programmes being undertaken and the extra wages in workers' pockets which would enable them to spend money on decorating their new homes.¹⁰⁰ The light touch taken by the magazine's editorial belies a more commercially-driven aim which will be explored in Chapter 4 and this contradiction must be considered in assessing the magazine's visual message – is it designed to appeal as a benevolent partner or a rigorous enforcer of company values?

The Cover Design: 1920

The covers of the magazine over 19 years demonstrate an initial exuberance and ambition followed by a more sober, conservative approach with a variety of ad hoc decisions generating changes and adaptations to its visual presentation. It launched in April 1920 with a cover design of red and white roses and purple lilac on both front and back, presumably drawn from a WPM wallpaper of that season (Fig. 6). The majority of the space is given over to this design, with the masthead, in a conservative capitalised serif typeface, located right at the top as if to give priority to the wallpaper. No indication is given as to the content or target reader of the magazine or the fact that this is the first issue. The prevailing sense is of a publication about design and fashion, rather than business, and in its choice of colourful florals it has a distinctly feminine appeal. All this seems bewildering given that the magazine only ever addresses its reader as 'he' and is squarely aimed at men who are merchants, decorators or retailers. One explanation might be the involvement of Ethel Mannin (1900-1984),¹⁰¹ Higham's young associate editor on *Higham's Magazine* from 1917-1919 who, though she had to give up this role on the return of H. St George Ogden from the war,¹⁰² continued to be a prolific contributor to this publication and *The Wallpaper Magazine* over many years. Mannin, who had gained a diploma in business

¹⁰⁰ "The Wall Paper Manufacturers Limited: A Successful Year," *The Yorkshire Post*, 10 Dec. 1920: 11.

¹⁰¹ Mannin's name came to light as her novel *Men Are Unwise* is listed in Entwisle's *A Literary History of Wallpaper*.

¹⁰² Samuel noted that 'Wartime commissions, mysteriously surviving as military ranks in the days of peace, dignified the holders with the magic of authority.' Samuel, "The Middle Class between the Wars: Part Two," 29.

training, was only 15 when she was sent to work for Higham as a stenographer but by 16 was writing advertisements and running two house organs for him, so by the time *The Wallpaper Magazine* launched she would have been a seasoned editor.¹⁰³ Perhaps the floral design was selected to be attention-grabbing on a newsstand, where the magazine could be bought for 3 old pence, but this seems unlikely as the primary method of distribution was direct to the distributor free of charge. Nevertheless, an eye-catching design would draw the distributor to the magazine and gain his interest straightaway. As Rose notes 'visual imagery is never innocent'¹⁰⁴ and this launch design must surely have been the subject of intense discussion. It might have sought to reinforce the article entitled "The Feminine Appeal" inside¹⁰⁵ but whether it is a statement of contemporary wallpaper trends, relatable domesticity or simply arresting colour it would have persuaded the reader to open the cover and delve inside. Printed on glossy paper, it exuded quality and style without any alarmingly modernistic tendencies, reinforced by its traditional typeface. Higham was proud to announce that the magazine would have a cover incorporating three colours 'each issue portraying a fine example of wallpaper'¹⁰⁶ but after six issues, each one featuring a different wallpaper of flowers or birds, and experiments with boxing in the masthead as well as separating the word 'wallpaper' into two words,¹⁰⁷ the magazine underwent a significant shift in design in 1921. The impact had no doubt been made but a new message was needed.

¹⁰³ Higham championed women in business, believing them to be 'as efficient as men and[...]certainly more loyal.' "Advertising Expert: Death of Sir Charles Higham," 14.

¹⁰⁴ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: Sage, 2000) 32.

¹⁰⁵ "The Feminine Appeal," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, April 1920: 8.

¹⁰⁶ "A New House Organ," 12.

¹⁰⁷ The magazine was given the spelling *The Wall Paper Magazine* from June 1920.



Fig. 4: Details of the Studio of Charles F. Higham, Ltd, with *The Wall Paper Magazine* clearly visible among its stable of house organs. *Higham's Magazine*, Nov. 1920, 7. Print. Photo by the author.



Fig. 5: Cover of *The Decorator*, Jan. 1934. Print. Photo by the author.



Fig. 6: *The Wallpaper Magazine* launch issue, April 1920. Print. Photo by the author.

The Cover Design: 1921-1931

For the next two years the cover design was reduced to two colours, possibly for cost reasons, with a neoclassical border in orange and white framing a large white space into which is introduced insignia of a roll of wallpaper and a pasting brush laid on top of a triangular frame of curlicues (Fig. 7). The message being conveyed overturns that of the previous magazines: although frames and borders were popular as wall dressings, this logo now suggests something of the weight and tradition of the industry, a reassuring longevity with a unifying symbol, something akin to the mark of a guild, which serves to unify the decorating profession in one purpose. It was also possibly to shape the magazine as ‘a trustworthy and dignified ambassador-in-print’¹⁰⁸ – *Higham’s Magazine’s* definition of what a house organ should be. There is no existing evidence of this symbol being already in use. It appears to have been created for the magazine and was used until 1925 when it was replaced temporarily by the symbol of the English lion alongside those of three key Dominions of the British Empire: the kangaroo (Australia), the springbok (South Africa) and the silver fern (New Zealand) (Fig. 8). The inspiration no doubt came from the British Empire Exhibition, held at Wembley from April 1924 to October 1925 and followed up by the establishment of the Empire Marketing Board in 1926 which was set up to help promote trade across the Empire and give a boost to British businesses. By this point the magazine had downgraded its cover paper to a coarser brown stock and removed all secondary colour from the inside of the magazine, indicating a need for cost-cutting during a period when WPM was suffering from competition domestically, particularly on price, and even more intensely in the overseas Dominions.¹⁰⁹ Canada, which had been able to soak up the colonial trade lost by WPM during World War I, had posed a particular challenge but this was quashed by WPM buying up their four main producers in 1927 and incorporating them under the name Canadian Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd

¹⁰⁸ Ogden, “House Organs,” 10.

¹⁰⁹ “The Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd: Extract from the Chairman’s Speech.” *The English Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1925: 10.

(CWM).¹¹⁰ Now was an opportune time to enthuse the distributor at home and abroad and travellers were sent overseas with WPM sample books – maybe they also carried the magazine with them? Whilst the cover design proudly conveys Imperial unity, the articles and advertisements within from the late 1920s ceaselessly promote wallpapers on the strength of their English provenance.¹¹¹ For part of the duration of the British Empire Exhibition the magazine chose to rename itself *The English Wallpaper Magazine* but reverted to *The Wallpaper Magazine* before becoming *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, complete with the Crown trademark, in August 1931, (Fig. 9) reflecting a need to support the ‘Buy British’ campaign designed by the Empire Marketing Board to help pull Britain out of economic depression.¹¹² With the trademark now registered,¹¹³ WPM was able to use the Crown logo together with the brand name on the selvedge of its papers. On every magazine cover there is a visual message to the salesman about which aspect of the wallpapers to emphasise in his selling campaigns. How long Higham remained in charge is unclear but it could be argued that these restless changes of name demonstrate a serious lack of editorial control or at least a puzzling inconsistency. They are not explained to the reader, as we would expect nowadays, but arguably the message, even if subliminal to the reader, is clear in its intent. It signals at each point a change of direction in the marketing strategy of the company and the way in which it wishes its wallpapers to be perceived and sold. As time elapses, the magazine that claimed to be the distributor’s ‘friend’ becomes more clearly focused on its commercial message than on continuity and loyalty to the reader. The salesman may have found the constant changes of design and title exasperating or they may have served to make him look at the magazine anew. WPM may have been battling a declining readership - evidence shows that between 1932 and 1934 readership of trade journals by retail categories decreased from 70.1% of all retailers to 66.3%, with a much higher degree of non-readership

¹¹⁰ R. M. Kelly, “Toward a History of Canadian Wallpaper Use: Mechanization 1860-1935.” *Material Culture Review*, 80 (2015): 29.

¹¹¹ “Solid Reasons Why it Pays to Push English Wallpapers,” *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Aug.-Sep. 1927: 6.

¹¹² “Spend Wisely and Buy British,” *The British Wallpaper Magazine* Aug.-Oct. 1931: 4.

¹¹³ This is a presumption based on WPM starting to use the trademark both in the magazine and on the wallpapers. Neither the company records nor UK Trademark Registration records at the British Library list it in 1931 so further research is needed. The Crown device was registered in 1900.

outside London, where the majority of wallpaper shops were located.¹¹⁴ One explanation may be that magazines focusing on home design were by now readily available so there were alternative sources for learning about trends in interior design.

From 1923 to 1937, in addition to the variety of titles used, a number of different background designs were also employed. These did not necessarily coincide with changes in the title. April 1923 saw the introduction of a stencilled tree design on a pale blue background and similar stencil designs of either trees or roses growing over a trellis feature over the next 10 years (see cover), with variation in the background colour. These are possibly the work of Leonard W. Pike, an artist and interior decorator who wrote frequent pieces about room schemes for *The Decorator* illustrated with his own very similar designs, and advertised a book of stencils for sale from his shop in Worcester. These designs may have been taken from actual wall stencils or created exclusively for the magazine. They bear some resemblance to the mature trees so often depicted in the posters of speculative house builders to foster the ideology of the rural idyll being created in the suburbs, but they do not seem to have been chosen with any great care. Their message to the salesman is unclear as they are utilised for too long a period to depict the latest trends in patterns or contain any reference to historical or economic conditions as had been effected with the Empire covers. Coupled with the unchanging capitalised serif typeface they represent conservatism, a sense of business as usual, and indeed the late 1920s was a period of steady growth for the company, yet inside the text remains dynamic in its exploration of the new techniques of salesmanship.

The Cover Design: Crown Branding

When the next major design change to the cover saw the incorporation of the Crown logo in the centre, in August 1931, with the word 'trademark' alongside it from November, this symbolised a growing recognition by WPM of the importance of the

¹¹⁴ Sales Research Services, *The Readership of Trade Journals in the Greater London and Provincial Markets, 1934* (London: Sales Research Services, 1934) V.

brand in promoting its papers, coinciding with the considerable growth in its own multiple stores. This would have been absorbed by the salesman as the latest approach to selling. This ultimately resulted in the relaunch of the magazine in a new format as *The Crown Wallpaper Magazine* in January 1938, featuring a mint-green masthead with a new modernistic typeface, albeit still serif-based, and a startling, almost surreal image of a decorator constructed from rolls of wallpaper striding up the steps of a house made itself of wallpaper (Fig. 10). This daring departure from previous graphic language is abrupt and powerful, signalling, finally, an energetic embrace of modernism and an urgency for the salesman to look at modern 'scientific' ways of selling. For the first time the magazine confidently announces the change to the reader - 'your old friend in his new jacket!'¹¹⁵ - reiterating the notion of friendship stated in its original aims but also trumpeting the arrival of 'a more ambitious magazine...catering for a new age.'¹¹⁶ The black and white documentary-style cover photography in subsequent issues, displaying the industriousness of the workforce and the modern technology of the machinery, with explanatory captions, brings the magazine in line with photojournalistic titles of the period such as *Picture Post* which launched in the same year, giving it a new agency. At a troubled time in history this design had the clarity and power to unite the salesforce under the banner of friendship once again and engender a pride in the company in the two short years before the country found itself once again at war and the magazine was obliged to cease publication.

