

Shell's England:
Corporate Patronage and English Art in the Shell Posters of the 1930s

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Abstract

This thesis establishes why the Shell Oil Company produced a series of seventy-one posters of the British landscape in the 1930s. Through an examination of the 76 cm. x 114cm. posters that were attached to the sides and backs of the company's delivery lorries, the thesis determines why Shell chose this form of publicity. The thesis examines the posters as historical, if ephemeral, artefacts and analyses the social, economic and cultural context of their production. Whilst there has been some historical analysis of poster design within the field of design history, the significance of the poster within these contexts has been largely neglected. The unique hybrid nature of the Shell posters as advertising based upon fine art using over fifty artists and designers makes them a unique repository of British visual culture of the 1930s. This thesis describes how Shell created three landscape poster campaigns, not through the enlightened patronage of its publicity manager, Jack Beddington, but through a complex set of circumstances that included: the cartel that was formed by the oil companies supplying Britain; the development and encouragement of motoring tourism and its effect on the countryside; the middle-class rejection of working class holiday destinations; concern about the preservation of the countryside; the effect of the 'slump' on the working lives of artists; economic and aesthetic arguments about the relationship between fine and commercial art and the relationship between landscape and national identity. Chapter 1 explores the background and influences that led to the creation of the posters, including the precursors of Beddington and the development of the poster as a medium. Chapter 2 investigates the inter-war debate that exposed the uneasy relationship between fine art, commercial art and industry. Chapter 3 investigates the concept of 'place' and uses case studies of places Shell wished to portray as destinations. Chapter 4 examines, through case studies, how the landscape, as portrayed by the posters, is represented for tourists and also the posters' function within tourism.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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My greatest thanks must go to my wife, Mary, who has patiently encouraged me throughout the roller coaster ride of completing a PhD thesis. She has spent many hours proof reading my work and has been an essential support in completing the work. This thesis is for her with love.

Throughout the six years of completing the thesis I continued to teach Art at Withington Girls' School and the interest the staff and pupils have taken in my work has been invaluable in keeping my enthusiasm at a high level. My Sixth Form Art students were perceptive in our discussions and for many of them this led to a new found interest in Art History.

I must also thank the Shell Art Collection archivist, Nicky Balfour, for providing me with a tour of the archive at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu and providing advice, illustrations and a complete list of Shell's advertising in the 1930s. The Shell archivist in London, Veronica Davies, provided me with Shell's company magazines from the 1930s as well as an office to work in and generous photocopying facilities. The staff at the Shell and BP archive held at Warwick University were also most helpful and patient.

Preface

The author graduated from Manchester Regional College of Art (subsequently Manchester Polytechnic) in 1970. After working in advertising he obtained a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education in 1973. He worked as an Art teacher in Chester for five years before becoming Head of Art at Fallibroome High School in Macclesfield. During his twenty-seven years in Macclesfield he also became the Central Mentor for teacher training and obtained a Masters Degree in Education in 1987. After leaving Macclesfield and whilst teaching at Withington Girls' School from 2005 and working for the University of Manchester as a visiting mentor for teacher training he studied Art History at the University and obtained a Masters Degree in 2007. The title of his MA dissertation was 'The Return of the Picturesque Traveller' and he was supervised by Andrew Causey. This PhD was begun in January 2008.

Introduction

In 2006, when researching British landscape art of the 1930s for my M.A. Degree thesis, I found that some of the leading artists of the period: Paul Nash, Graham Sutherland, Tristram Hillier, Ben Nicholson and Vanessa Bell had produced posters for the Shell-Mex oil company. As my first degree was in Graphic Design, I was familiar with the posters produced for the railway companies, especially London Underground, during the interwar period but was not aware of the seventy-one landscape posters produced by Shell in the 1930s. I was further interested to find that the Head of London Underground (in the 1930s known as London Transport), Frank Pick, had at least two studies devoted to him, as well as featuring in other histories of design. However Jack Beddington, publicity manager of Shell, was relatively neglected.¹ During an unrelated visit, in the same year, to Upton House in Warwickshire, I was fascinated to find an exhibition of the Shell posters along with some of the original paintings that were used to create the posters.² The motives that encouraged Shell to use such a wide variety of landscape images and artists and the relationship between commerce, fine art, commercial art and landscape were the issues that drew me to this subject.