¹¹⁵ "Back cover," *The Crown Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Mar. 1938.

¹¹⁶ "Back cover," *The Crown Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Mar. 1938.



Fig. 7: *The Wall Paper Magazine* Apr-May 1921. Print. Photo by the author.

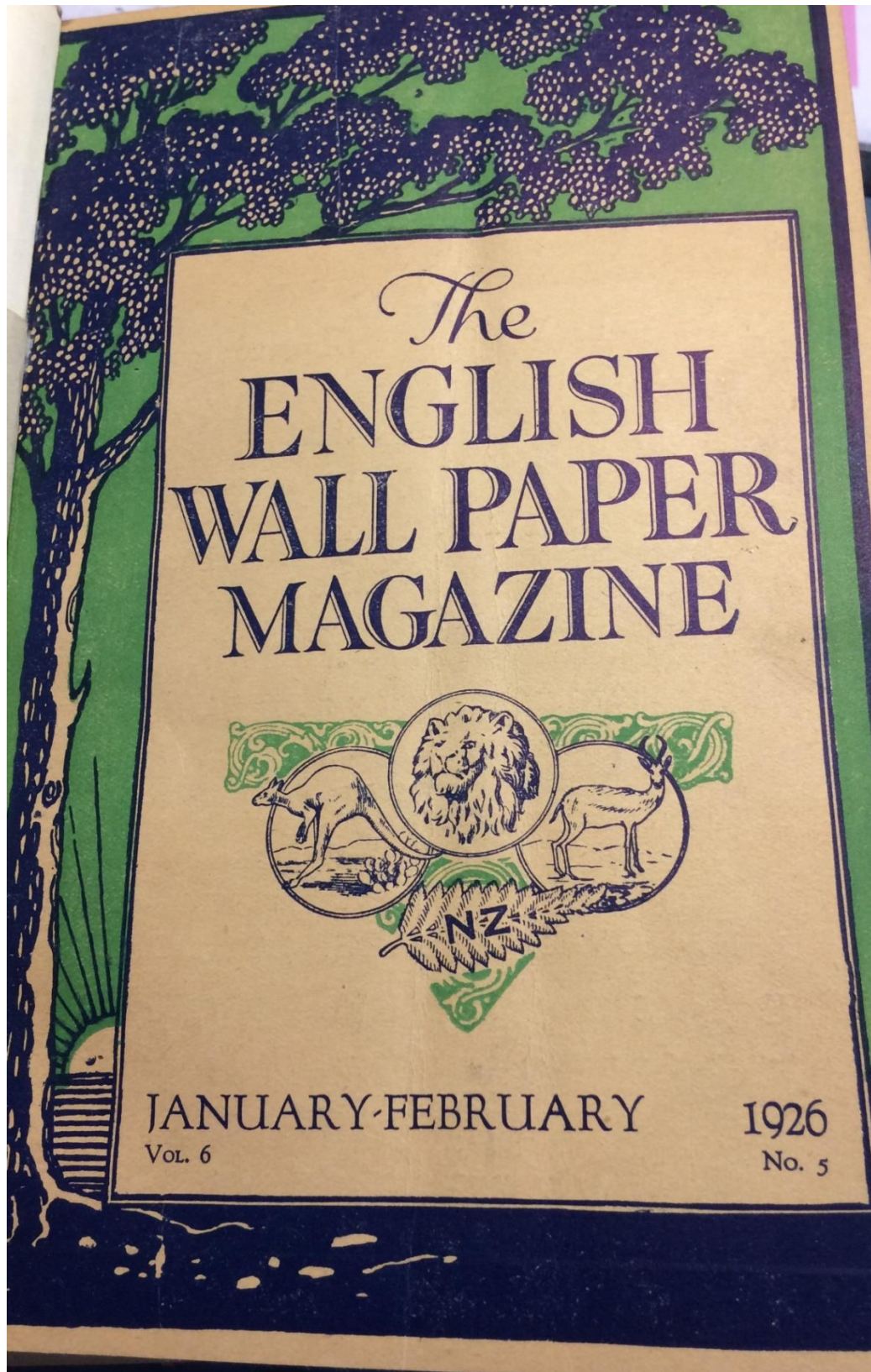


Fig. 8: *The English Wall Paper Magazine* Jan-Feb. 1926. Print. Photo by the author.



Fig. 9: *The British Wallpaper Magazine* Aug-Oct. 1931, featuring the crown device. Print. Photo by the author.

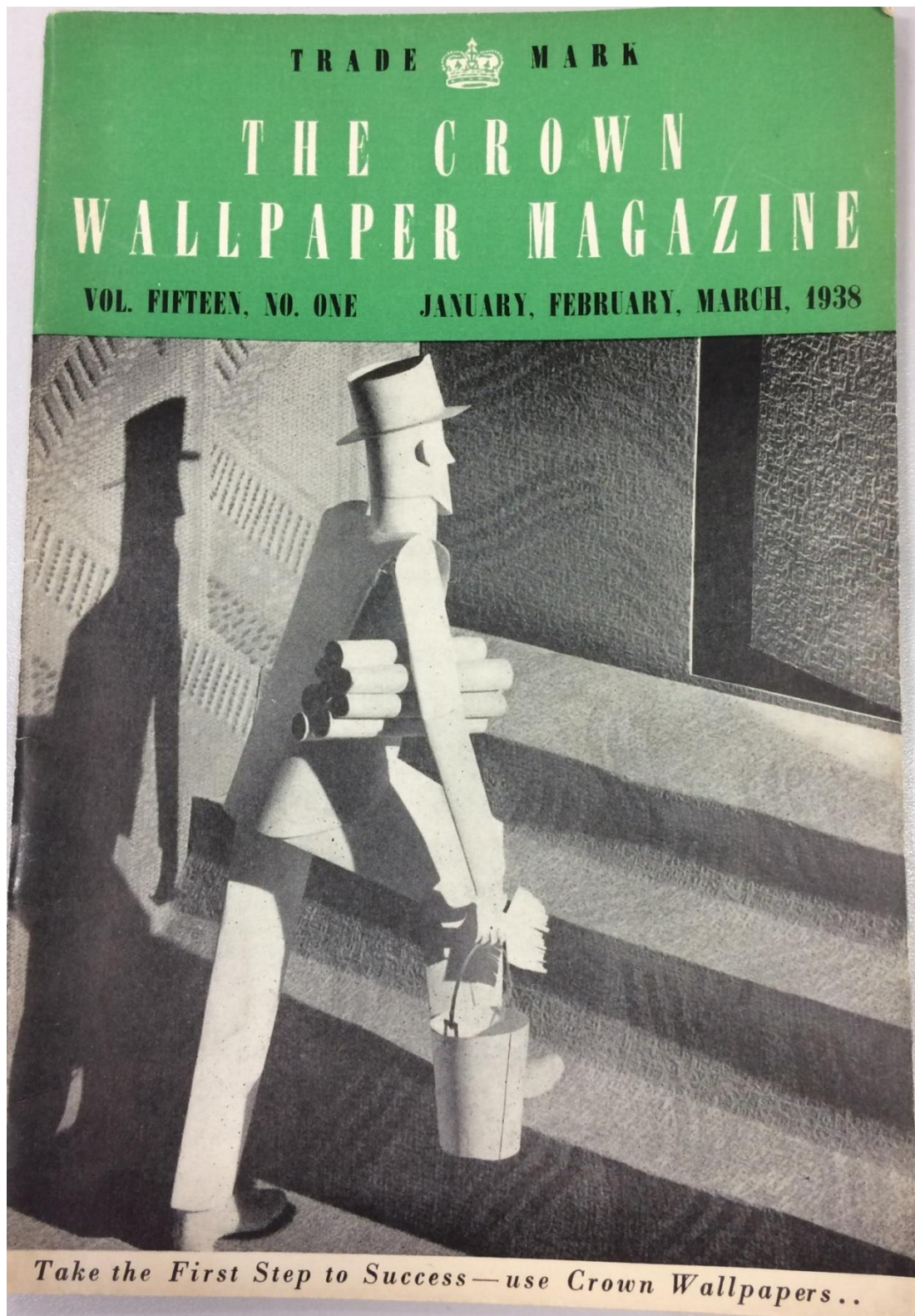


Fig. 10: *The Crown Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Mar. 1938, with a new emphasis on modernism and the Crown brand. Print. Photo by the author.

Chapter 4

The Science of Salesmanship

Introducing the Science

At the time of the launch of *The Wallpaper Magazine* in 1920, the systemisation of selling, primarily designed to manage large centralised sales forces in companies of mass production in order to enable greater efficiency and growth, was well established. Salesmanship was starting to be taught in universities, business schools and even night classes.¹¹⁷ This chapter will investigate how this 'science', which emanated primarily from America, was adopted and promulgated by WPM through the pages of the magazine. As academics¹¹⁸ generated research studies and statistics, the newly formed sales departments of British and American companies grappled with how best to apply the new discipline. Many of the theories were aimed at travelling salesmen employed by large firms, but the basic tenets are readily applicable to salesmen in shops too and are therefore relevant here. However, the studies looked at the selling of consumer goods generally, without distinguishing between product types and it is doubtful that any of its theorists had any experience of working face to face with retail customers, let alone had any direct knowledge of the wallpaper business. Unlike soap, tobacco or breakfast cereals, wallpaper was a product which was subject to fashion and had the potential to change the look of a home for years. Poor sales advice could adversely affect the decorator as well as the client as Henry Dowling noted: 'error in judgment by the interior decorator is costly both in time and materials'.¹¹⁹ WPM drew on ideas from both British and American sources, as well as the advertising expertise of Charles Higham, to shape its salesmen. As Church attests: 'In contrast to the relative neglect of salesmen in Britain, the study of American

¹¹⁷ The Royal Society of Arts, "Report on the Society's Examinations, 1931," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 79.4115 (1931): 962-70.

¹¹⁸ Dean Edwin Gay, Arch W. Shaw, Melvin T. Copeland and Harry R. Tosdal were notable scholars in the field at Harvard Business School.

¹¹⁹ Henry G. Dowling, "Wallpaper: Its History, Production and Possibilities," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 73.3782 (1925): 598.

salesmen is much more advanced'¹²⁰ so certain common factors must be deduced from the American model. In the wallpaper industry the new 'science' was employed initially as a rather blunt instrument, particularly in the early 1920s, and its more sophisticated ideas were slower to be absorbed. Nevertheless, it was enthusiastically welcomed and a set of beliefs evolved which were intended to galvanise the wallpaper salesman.

The Evolution of the Science

The 'science' of salesmanship evolved from the rise in mass manufacturing at the turn of the 20th century when the scale of production necessitated a more systematic approach to selling. Friedman, a business historian, explains that the Americans, who were generally ahead of Britain in exploring the so-called science, were quick to adopt the idea that salesmanship could be governed by a set of theoretical principles. One influential promoter of this idea in the early 1900s was John H. Patterson, founder of the National Cash Register Company, who aimed to build systems of sales management that would coordinate production and distribution and also strove 'to make an all-encompassing science of selling.'¹²¹ He designed strategic 'pyramid plans', dividing processes into standardised procedures to achieve homogeneity in selling style. The character of the salesman was of great importance, with one plan detailing the necessary attributes as 'health, honesty, ability, industry and knowledge of the business.'¹²² WPM likewise advised: 'You've got to be a very tactful, sympathetic, understanding, discerning sort of person to sell anything successfully, particularly wallpaper, which is a matter so closely affecting home-life.'¹²³ In America the new discipline aimed to banish a general distrust of the unscrupulous and unregulated drummers and canvassers of the 19th century, by professionalising the salesman. Patterson was among the first to organise sales conventions, training and inculcating salesmen with company principles, in almost military style, and establishing quotas

¹²⁰ Church, "Salesmen and the Transformation of Selling," 697.

¹²¹ Walter A. Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman: The Transformation of Selling in America* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard UP, 2004) 117.

¹²² Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 134.

¹²³ "Letters from a Decorator," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Dec-Jan. 1921: 7.

and measuring performance. He developed a *Primer* which divided selling into four simple steps: approach, proposition, demonstration and close.¹²⁴ Soon other ambitious entrepreneurs followed suit and established their own competitive and successful salesforces.¹²⁵ At this stage the aims were fairly simple. Salesmen were encouraged to put subtle pressure on the customer, with scripts providing answers to rebut any common objections. They were expected to demonstrate a boundless enthusiasm in the product combined with determination and self-belief. Patterson believed 'the greatest inhibitors of success were cowardice, discouragement, and lack of confidence.'¹²⁶ As Patterson was based in London for two years in 1908 he may well have influenced WPM. Charles Higham, who published *The Wallpaper Magazine*, was a passionate follower of American advertising and business practices and the 1920s magazines are replete with his enthusiasm for the new ideas. The gung-ho language is littered with maxims such as 'Success is all a question of pluck, not luck'¹²⁷ and 'capacity never lacks opportunity.'¹²⁸ There is admiration for the 'pep' of the American salesman and his marketing ideas, like making 'little counter novelties such as lamp-shades, boxes, writing-pads and blotters'¹²⁹ from spare wallpaper; and exasperation with the reticence of the British wallpaper man. Instead of his 'fondness for playing a lone hand'¹³⁰ he is urged to work with other distributors on co-operative publicity like their 'progressive cousins across the "herring pond."¹³¹ In an early British marketing survey Sinclair Wood endorsed this, claiming that: 'If we could apply the typically thorough sales planning and control of the Americans to the native restraint and genius of the individual British salesman, then we should be able to sell our goods as we have always been able to make them – better than anyone in the world.'¹³² WPM

¹²⁴ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 125.

¹²⁵ These included W.K. Kellogg, William Cooper Procter of Procter and Gamble and Robert W. Woodruff of Coca-Cola.

¹²⁶ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 136.

¹²⁷ "Editorial," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Feb-Mar. 1922, 1.

¹²⁸ "Success," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Apr-May 1922, 8.

¹²⁹ "What Does Your Counter Hold?" *The English Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1925, 7.

¹³⁰ "What Does Your Counter Hold?" *The English Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1925, 7.

¹³¹ "Why Not Co-operative Wallpaper Publicity?" *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-May 1927, 5. The 'herring pond' was a commonly used expression for the Atlantic at this time.

¹³² Sinclair Wood, "How to Use this Survey," *Marketing Survey of the United Kingdom*, ed. Cecil Chisholm (London: Business Publications Ltd, 1937), 21.

and Higham disregarded this 'restraint and genius' in the first 7-8 years of the magazine in order to make an unsubtle push for business based on the quality of the products, the need for efficiency, the education of the customer and all forms of promotion and publicity. There is expediency to the approach which is rooted in the weak economic conditions of the time.

Going on the Offensive

In the 1920s, aware of and uncomfortable with the competition from cheaper wallpapers, WPM, which prided itself on the quality and design of its papers and paints, took the view that if only customers could be made aware of those qualities, they would choose them over lower-priced alternatives. They recruited the decorators to the cause, pointing out to them 'how they may cultivate customers by educating them to an appreciation of more and better papers.'¹³³ However, in Dowling's opinion the advice failed to recognise that the decorators might lack an understanding of the 'principles governing good decoration'¹³⁴ and that they would make better salesmen if they were suitably trained:

A more intimate knowledge and appreciation of what is good would certainly make for greater enthusiasm, and salesmen would thus become greater factors in the advancement of good design. It can scarcely be challenged that the retail salesman exercises a larger influence in affecting the quality of the thing sold to the customer than that coming from any other quarter.¹³⁵

Although WPM had rejected in the main the opportunity to develop papers of a more modern style that would please the design critics, they believed that their papers stood on their own merits and that winning business was merely a question of educating the public:

when they are made to realise how much brighter are their homes with better-class papers, they will always buy the best and cease to purchase inferior makes. In this magazine distributors will find many useful hints on how the public may be brought to this understanding.¹³⁶

¹³³ The Wallpaper Magazine April 1920, 2

¹³⁴ Dowling, "Wallpaper: Its History, Production and Possibilities," 598.

¹³⁵ Dowling, "Wallpaper: Its History, Production and Possibilities," 598.

¹³⁶ "Foreword," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, April 1920, 2.

Whilst WPM's conviction in its products is persuasive, there is a noticeable absence of interest in the customer's needs, wants and tastes. She is viewed almost as a child, to be 'educated' into buying the right type of paper, and the didactic tone of the magazine's directives in 'made to realise' and 'brought to this understanding' suggest a missionary zeal that will be discussed in more detail below. WPM advertisements from *The Decorator*, a general trade magazine of the time, also bear out this emphasis on quality, with slogans such as 'Why It Sells' (December 1924) and 'Prestige Versus Cost' (March 1926) and an emphasis on the long tradition of reliability and durability in their wallpapers. In the post-war period WPM faced the challenge of a shortage of decorators because of the huge losses of men in the conflict so it needed to create a fraternity among those remaining or in training to help get business going again. There is much written about co-operation and a 'common cause' between the company and the decorators in facing the future. The immediate post-war years offered the opportunity to sell the idea of redecorating to celebrate the homecoming of husbands and sons and make up for 'nearly five years of decorating arrears',¹³⁷ and brightly coloured papers were promoted to lift everyone's mood. But even in 1920 WPM was warning the salesman to look ahead to a time when 'the paper put on to-day is a little dusty and faded, and the paint has dimmed on the outside of the house. And there are no homecoming men-folk to inspire her to re-decoration.'¹³⁸ The war would soon cease to provide a reason to sell, but the effect of many men coming out of military service and back into the trade, particularly senior officers in management roles, had a noticeable impact on the way in which the decorator is addressed in the magazine. Just as there is a very patriarchal attitude to the women customers, there is a distinctly hierarchical approach towards the decorator. He is frequently treated as a lower-ranking subordinate to be drilled in the systems of selling. Military language pervades the early magazines with articles bearing titles such as 'The Spring Offensive',¹³⁹ and

¹³⁷ "Educating the Public," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, April 1920, 4.

¹³⁸ "Educating the Public," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, April 1920, 4.

¹³⁹ *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Feb-Mar. 1922, 8.

the need to keep good records as part of the 'armoury of trade weapons.'¹⁴⁰ Despite the insensitivity this displayed towards the many men who would have preferred to put the horrors of war behind them, business advancement is viewed as a new battleground where brave troops will go out to conquer competitors and claim the victory of better business. This approach lays the path for the later campaigns based on promoting English wallpapers where patriotism and national pride were called on to inspire the salesman to resist stocking cheaper foreign papers and promote those made by WPM.

Selling and Masculinity

The somewhat regimented approach to the salesman in the early magazines owed a debt not just to the armed forces but also a cult of masculinity. Although women occasionally appear in photographs of decorators' shops and it is thought that many wives helped their husbands run his business, the majority of WPM's advertisements depict a well-groomed man in a smart suit helping a woman choose from a pattern book. In the background sometimes appears a decorator in his white coat selling paint pots, but clearly the professional work of selling is the responsibility of a higher class of man. Friedman notes that retail selling was considered in essence an effeminate job as it involved an interest in fashion and design combined with a polite manner and therefore 'entrepreneurs and managers responded to changing ideas about gender as they tried to redefine selling as a masculine profession, dependent on hard work and determination, rather than on feminized skills of seduction.'¹⁴¹ In America and Britain women had recently won the vote and, with the shortage of men to fill business roles, this might explain the need to elevate salesmanship to a professional rank to give it appeal. These men were expected to be resilient, not only in selling to the customer but in dealing with the competition, and the magazine at times instilled a sense of fear into them: 'You've got your Spring Campaign cut and dried of course. No? Well, the

¹⁴⁰ "Press Publicity for 1925," *The English Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1925, 8.

¹⁴¹ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 13.

man over the road has!’¹⁴² In the same way there is a constant reminder of the need for efficiency, which was considered synonymous with modern business methods, with a suggestion that the alternative means ruin: ‘Efficiency counts. It means bigger business and bigger profits. Inefficiency means failure. It means letting the competition get on top, it means letting the more efficient organisation leap ahead.’¹⁴³ Again the militaristic style prevails and, if not provoking alarm in the distributor, might have generated resentment. The rhetorical device of repeating a phrase three times (‘it means’) is used to drive home the point that WPM has a clear set of expectations of its men and will tolerate nothing less than success. Ironically, the reader of the magazine was not actually beholden to WPM, but an independent business man.