The Shell Advertising Art Collection, housed at the National Motor Museum in Beaulieu, is one of the most important collections of commercial art in Britain and spans the period from the 1900s to the 1980s. The collection contains posters, press advertisements, paintings and illustrations, as well as early postcards, books and even a collection of Valentine cards. Previously stored at Shell-Mex House in London, the Shell Advertising Art Collection has been housed at Beaulieu since May 1993. There are over 7,000 printed posters and 1,000 original art works in the

¹ These include: Christian Barman, *The Man Who Built London Transport: A Biography of Frank Pick* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1979) and Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960). Jack Beddington is the subject of the self-published, Ruth Artmonsky, *Jack Beddington: The Footnote Man* (London: Artmonsky Arts, 2006).

² Upton House was owned from 1927 by Marcus Samuel known as Sir Marcus Samuel between 1903 and 1921 and subsequently as The Lord Bearsted. He was the founder of the Shell Transport and Trading Company, a precursor to Royal Dutch Shell.

collection.³ Examples of the seventy-one landscape posters produced under the direction of Jack Beddington can be found there, as well as some of the original artwork. There are also examples of the other important campaign, from the 1930s, created by Beddington. This one used occupations, hobbies and interests such as ‘Smokers Prefer Shell’ as its theme. Many of the paintings used for the posters were originally on display in Shell-Mex House, the 1931 large Art Deco building, on the banks of the Thames. When Shell moved from there in 1993, much of its archive went to Beaulieu whilst many items including more press advertisements, dealers’ booklets and photographs went to the Shell-Mex and BP Archive at Warwick University.⁴ Exploring these archives and wherever possible viewing the original work has been an interesting and revelatory part of this thesis.⁵

A small number of written documents relating to the posters can be found at Tate Britain which holds a number of letters from Jack Beddington to artists, as well as artists’ letters to Beddington.⁶ These revealed useful information about his working methods as did the published letters of John Betjeman.⁷ Original editions of the Shell Guides, edited by Betjeman, and kept at the University of Manchester Library gave an insight into Shell’s advertising strategy, particularly in relation to encouraging tourism.⁸

In Britain during the 1920s there was increasing hostility towards the spread of roadside advertising, of which the petrol companies were considered to be one of the major culprits.⁹ To counteract this opposition, Shell-Mex and the British Petroleum Co. Ltd. (henceforth to be known in this thesis as Shell) began to remove

³ The collection may be viewed by appointment and enquiries are welcome from the public, students and academics. The Shell Art Collection Manager is Nicky Balfour and she can be contacted at shell.art@beaulieu.co.uk.

⁴ This archive can be contacted at BPArchive@bp.com and its website is <http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/bparchive/about/>.

⁵ The posters occasionally appear in exhibitions on 1930s’ art or exhibitions devoted solely to the advertisements of the period such as the forthcoming ‘Shell Advertising poster collection’ exhibition, Easter 2014 at Upton House, Warwickshire.

⁶ The letters to Cedric Morris and his partner, Arthur Lett-Haines, were particularly useful and are available at the Hyman Kreitman Research Centre, Tate Britain, Millbank.

⁷ John Betjeman and Candida Lycett-Green, *John Betjeman Letters* (London: Methuen, 1994).

⁸ The original 1930s’ Shell Guides are available at the University of Manchester Special Collections, Michael Robbins’ London Collection.

⁹ An excellent discussion on the preservation of the countryside in the 1930s is in David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998).

their advertising from countryside sites.¹⁰ Photographic opportunities were arranged to record publicly the company's commitment to remove the offending signs and restore the beauties of the countryside (Fig. 1).¹¹ Shell was already using its fleet of delivery vehicles as mobile advertisements and the company realised that this provided an acceptable alternative that would gain the approval of those organisations opposed to rural advertising. Full colour lithographic posters measuring 76 x 114 cm were attached to the back and sides of each lorry (Fig.2) with frequent changes to create and maintain public interest.¹² The earlier posters referred to the quality of petrol and oil but, by the 1930s, lack of competition between petrol companies created a shift in advertising towards 'brand' building.¹³ The aim of this was to create public awareness and a positive attitude towards Shell as a company. Although Shell used other forms of publicity, particularly press advertising, it was the lorry bills that attracted the most attention and established the company as one of discernment which associated itself with fine art.

The work commissioned by Beddington collectively represents a unique cross section of 1930s' British landscape painting. The posters contain no reference to the company's products and, although the company promoted the benefits of its oil and petrol in press advertising, its poster campaigns were the most recognised of its marketing strategies. Jack Beddington, Shell's publicity manager, who commissioned the artists, was characterised as a patron of fine art and artists.¹⁴ However, I shall argue that there were several other factors that were just or even more important in the creation of the posters. These included: the cartel that was

¹⁰ The two companies did not become a joint marketing company until 1932 when an advertisement appeared in the British press announcing a joint marketing operation between 'Shell-Mex Limited' and the 'British Petroleum Co. Ltd.', the marketing organisations of the Shell Group and the Anglo-Persian Group respectively. The advertisement is reproduced in, *Shell-Mex and BP Ltd.: The First 25 Years. History as Mirrored in Advertising of Shell-Mex and BP Ltd., 1932-1957* (London: Shell-Mex and BP Ltd., 1957) p.6.