Evangelism and the Protestant Work Ethic

By contrast, the newly established business schools in America analysed the functions of the salesman and gathered economic data about the costs of distribution to assess the efficiency generated by the salesforces. There was a dawning realisation that salesmanship offered ‘an opportunity to create new markets’¹⁴⁴ for, in common with WPM, the USA had seen that ‘the problem was not how to sustain high levels of production, but how to stimulate demand for the products they churned out in great number.’¹⁴⁵ A class of professional specialists arose around the subject and ‘salesmanship became of interest to psychologists, economists, ministers and politicians.’¹⁴⁶ Selling became systematised along the same lines as production, with sales and marketing integral to the expansion of industries to the point that ‘large firms were capable not only of production on a great scale, but also of persuasion, pressure and the fostering of an evangelical exuberance.’¹⁴⁷ The evangelical zeal which underpins salesmanship at this time is an important component of *The Wallpaper Magazine*. It is frequently associated with industry and hard work, as well as an

¹⁴² “Better Business this Spring! Bright Ideas Come with the Sunny Season,” *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Feb-Mar. 1928, 5.

¹⁴³ “A Practical Book for the Distributor,” *The Wallpaper Magazine*, April 1920, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 151.

¹⁴⁵ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 151.

¹⁴⁶ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 5.

¹⁴⁷ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 7.

unshakeable belief in the merits of wallpaper, as in this example of an editorial from 1921:

We believe in Christmas[...]But unless the Christmas holidays fill us with a greater zeal than ever for work when we return to it, they have been wasted[...]With the winter stock-taking we should also take stock of ourselves – of our lives[...]For work is salvation. It spells forgetfulness in trouble, expression in happiness. It is the medium through which we interpret all that is best in us.¹⁴⁸

This rousing affirmation would not be out of place coming from a pulpit but would not have seemed unusual to the many American entrepreneurs of the period whose business practice was infused with their strong religious beliefs.¹⁴⁹ Many businesses and banks in Britain, such as Cadbury, Rowntree, Clarks, Barclays and Lloyds, were founded by Quakers whose beliefs in integrity, truth and philanthropy underpinned their business ethos. Obituaries of WPM management detail some instances of church work and there was a Commercial Travellers' Christian Association, but religious adherence is unclear. Whatever their beliefs, they nevertheless share the Protestant work ethic described in Max Weber's seminal essay.¹⁵⁰ Weber sought to identify the spirit (*Geist*) of modern Western capitalism. For him Western capitalism was dependent on rational organisation of labour, as demonstrated in the systematising of salesforces, but differed from traditional capitalism in constantly investing and reinvesting for greater profit. This drive can be seen in the magazine's frequent exhortations to the distributor to push forward 'all out for better business and more of it.'¹⁵¹ In one, a fictitious character 'George' writes to his old war chum 'Bill' about the power of advertising as an aid to selling, distilling the essence of Weber's ideas: 'Don't you see how business grows Bill? It's got to have its beginnings, like everything else that grows, and believe me there's nothing like consistent advertising to promote the

¹⁴⁸ "An Editorial Message," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Dec-Jan. 1921, 1.

¹⁴⁹ H.J. Heinz had originally planned to become a Lutheran minister, Alfred Fuller of Fuller Brush was a Christian Scientist and Asa Griggs Candler, who was behind the mass marketing of Coca-Cola, was a Methodist and vice-president of the American Bible Society.

¹⁵⁰ Max Weber, trans. Parsons, Talcott, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1930.) It was first published as an essay in 1904, then as a book in 1930.

¹⁵¹ "Editorial," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Aug-Sep. 1920, 1.

tree of the wall paper business.¹⁵² Weber suggests growing a business goes beyond this: 'Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means of the satisfaction of his material needs.'¹⁵³ This is exemplified frequently in the early issues of the magazine, where salesmen are urged to grab their share of business in the hopeful days after the end of the war, but although this appears hedonistic and immoral, Weber explained that modern capitalism had its own very disciplined morality, where the impulse to accumulate is combined with a frugal way of life. This apparent dichotomy derived from the Calvinist notion of asceticism, through which a person has a 'calling'. Through practising his religion in his daily work, and upholding moral values, he would fulfil his duty in the real world, finding his redemption in the after-life. The apparently diametrically opposed goals of making money and living a simple life are reconciled, as Giddens explains: 'The accumulation of wealth was morally sanctioned in so far as it was combined with a sober, industrious career; wealth was condemned only if employed to support a life of idle luxury or self-indulgence.'¹⁵⁴ In the magazine hard work and service are frequently held up as crowning virtues, but underlying them is the threat of competition from other decorators who may be working even harder: 'The Wallpaper trade is going to see Big Business during 1921, and the fruits of it will fall to the livest men, the men who have their hearts in their work who are alert to opportunity, and tireless in their endeavour.'¹⁵⁵ Hard work is praised but passivity, sitting waiting for the customer to arrive, is roundly condemned as a sign of idleness, just as failing to keep one's store clean and tidy is considered slovenly. The admonishments meted out in the magazine stop short of being overtly religious but there are strong biblical overtones in phrases such as 'the stony way of sheer hard work'¹⁵⁶ which suggests that the Protestant work ethic had a significant hold on the company directors. But by far the most potent example of the semi-religious fervour which fills the early years of the magazine is

¹⁵² "Letters from a Decorator," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Apr-May 1921, 9.

¹⁵³ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 53.

¹⁵⁴ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 5.

¹⁵⁵ "An Editorial Message," Dec-Jan. 1921, 1.

¹⁵⁶ "How They Do It!" *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1924, 17.

what amounts to a creed for WPM salesmen (Fig. 11): a single page devoted to a list of ten beliefs relating to the qualities and attributes of wallpaper is laid out within a border as if ready to be framed and hung in the shop for the salesman to observe and learn by heart, a homily in which every line starts with 'I Believe' and ends with the capitalised 'I BELIEVE IN WALLPAPER.'¹⁵⁷ Looking at this with today's liberal, secular eyes this seems faintly absurd but perhaps it is just an earlier manifestation of the modern-day tendency to be 'passionate' about one's product.¹⁵⁸

Salesmanship Publications

As the study of selling gained credibility, companies such as Ford, Heinz and National Cash Register in America started to publish sales manuals incorporating motivational and philosophical musings from public figures such as Benjamin Franklin - whom Weber cited as embodying the Calvinist work ethic - and Teddy Roosevelt, with the idea of inspiring their salesforces. Salesmanship became an acceptable area for academic study with the Carnegie Institute of Technology founding a Bureau of Salesmanship Research in 1916, with Walter Dill Scott as its director. Scott, another deeply religious man, was hugely influential. As an advertising expert and psychologist, he introduced a more refined approach to selling, concentrating on the softer skills needed in business, and taking into account the personalities and motivations of salespeople. He broke new ground by helping businesses find methods to employ the most promising employees and stimulated discussions about the creation of wants and the need to appeal to customers' feelings. He believed that innate tendencies and feelings gave rise to emotions, and that products should appeal to those instincts rather than being promoted for their own values. Scott believed the customer should be motivated rather than manipulated and her confidence secured in order to clinch a sale. These ideas were explored in 'the rash of books on salesmanship that appeared in the late 1910s and early 1920s'¹⁵⁹ such as Henry R. Tosdal's *Principles of Personal*

¹⁵⁷ "I Believe In Wallpaper," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Aug-Sep. 1922, 24.

¹⁵⁸ As in this example from the Tropicana website: 'We've been making orange juice for nearly 70 years and still bring the same passion to the process as when we first started.' "The Tropicana Tradition," *Our Story* Tropicana [n.d.]. <https://www.tropicana.com/our-story>.

¹⁵⁹ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 177.

Selling. The effect only becomes noticeable in *The Wallpaper Magazine* of the late 1920s and 1930s when far greater attention is given to the customer's thoughts and motivations. In Britain it seems as though salesmanship was more often the preserve of house organs and magazines such as *The Salesman* rather than books, but there were less academic titles available such as Pitman's *Salesmanship: A Practical Guide for Shop Assistant, Commercial Traveller, and Agent* of 1908. Pitman, a publisher and religious adherent, developed a system of shorthand that spawned business training schools. Although his book pre-dates Scott's work by several years it shows itself to be aware of the psychological angle to selling that goes beyond the then-popular interest in phrenology which depended on the size and shape of people's skulls for its insights. Although essentially full of practical advice on matters such as stock management and shop maintenance, dress, deportment and tone of voice, it also demonstrates some knowledge of the growing formalisation of selling, devoting chapters to 'The Law of Suggestive Salesmanship' and 'The Psychology of Salesmanship.' It is forward-looking enough to recommend 'Let us not despise theories – even in salesmanship.'¹⁶⁰ As it addresses shop assistants, it may well have been what the wallpaper distributor was reading. It offers the reader a flow chart suggesting three possible aspects of the customer to appeal to: intellect, emotions and volition. The intellect may respond to quality or value, while the emotions can be triggered by stressing the gratification that will accrue from a purchase or the love to a child that will be demonstrated. Volition is a less developed category as an idea, but the chart suggests that by appealing to a customer's faculties and feelings, the powers of Suggestive Salesmanship are being brought into play. It concludes that salesmanship is a liberal science in which courtesy and knowledge of the stock are married with 'a trained or intuitive perception of human nature.'¹⁶¹ It is an early indication that work was being done on softer skills, in contrast to the go-getting tone of the early magazines.

The Wallpaper Magazine embraced the new methods of salesmanship proliferating in America, and to a lesser extent in Britain, with enthusiasm and attempted to convey

¹⁶⁰ William Amerlius Corbion and G. E. Grimsdale, *Salesmanship: A Practical Guide for Shop Assistant, Commercial Traveller, and Agent* (London : Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1908) 99.

¹⁶¹ Corbion and Grimsdale, *Salesmanship*, 99.

them to the shop floor with rigour, but the impression received by the decorator must sometimes have been one of sermonising and heavy-handed instruction. WPM was not his employer and he did not owe them any obligation to sell their wallpapers over those of other suppliers. He may not have subscribed to all their views and no doubt felt that he already knew a fair amount about selling, and had a good understanding of his customers. If there was a science to selling, it was an applied science, and never ceased to be an art as well.

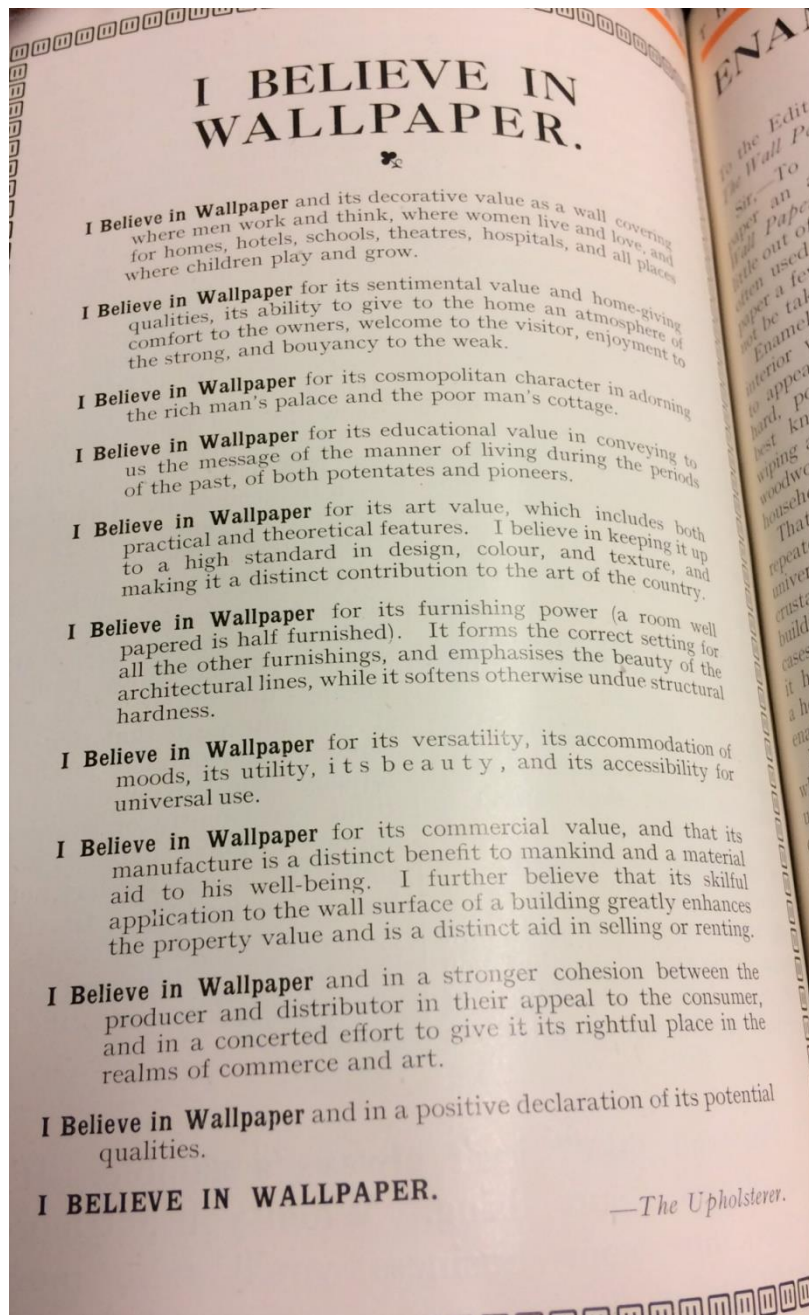


Fig. 11: "I Believe In Wallpaper," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Aug-Sep. 1922, 24. Print. Photo by the author.

Chapter 5

Salesmanship: the Theory and Practice of Understanding the Consumer

The effective wallpaper salesman may have taken instruction from the pronouncements of the magazine but he had other resources at his disposal too. By the mid-1930s he was able to access market data in publications such as *The Home Market*, which offered comprehensive statistics on population distribution, class segmentation and the consumer base. With this he could independently plan his own marketing. He had a valuable asset, if he had been in business for some time, in his innate understanding of his own locality and customers and how best to approach them. Whereas the previous chapter focused on shaping the salesman, this chapter will trace the arc in the magazine's selling approaches towards the customer from the early 1920s to the late 1930s, charting the progression from a very direct drum-banging style, in which belief in the product was considered sufficient to win a client over, to a more considered approach in the 1930s whereby the salesman was encouraged to think more carefully about the customer as an individual with particular needs, wants and emotions, and a distinct personality shaped by class and circumstance. It challenges the notion that selling was simply a body of knowledge or a set of techniques to be transferred. Theories of consumer behaviour abound but as Benson points out: 'It remains difficult, above all, to distinguish consumption from other influences on people's attitudes: the schools in which they were taught[...]the communities in which they lived; the churches in which they worshipped; the wars in which they fought.'¹⁶² Arguably the salesman's practical knowledge was as useful to him as any theoretical approach.

¹⁶² Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain*, 143.

Theorising the consumer

Even by 1926, the magazine had abandoned its rigid stance and accepted the importance of adaptability in selling, stating that '*one cannot tie such a varied and intricate business as modern salesmanship down to one line of procedure*' [original italics].¹⁶³ It recognised the variety of consumers, the complexity of consumer relations and the wide range of tactics needed by the salesman. After World War I, the significant societal changes and huge increase in choice of consumer goods affected customer behaviour profoundly. Theorists have typically advanced ideas about consumerism that focus on a single aspect of consumer personality or behaviour. The economist J.K. Galbraith outlined three key theories: emulation, 'instinctivism' and 'manipulationism'.¹⁶⁴ How relevant were they for the selling of wallpaper? Emulation, Veblen's theory of consumption, conceived in 1899, argued that consumers were eager to imitate those of a higher social class, and indulged in conspicuous consumption to gain status. Yet while WPM certainly took advantage of the customer's aspirations in the new stratified world of suburban living, this theory had become outdated. The new suburban dwellers sought to live up to the standards set by their own class, 'keeping up with the Joneses' being their primary aim. 'Instinctivism' suggests wants are pre-programmed into consumers, waiting to be activated by the right products and services, and examples appear in the magazine: 'Your problem is to arouse the *dormant* desires of the womenfolk for beauty in the home.'¹⁶⁵ Both the Pitman guide to salesmanship and advertiser Walter Dill Scott favoured the concept, but Scott and other psychologists moved away from the idea in the 1920s, realising 'human wants to be dynamic, rather than fixed'.¹⁶⁶ The magazine also came to this enlightened view, one arguably easier to adopt once sales were healthy again. Thirdly, 'manipulationism', a post-World War II theory suggesting advertisers and salesmen, as

¹⁶³ "Adaptability: the Secret of Successful Salesmanship," *The English Wall Paper Magazine*, Mar-May 1926, 17.

¹⁶⁴ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987) 41.

¹⁶⁵ "Spring Propaganda for the Decorator," *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Mar. 1933, 7.

¹⁶⁶ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 188.

Galbraith later described, 'inject' consumers with a desire to buy, assumes a fundamental passivity and vulnerability in the consumer.¹⁶⁷ Though the magazine did play on notions of suggestive guilt, there is little evidence of any genuinely underhand tactics or misrepresentation of the product. WPM's reputation was based on being a reliable, decent business with a belief in the quality and value of their product.

Comparing these three theories to the practice of the wallpaper salesman finds them wanting. The wallpaper customer could not be motivated to buy by simplistic means. The subtle and skilful work of wallpaper selling intersects more readily with sociologist Campbell's later theory,¹⁶⁸ almost an anti-theory, that consumerism is a puzzle not readily explained by existing economic or psychological theories. Campbell critiques 'instinctivism', 'manipulationism' and the Veblenesque effect as being too narrow in their thinking, taking a rounder and more anthropological view of the consumer, closer to that espoused by Douglas and Isherwood. They suggested that goods have meaning and contribute to how we perceive ourselves and relate to others:

We can never explain demand by looking only at the physical properties of goods. Man [sic] needs goods for communicating with others and for making sense of what is going on around him. The two needs are but one, for communication can only be formed in a structured system of meanings.¹⁶⁹

Campbell agrees, arguing that the consumer is more complex than allowed for by existing theories and cannot simply be duped into buying goods, a concept already recognised by WPM by the late 1920s. As Campbell says:

the conceptual framework employed to account for the origins of the new propensity to consume is simply not adequate for the task. Ideas about increased demand stemming from a new outburst of social emulation, coupled with strenuous attempts at manipulation of consumer wants by producers, do not amount to a logically related set of propositions from which cause might

¹⁶⁷ Campbell suggests that this was 'an argument which[...]figures prominently in the standard account of the eighteenth century consumer revolution.' *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, 46.

¹⁶⁸ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, 36.

¹⁶⁹ Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. (London: Routledge, 1979) 67.

effectively be separated from effect, or even a convincingly meaningful pattern of subjective action constructed.¹⁷⁰

Just as wants are too puzzling to be subjected to any one theory, neither do consumer products arguably all fit the same model. Church proposes classifying and selling products according to their characteristics. 'Search' goods are immediately comprehensible; 'experience' goods only reveal their true qualities after purchase and 'credence' goods have to be taken on trust.¹⁷¹ Wallpaper conceivably falls into all three categories. Wallpaper consumption was particularly complex because the purchase went beyond the product. To achieve a sale the salesman needed to be sensitive to contextual factors such as the disruption of redecorating, concerns over the quality of the work and the fear of making wrong choices about a product that represented a household's taste and might define an interior for years to come. Arguably the need to tailor the service to an individual customer renders traditional theorising redundant.

Who Was the Wallpaper Customer?

According to *The Wallpaper Magazine* the main target of the wallpaper salesman was, until the 1930s, gender-specific. It was expected that a woman, usually a middle-class housewife, would be buying both the wallpaper and the decorator's labour. Although women had worked competently in a variety of jobs during World War I, they were encouraged back into the home after the war to allow ex-servicemen priority access to employment and restore the status quo. Formal marriage bars were imposed in areas such as the civil service and teaching, and informal marriage bars operated in many other sectors. Many working-class women went into clerical and factory work as a preferable alternative to domestic service so that by the mid-1920s few homes had a live-in servant. Working-class women had long been responsible for making family ends meet and oral history indicates that they were 'likely to be respected and highly regarded, [as the] financial and household manager, and the arbiter of familial and

¹⁷⁰ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, 36.

¹⁷¹ Church, "Salesmen and the Transformation of Selling," 716.

neighbourhood standards.¹⁷² Now middle-class women also found themselves in charge of running the household and its budget, rather than merely acting as a supervisor.¹⁷³ Decisions on interiors, as the magazine reminds the salesman, were the preserve of women: 'The one thing the distributor has to remember all the time[...]is that in most cases he has to deal with the housewife herself. Women are the Spenders-in-Chief in all directions.'¹⁷⁴ With this adjustment, and the boom in housebuilding, came a profusion of women's magazines promoting the suburban lifestyle and dispensing domestic advice, such as *Homes and Gardens* (1919), *The Ideal Home* (1920), *Good Housekeeping* (1922) and *Woman and Home* (1926). An ideology of domesticity was created with the professional housewife at the centre of the home, whilst, in the view of Beddoe, single women were either looked on with ridicule or pity, as seen in the advertisements mentioned later in this chapter.¹⁷⁵ She refers to 'the anti-progressive and reactionary character of this era in British women's history.'¹⁷⁶ Benson agrees, saying that 'although changes in consumption offered women new economic power, new social possibilities, and new opportunities for improving their social status, it did so within limits that confirmed and reinforced, rather than challenged and undermined women's conventional role and status.'¹⁷⁷ *The Wallpaper Magazine* of the early 1920s tapped into the new ideology, treating women as souls to be converted, like unbelievers, to the cause of wallpaper. Friedman endorses this idea of the salesman as a missionary whose belief in the product will sustain him if he fails to convert a pitch into a sale.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore the magazine, in strong patriarchal tones, holds the housewife responsible for the cleanliness of the house: 'She would never dream of leaving her curtains up for five or six years; she must be made to realise that it is just as big a mistake to leave the same papers up for

¹⁷² Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) 124, qtd in Benson *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain*, 22.

¹⁷³ Peter Scott, *The Making of the Modern British Home: The Suburban Semi and Family Life between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013) 3.

¹⁷⁴ "The Feminine Appeal," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, April 1920, 8.

¹⁷⁵ Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars 1918-1939* (London: Pandora Press/Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1989) 4.

¹⁷⁶ Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty*, 3.

¹⁷⁷ Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society*, 181.

¹⁷⁸ Friedman, *Birth of a Salesman*, 26.

that length of time.¹⁷⁹ This is not the only occurrence of the coercive ‘made to realise’ and the phrase would have been instrumental in guiding the sales approach. Roles in the home are portrayed as quite distinct with the husband frequently depicted as beleaguered by the chaos of decorating, cheerfully incompetent as he attempts to put up his own wallpaper, or bewildered by his wife’s artistic choices. The implication is clear – his job is to go out and earn the steady income that will enable his wife to make the decorative choices for their home, her area of strength and a mystery to him. In spring in particular he is ‘glad he has an office in which to seek refuge.’¹⁸⁰

Spring Cleaning

Spring cleaning was a major event for the inter-war housewife, and a ‘national institution’¹⁸¹ as far as *The Wallpaper Magazine* was concerned. It devoted many pages to its selling potential every year until the late 1920s. At a time of huge expansion of industry and coal fires heating homes, this annual ritual was crucial for maintaining cleanliness. Pictures and curtains were taken down, carpets lifted and floors polished, woodwork washed and repainted.¹⁸² *The Wallpaper Magazine* frequently refers to the ‘orgy of dusting’¹⁸³ affecting ‘the life of every married man,’¹⁸⁴ something wild and uncontained that he should steer well clear of. This madness is a boon to the salesman because ‘when the housewife is taken with the spring-cleaning fever, she is just exactly in the right mood for considering the re-decoration of the walls of her home.’¹⁸⁵ Wallpaper, if not a washable ‘sanitary paper’, was extremely difficult to clean, with *Good Housekeeping’s* only recommendation being ‘rubbing and dusting with a clean cloth and fresh dough.’¹⁸⁶ Despite the punishing work of spring-

¹⁷⁹ “Educating the Public,” *The Wallpaper Magazine*, April 1920, 6.

¹⁸⁰ “Spring Cleaning: The Home” *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Feb-Mar. 1921, 2.

¹⁸¹ “The Spring Offensive,” *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Feb-Mar. 1922, 8.

¹⁸² “An Encyclopaedia of Cleaning” *Good Housekeeping*, March 1932, 63. *Good Housekeeping* even offered advice on re-enamelling the bath and re-stuffing a mattress, noting ‘it is rather strenuous work, and should be carried out in an unused room or attic.’

¹⁸³ “Spring Cleaning: The Home,” 2.

¹⁸⁴ “Spring Cleaning: The Home,” 2.

¹⁸⁵ “Spring Cleaning: The Home,” 2.

¹⁸⁶ “An Encyclopaedia of Cleaning,” 142.

cleaning, the magazine suggests that unless the housewife also considers the prospect of redecorating at this time she is guilty of 'foolishness.' The salesman is exhorted to impress on her that rehangng her curtains against 'faded and dirty' walls means she has 'only *half* spring-cleaned.'¹⁸⁷ Effectively he is being persuaded to induce guilt and shame in the customer by suggesting that she is allowing her family to live in an unhealthy atmosphere, a somewhat manipulative technique. A significant focus was placed on health and sport at this time, with the new suburbs lauded for their fresh air and gardens, an ideal place to raise a family. With this went a reputation for respectability and decency that was highly prized and therefore vulnerable to criticism. The salesman is advised to be sensitive and to mitigate the disruption of decorating with assurances of the tidiness and professionalism of the decorator. He too is expected to do his own spring cleaning, using the time to metaphorically clear his mind of 'old prejudices, stale and unprofitable ideas and worn-out methods'¹⁸⁸ namely his passive, business-as-usual approach.

Selling Fashion

The magazine assumes that when women are not devoting their energies to cleaning or looking after their children, they are thinking about fashion, and in particular hats. Spring was the time to buy a new hat,¹⁸⁹ and consequently the salesman is advised to 'treat wallpapers much as dress-materials are treated. Create the feeling there are fashions in wall paper as much as in millinery.'¹⁹⁰ By 1924 the magazine is adamant that there *are* fashions in wallpaper and that, again, it is merely a question of bringing this to the attention of the customer and getting her to 'see sense' for she is 'the willing slave of fashion.'¹⁹¹ The same article addresses her throughout with the pejorative 'Eve', signalling her inability to resist temptation. Lury points out that from

¹⁸⁷ "Spring Cleaning: The Home," 2.

¹⁸⁸ "The Spring Offensive," 9.

¹⁸⁹ "A New Hat for Easter," *Good Housekeeping*, March 1932, 56. It jokily references Tennyson: 'In the spring a woman's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of hats.'

¹⁹⁰ "The Feminine Appeal," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, April 1920, 18.

¹⁹¹ "Wall Paper Fashions," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1924, 16.

the late 19th century onwards, women were encouraged to think of themselves as having 'an insatiable desire to buy'¹⁹² and in need of help to realise this desire. The magazine assumes that, as women are fearful of being out of fashion they will readily respond to the notion that their wallpapers must exude fashion sense too, advocating combining both instinctivism and manipulationism to lure her to buy. Charles Higham, writing in a 1922 magazine, endorses this approach, declaring: 'Smart women like smart homes; they should be made to feel that if their homes are not as fashionable as their hats, they are not really smart women.'¹⁹³ The stress is on the fear of loss rather than the promise of gain. Higham takes a very narrow view of women customers and lays the blame for the fact that women are more excited by a new hat than by new wallpaper firmly at the feet of the distributor, complaining that 'no real organised effort has been made by the trade to capture the feminine imagination.'¹⁹⁴ One proposed solution is to create an association in the customer's mind between the January sales, when the customer picks up accessories for the home, and wallpaper purchases. She should be led to expect the sales to be swiftly followed by an offer of wallpapers, a schedule to be repeated annually. As Schwarzkopf points out, Higham was clinging to the idea that 'political and commercial advertising [were][...]forms of propaganda and social engineering.'¹⁹⁵ The small-time decorator, who actually met and dealt with the customer, may have been ahead of the magazine in realising that a more sophisticated approach was required.

A Turning Point for Salesmanship

1926 was something of a watershed year for the magazine. With the wallpaper trade picking up and incomes growing, there is a noticeable change in how customers are viewed, with a growing recognition of the variety and motivations of potential

¹⁹² Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture, 2nd Ed.* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 123.

¹⁹³ "The Spring Season," *The Wall Paper Magazine*, Feb-Mar. 1922, 3.

¹⁹⁴ "The Spring Season," 3.

¹⁹⁵ Stefan Schwarzkopf, "What Was Advertising? The Invention, Rise, Demise,

purchasers. The middle-class housewife is still the primary target but not the exclusive one, and an attempt is made to understand both the psychology of the customer and the psychological effects of wallpaper. Deborah Cohen states that from the late 19th century and the advent of Freudian thinking, 'the idea of 'personality' was fundamentally intertwined with the domestic interior,'¹⁹⁶ a concept that the magazine starts to absorb. Scott likewise describes how the aggressive marketing employed to convert the public to home ownership in the 1930s came with an appeal to the emotions that a new lifestyle beckoned: 'owner occupation came to be perceived as a markedly superior tenure – due, at least in part, to a concerted effort by the building industry to imbue it with a new symbolic meaning.'¹⁹⁷ Having a home of one's own not only conferred a certain status and respectability, it also served as a vehicle for one's own taste and an opportunity to create a sense of personal well-being through decorative choices. For the salesman this entailed a marked shift from addressing the quality of his wallpaper to addressing the needs and wants of a complex consumer. The magazine starts to advise the salesman to consider the class structure of his neighbourhood, and adapt his language accordingly. So for a 'good-class' area, the quality and artistry of the wallpaper should be described; in an upper-middle-class neighbourhood with many new dwellings the focus should be on 'Home'; and in a lower-middle-class district the advice is to 'stress Economy and Durability.'¹⁹⁸ This is evidence of the magazine using 'sales strategies based on market and consumer research data.'¹⁹⁹ As Schwarzkopf says, 'it became possible to combine the thrust of mass salesmanship with more in-depth knowledge of the needs of specific market segments.'²⁰⁰ Higham and others were criticised for being out of touch with these ideas²⁰¹ and the magazine's less domineering tone suggests that he was no longer involved. Furthermore, as Scott had advised, salesmen started to move away from coercing or manipulating the customer and towards getting to know her so as to

¹⁹⁶ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (New Haven and London: Yale, 2006) xii.

¹⁹⁷ Scott, *The Making of the Modern British Home*, 110.

¹⁹⁸ "Choosing Your Selling Line for 1926," *The English Wall Paper Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1926, 14.

¹⁹⁹ Schwarzkopf, "What Was Advertising?" 14.

²⁰⁰ Schwarzkopf, "What Was Advertising?" 15.

²⁰¹ Schwarzkopf, "What Was Advertising?" 14.

motivate her to buy, helping her towards a decision rather than attempting to change her way of thinking. The magazine advises weekly changes of window displays and personal calls to new or prospective clients are encouraged. By taking pattern books round to customers' homes, a salesman succeeded not only in making their acquaintance but in gaining valuable information about their interiors.²⁰² The home would reveal something of the personality of the owners, and the salesman could reveal something of his own unique selling skills.

'She's Your Prospect!'

By the 1930s the magazine's less didactic style suggests a greater confidence in the distributor's sales technique with far more column inches devoted to wallpaper's ability to magically transform an interior and indeed the life of consumers across the social spectrum. The London advertising agency of William Crawford had started to use the term 'product personality',²⁰³ a precursor to 'brand image' and increasingly WPM promotes its wallpapers simply as 'Crown Wallpapers' (Fig. 14). A trade advertising campaign for Crown Wallpapers using the tagline 'She's Your Prospect!' run in part in *The Wallpaper Magazine* and in full in *The Decorator*, from March 1934 to March 1935, looks to market segmentation to help the salesman devise his approach. In each of the 12 advertisements a drawing depicts a woman engaged in an activity considered typical to her role, such as a vicar's wife having tea, accompanied by wryly humorous text describing her way of life and why she appreciates Crown Wallpapers. As well as all-important 'Mrs Newly Wed',²⁰⁴ (Fig. 12) six of the 'Prospects' are described in terms of their husband's occupation: the doctor's wife, the vicar's wife, the artisan's wife, the miner's wife, the fisherman's wife and the farmer's wife. All are held up to be noble and virtuous, no doubt because of their husband's respectable employment. Lower-class 'Mrs Scrubbs,' 'clean as a new pin in...person and in...thoughts,'²⁰⁵ though apparently husbandless, is nevertheless a valid prospect because she makes buying

²⁰² "That Spring Feeling," *The English Wall Paper Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1926, 17.

²⁰³ Schwarzkopf, "What Was Advertising?" 15.

²⁰⁴ "She's Your Prospect!" *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Mar, 1934, 1.

²⁰⁵ "She's Your Prospect!" *The Decorator*, 16 April 1934, 3.

wallpaper an ‘event of great moment.’²⁰⁶ Two caricatured single women are treated with scathing humour: ‘The Titled Lady,’²⁰⁷ a lorgnette-bearing aristocrat fallen on leaner times, and ‘Miss Artycraft’ complete with ‘carmined finger nails and elongated jade cigarette holder’²⁰⁸ (Fig. 13) who offers WPM the opportunity to make a jibe at modernism: ‘[she] has long passed that stage of her artistic development when “self-coloured” walls satisfied her artistic soul. Now she craves the more rich and satisfying effects of Wallpaper.’²⁰⁹ The remaining two are ‘The Maiden Aunt,’²¹⁰ depicted knitting and ‘The Boarding House Keeper,’²¹¹ slightly younger and more attractive than the maiden aunt. The categorisations, albeit somewhat caricatured, possibly derived from consumer research data and emphasise the wide variety of women customers, some with their own income, each with their own narrative and means of expressing themselves through their interior. They help sell a story to the salesman. Through these advertisements WPM explains to the salesman that people demand the ‘expression of their individuality.’²¹² Each person will decorate to assert her position in her own space, demonstrating what Bourdieu termed ‘habitus’, the physical embodiment of one’s cultural capital. As he states, ‘Every interior expresses, in its own language, the present and even the past state of its occupants.’²¹³ Or in WPM’s interpretation, ‘In seeking the fulfilment of beauty of her home, she is finding the frame for her life.’²¹⁴

The subsequent Crown Wallpapers advertising campaign, with the tagline ‘You Can Get Business Here’ and which appeared only in *The Decorator*, focused on habitus through different types of homes, from the ‘Big House in the Little Garden’²¹⁵ to the ‘Arty Looking House with the Dainty Chintz Curtains.’ A trim exterior suggests a desire to

²⁰⁶ “She’s Your Prospect!” *The Decorator*, 16 April 1934, 3.

²⁰⁷ “She’s Your Prospect!” *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-Jun. 1934, 1.

²⁰⁸ “She’s Your Prospect!” *The Decorator*, 15 June 1934, 3.

²⁰⁹ “She’s Your Prospect!” *The Decorator* 15 June 1934, 3.

²¹⁰ “She’s Your Prospect!” *The Decorator*, 15 August 1934, 3.

²¹¹ “She’s Your Prospect!” *The Decorator*, 15 October 1934, 3.

²¹² “Wallpaper and Happiness,” *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Mar. 1933, 14.

²¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice. (London and New York: Routledge, [1984] 2010) 70.

²¹⁴ Helen Marsden, “Look to Your Walls,” *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-Jun. 1935, 17.

²¹⁵ “You Can Get Business Here,” *The Decorator*, 15 April 1935, 3.

keep decorations fresh, a bright little end house evokes cheerful residents who are interested in their surroundings and a 'quaint little house' shows 'a highly developed consciousness of surroundings.'²¹⁶ The salesman can confidently deduce from the exterior of a property, its garden and state of upkeep, the nature of the residents and therefore what kind of wallpapers they might choose. The modernist Sunspan house fails to appear in this campaign, doubtless because of its customary plain walls, but otherwise the suggestion is that all respectable homes are suited to wallpaper, and the salesman should be open to all possibilities. By the mid-1930s the magazine had settled into a relaxed style, possibly because business was thriving.²¹⁷ The gently humorous editorials make forays into lyrical and poetic language and seek feedback from readers rather than chastising them for any shortcomings. It is less regulatory, offering encouragement and pointing out opportunities. The focus turns to the psychology of wallpaper and its benefits to different members of the family. Its claim that 'happier homes are largely a matter of well-chosen wallpaper'²¹⁸ illustrates its enduring pride in its product, emboldened by a proliferation of articles on the psychological benefits of wallpaper, written purportedly by medical experts. The new 'upward growth' designs - cut-out pieces that could be placed onto plain walls to give the impression of a herbaceous border - are recommended to bring the garden into the house and therefore improve mood.²¹⁹ It is a 'firmly established fact' that wallpaper calms the nerves, in contrast to plain walls which are associated with factories and asylums, and that it contributes to the wellbeing of both the husband returning from the office and the child from school.²²⁰ The pressure is maintained on the housewife although she was far more likely to be susceptible to low moods: the inter-war period saw a new wave of neurosis in women with magazines such as *Modern Home* carrying advertisements for remedies for 'nerves' and insomnia. Indeed in 1938 the condition of 'suburban neurosis' was officially named by Stephen Taylor in

²¹⁶ "You Can Get Business Here," *The Decorator* 15 July 1935, 3.

²¹⁷ "Pieces ordered 1900-1961," The Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick. MSS.424/9/15. The number of pieces ordered rose by 43% from 1934 to 1935.

²¹⁸ "Such Stuff As Homes Are Made Of," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-May 1927, 6.

²¹⁹ "Bringing The Garden Into The House," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Feb-Mar. 1928, 4.

²²⁰ "Wallpaper Has No Substitute!" Apr-May 1928, 18.

a *Lancet* article.²²¹ A less official ‘doctor’ writing in the magazine claims that sickness may be caused by unsuitable wallpaper. He attributes a wallpaper ‘in a ghoulish green with exotic birds flapping a weird way across it’²²² as responsible for the low mood of his jaundiced patient and urges that care be taken when choosing wallpaper colours and patterns, implausibly employing pseudo-science in the name of commerce. He even opines that ‘the house decorator of the future will have to be something of a psychologist as well as an artist.’²²³

In addition to happiness, the psychological benefits of wallpaper were deemed to include a peaceful atmosphere, the uplifting quality of beauty, a sense of luxury – which enabled a homeowner to show off their taste - and the unspecific ‘mental goodness that a newly decorated home brings.’²²⁴ The magazine waxes lyrical about a ceiling paper with ‘billowy clouds scurrying across a perfect blue sky’²²⁵ and, in a sobering indictment of the restricted life of suburban women, suggests that wallpaper is the ‘best friend a housewife can have.’²²⁶ Playing on a mother’s wish to do the best for her children, it also promotes the idea that wallpaper can be educational, stimulating and entertaining for children and will leave them with happy memories that carry into adulthood.²²⁷ The nursery friezes available at the time featuring nursery rhyme characters, alphabet letters, animals, even Mickey Mouse, were beyond the reach of many budgets but ‘wise mothers’ were still expected, or indirectly pressurised, to consider how they would improve their children’s wellbeing. Many column inches are devoted to the properties of different colours and their effect on mood, evoking yet another ‘science’ for the salesman to study. An understanding of colour is promoted as essential in helping the homeowner make choices to suit the mood of a room. Yellows, particularly ‘sunshine yellow’ were recommended for

²²¹ Deborah Sugg Ryan, *Ideal Homes, 1918-39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism*, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2018), 32.

²²² “Health Talks by a Medical Man,” *The English Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-May 1931, 6.

²²³ “Health Talks by a Medical Man,” 7.

²²⁴ “How to get Orders this Spring!” *The English Wallpaper Magazine*, Feb-Mar. 1931, 6.

²²⁵ Leonard A. White, “Make Your Home Beautiful,” *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-Jun. 1932, 9.

²²⁶ “Don’t Sell Wallpaper – Sell Beauty!” *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr-May 1929, 9.

²²⁷ “Wallpaper and the Child Mind,” *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Aug-Oct. 1931, 18.

cheering a room, whereas greens were deemed restful, blues peaceful and browns warm. Red was to be avoided in most situations, especially in selling to dentists, as being thought to cause mental agitation.²²⁸ With his expertise in psychology and colour, the salesman is now trusted to look to professionals such as doctors, dentists and restaurant owners for his business. For the first time in the 1935-36 trade Crown Wallpapers campaign, working women and male customers feature in the advertisements. A female café owner, a business man with a study in the home and a doctor are all portrayed as potential customers and the magazine recognises companionate marriages in 'Mr and Mrs Everyman,' who stroll round the suburbs in the evening, as a prospect, signalling an acceptance that couples were increasingly making decorative choices together.

By the late 1920s the magazine demonstrates a more psychologically astute assessment of the customer which it develops into the 1930s, recognising that a one-size-fits-all selling technique is outdated. The goal of securing a sale remains the same but other achievements such as generating goodwill and creating long-term relationships with customers are now deemed worthy of effort in order to keep business sustainable. It is a far cry from the first magazine of the 1920s when the salesman was used as a means simply to attract, inform and sell to customers. By the end of the 1930s he was recognised as a professional who could be trusted to create his own publicity, equally psychologist and business man, plying a trade no longer just informed by academic theory but also by his long-established selling ability.

²²⁸ "Fields Of Business For The Decorator," *The Wallpaper Magazine*, Feb-Mar. 1930, 1.

**She's your
PROSPECT!**



No. 1 of a series
stressing the
superiority of
"CROWN" Wall-
papers for every
possible type of
customer.

Mrs. Newly Wed.

God bless Mrs. Newly Wed—she represents new life in our business and our nation. She is full of plans and hopes for the future, and if she has any doubts, we must dispel them. Socially she has to keep her end up. Domestically she has to make the home fit for her particular hero to live in. And she does it too. A little sympathetic handling will make her a permanent customer. Guide her in her choice by showing her "CROWN" Wallpapers—She's your Prospect.



**CROWN
WALLPAPERS**

THE WALL PAPER MANUFACTURERS LTD.
125 HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C.1 : KING'S HOUSE, KINGST WEST, MANCHESTER

Fig. 12: "She's Your Prospect!" *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan-Mar, 1934, 1. Print. Photo by the author.

15th June, 1934 The Decorator 3

She's your PROSPECT!



No. 4 of a series stressing the superiority of "CROWN" Wallpapers for every possible type of customer.

Miss Artycraft.

Complete with carmined finger nails and elongated jade cigarette holder, She's your prospect. Not afraid of a dash of colour, and has long passed that stage of her artistic development when "self-coloured" walls satisfied her artistic soul. Now she craves the more rich and satisfying effects of Wallpaper.

The influence of Miss Artycraft in the home is a force to be reckoned with. Her opinions are forthcoming on all occasions, so when she comes into your Showroom dragging her maternal parent in her wake, you are in for a bright quarter-of-an-hour, for though she cheerfully leaves the paying to her elders—She's your Prospect.



CROWN

WALLPAPERS

THE WALL PAPER MANUFACTURERS LTD.
125 HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C.1 : KING'S HOUSE, KING ST. WEST, MANCHESTER

Fig 13: "She's Your Prospect!" *The Decorator*, Jul-Sep. 1934, 3. Print. Photo by the author.

Conclusion

This study of *The Wallpaper Magazine* has provided a fascinating and valuable insight into the inter-war wallpaper industry from the corporate directives being issued by WPM, through the filter of Higham's publishing company down to the distributor selling to the consumer. The magazine as a medium has made it possible to illuminate aspects of the industry, particularly salesmanship, that would not be readily found in official documents and bring the salesman to greater prominence than has been done before, proving 'how complex, yet also how rewarding, the process to reconstruct the history and significance of magazines can be.'²²⁹ It proves the relevance of a house organ in enabling a researcher to learn about the human business of a company, its relationship with its employees and the small details that shape the company ethos.

The scope of the research has revealed the changing attitude of WPM to salesmanship theories over 20 important years, mirrored against its own corporate developments and the wider economic climate. The magazine is exceptionally useful in revealing the transition from distribution of WPM wallpapers to independent decorators in the 1920s towards a focus on the Crown brand in the 1930s, mirroring the worldwide developments in publicity and selling methods. The widespread use of the Crown brand after 1931 coupled with a national advertising campaign meant that the magazine was needed far less as an instrument of instruction and promotion. With its now sizeable retail portfolio WPM was able to control much wallpaper selling direct from its head office rather than through the individual distributor. The decorator was now very knowledgeable about selling, and whether it was this or the power of advertising that was the bigger contributor to WPM's profits is hard to know. As Church observes: 'It is not possible conceptually to define a boundary between the role and contribution of salesmanship and other forms of marketing strategies, notably branding and advertising.'²³⁰ Yet the change in the magazine suggests the

²²⁹ Aynsley and Forde, eds. "Introduction," 14.

²³⁰ Church, "Salesmen and the Transformation of Selling," 703.

independent distributors had led the path to success for WPM. The salesman, who was now acknowledged to have access to 'many excellent books published to-day on salesmanship',²³¹ is encouraged to prioritise service over profit. The magazine claimed that 'happiness lies in the game itself – not the goal',²³² and noticeably eased off promoting pressurised selling, styling itself simply as a stimulus to the decorator. Significantly by 1934 there is not a single article on salesmanship. In addition, evidence suggests a declining readership as the editor notes that 'All too few of our readers take the trouble to write and express their opinions.'²³³ If the decorator was giving up reading it, then WPM's influence was waning too.

The new-style 1938 magazine looked simply to provide 'a real link between all sections of the industry',²³⁴ arguably hoping to bring both in-house retailers and independent distributors together. It even acknowledges that 'a certain degree of "Modernism" has been admitted to the new make-up of the magazine',²³⁵ demonstrating rather late in the day a relaxation of its attitude towards design. The same attitude pervades any mention of selling; it takes the view that salesmen are born, not made. Good intuition, a 'deep and sympathetic understanding of human nature' and a 'deep wish to please' are deemed the most important aspects of his art. Like an artist studying colour and tone, the salesman is expected to learn his technique but must intuitively understand the art, 'an art requiring continual concentration.'²³⁶ In a deeply contemplative tone the magazine expresses its desire to see wallpaper design too elevated to an art, with the salesman's window a purveyor of ideas and dreams. However, the new more thoughtful magazine was arguably losing its power.

With the storm clouds of another war gathering, the October-December 1939 issue saw publication of the magazine cease for good. Yet its 20-year lifespan offers an insight into the company and the interpretation and dissemination of salesmanship

²³¹ "From the Editor's Chair," *The English Wallpaper Magazine*, Feb.-Mar. 1931, 3.

²³² "Where is Business Headed: What are we after, after all?" *The English Wallpaper Magazine*, 1931 Apr.-May 1931, 18.

²³³ "From the Editor's Chair," *The British Wallpaper Magazine*, Apr.-Jun. 1934, 3.

²³⁴ "From the Editor's Chair," *The Crown Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan.-Mar. 1938, 3.

²³⁵ "From the Editor's Chair," Jan.-Mar. 1938, 3.

²³⁶ "Successful Salesmanship," *The Crown Wallpaper Magazine*, Jan.-Mar. 1939, 21.

that no other medium can rival. Over that time we see the growth in sophistication of salesmanship, the evolution from didacticism to psychological analysis, an acceptance of modernism and the beginnings of a more broad-minded view of gender roles. What remains constant is WPM's fascination with wallpaper history and its love and reverence for its own products as well as a concerted effort to do its best for its employees. Finally, to gauge the impact of *The Wallpaper Magazine* on the salesman, perhaps the last word should be given to fictional wallpaper retailer Donald Hildred, who studied it closely:

by the end of the fortnight he was positively enthusiastic about the retailing of wallpaper and concerning the decorating trade generally. Who would have thought there was so much in selling wallpaper? But apparently it was an Art and a Science, and, when the requisite amount of Goodwill was thrown in, a Social Service as well. The housewives of Malden should be educated into better interior decoration – and more of it.²³⁷



Fig. 14: Crown Wallpaper from after 1931, showing the use of the trademark and crown device together. The Whitworth, University of Manchester. W.1987.79. Photo by the author.

²³⁷ Mannin, Ethel, *Men Are Unwise* (London: Jarrolds, 1934) 23.

Appendix 1: WPM timeline

1899 Amalgamation of 31 companies to form The Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd.

1900 The crown device is registered.

1906 Wall Paper Stores Ltd is formed to acquire retail units.

1914-1918 World War I. Paper and dye shortages severely affect production.

1915 WPM acquires 10 more manufacturing concerns. The Walpamur Paint Company is formed.

1920 Launch of *The Wallpaper Magazine*.

1921 WPM embarks on a policy of consolidation.

1924-1927 WPM acquires three more manufacturing concerns.

1924 British Empire Exhibition takes place at Wembley.

1926 Empire Marketing Board is established.

1931 The 'Crown Wallpapers' trademark and the crown device start to be used together.

1934 WPM acquires six more manufacturers and changes policy to start manufacturing cheaper papers.

1939 *The Crown Wallpaper Magazine* ceases publication.

1939-1945 World War II. Mills are converted to war use.

1949 WPM's Jubilee year.

1962 WPM is responsible for 79% of the total supply of wallpaper in the United Kingdom.

1963 The Monopolies Commission investigates WPM and finds it to be operating against the public interest.

1965 WPM is dismantled.

Appendix 2: List of WPM Amalgamations (two pages)

<u>AMALGAMATIONS</u>		32
<u>1899</u>	C. & J.G. Potter, Belgrave Mills, Darwen.	
	The Darwen Paper Staining Co., Livesey Mills, Darwen.	
	Potter & Co., Hollins Mills and Orchard Mills, "	
	Huntington Freres, Livesey Mills	"
	Almond & Co., South Belgrave Mills	"
	The Anaglypta Co. Ltd., Queens Mills	"
	Lightbown Aspinall & Co. Ltd., Hayfield Mills, Pendleton.	
	Allen Cockshut & Co., Old Ford.	
	The Lignomur Co. " "	
	Carlisle & Clegg, City Road, London and Dame Street, Dublin.	
	A. Sanderson & Sons, Chiswick.	
	Osborn & Shearman, Stephendale Works, Fulham.	
	John Trumble & Sons, York Street, Leeds.	
	Wylie & Lockhead, Whiteinch, near Glasgow.	
	Walker Carver & Co., Orchard Street, Pendleton.	
	W.G. Wilkins & Co. Ltd., Uttoxeter Road, Derby.	
	Mitchell Arnott & Co. Ltd., Brookside Mill, Golborne.	
	The Heywood Paper Staining Co., Brunswick Mill, Heywood.	
	Barnes Davidson, Holden & Co. Ltd., Pulbridge Works, Ramsbottom.	
	Yates Launcey & Dawson, Greenhill Mills, Radcliffe.	
	David Walker, Saffield Mills, Middleton.	
	The Claremont Paper Staining & Engraving Co., Pendleton.	
	Lewis & Co., Medlock Mill, Lees, Oldham.	

<u>Amalgamations</u> (Continued)		33
<u>1899</u>	Fincham & Co., Station Mills, Nr.Wortley, Leeds. John Dunn & Son, Tyne Works, Elswick Place, Newcastle-on-Tyne. Essex & Co., Essex Mills, Battersea. The Cordelova Co. Ltd., Pitt Street, Edinburgh. The Salamander Decorations.	
<u>1915</u>	Broadfield Paper Staining Co.Ltd. C. Cole Ltd. Doncaster Paper Staining Co. Ltd. Fred. W. Howarth Holmes Chapel Wall Paper Co. Ltd. Kinder McDougall & Co. Little Lever Paper Staining Co. Ltd. The Middleton W.P. Manufacturers. Smith & Butler Ltd.	
<u>1934</u>	The Derby Paper Staining Co. Cunliffe & Ward. Lees Paper Staining Co. T. Fairbrother. County End Paper Mill Co. Ltd. English Wallpaper Makers Ltd. British Embossed Paper Co. Ltd.	

Source: "Chronological list of events in the history of WPM" compiled in c.1946 by Eric Entwisle. Some company names are missing. This may be because they were subsidiaries. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.424/10/3.

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Participant Consent Forms have been submitted and interview notes are available on request.