¹¹ This photograph was published in Design and Industries Association, *The Face of the Land: The Year Book of the Design and Industries Association, 1929-30* (London: DIA, 1930). See also David Jeremiah, 'Filling Up: The British Experience, 1896-1940', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1995, pp.97-116.

¹² The Publicity Department at Shell would supply the posters to the public at 2/6 each, post-free (special price for schools, 1/- each post free). *The Shell Magazine*, July, 1934, p.314

¹³ See Michael Heller, 'Corporate Brand Building at Shell-Mex Ltd. in the Interwar Period' (Working Paper 23, Queen Mary, University of London, September, 2008).

¹⁴ The theme of the patron is a recurring one in discussions on interwar posters. The most frequently named patron is Frank Pick at London Underground and as recently as 2010 Paul Rennie has devoted a whole chapter to the 'patrons' of this period in Paul Rennie, 'Patrons of the Modern Poster', *Modern British Posters: Art, Design & Communication* (London: Black Dog, 2010) pp.33-75.

formed by the oil companies supplying Britain; the development and encouragement of motoring tourism and its effect on the countryside; the middle-class rejection of working class holiday destinations; concern about the preservation of the countryside; the effect of the 'slump' on the working lives of artists; the economic and aesthetic arguments about the relationship between fine and commercial art and the relationship between landscape to national identity. All these factors will be explored as elements of the social, economic and cultural background to the diverse collection of images produced by Shell in the 1930s.

The poster has rarely been afforded the scholarly interest shown towards other aspects of mass-produced visual culture such as film and television. In Britain, research into the history of the poster has tended to produce books that are essentially picture books, with captions giving titles and dates.¹⁵ More recently, Paul Rennie has produced a well-illustrated and well-researched exploration of the British poster.¹⁶ An article by John Hewitt, in the *Journal of Design History*, was helpful in both informing and inspiring this thesis.¹⁷ Hewitt explores what he states to be a recurring theme of Shell's advertising that he traces back to the 1930s. This theme is the reference in the company's publicity to nature and art and how Shell, 'started systematically to identify itself and its products with the euphoric values of nature and art'.¹⁸ He also points out the contradiction in which Shell claimed to be preserving and making available an idealized British countryside whilst colluding with the forces which were rapidly transforming it. What Hewitt does not give attention to is the contribution to the campaigns of the artists and designers who created the images. The social, economic and cultural issues surrounding their artistic production and its relationship to commercial art were not the focus of his paper.

Much of the research into the poster in Britain has focussed, understandably, on those produced by the railway companies, especially London Underground. However, the large industrial companies such as Shell have received minimal

¹⁵ A good example with excellent illustrations of posters, a short introduction but very little text can be found in John Hewitt, *The Shell Poster Book* (London: Profile Books, 1998).

¹⁶ Rennie, 2010.

¹⁷ John Hewitt, "The 'Nature' and 'Art' of Shell Advertising in the Early 1930s", *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1992, pp. 121-139.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.121.

attention to their advertising.¹⁹ Apart from Frank Pick at London Underground, those in charge of the publicity for their organisations have been afforded a similar lack of research.²⁰ Interest in the history of posters has tended to be the preserve of collectors or enthusiasts rather than cultural historians. This thesis, however, is formulated on the belief that posters, like other forms of visual culture, are historically significant for what they reveal about the social and cultural values of their times. The Shell posters convey messages about attitudes towards the countryside and its preservation, travel and tourism, national identity and fine art. This thesis will explore the creation of three Shell poster campaigns: *See Britain First, Everywhere You Go* and *To See Britain's Landmarks*, that were based upon the British landscape. It will situate them in the social context of inter-war England, consider the images of Englishness that they represent and explore the motivation of Shell in creating the campaigns.

As already noted, research into the history of the poster may be limited and disconnected, despite some recent studies into the history of graphic design.²¹ One reason for the lack of research into the history of the poster is the fragmentation of archives in Britain that keep the relevant material. The research for this thesis found that, in the case of Shell, posters and some of the original art work from the 1930s, are kept at the Shell Art Collection which is housed at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu, Hampshire whilst the Shell-Mex and BP archive at Warwick University holds other material: photographs, mainly black and white, of vehicles, offices, depots and installations, petrol stations, advertising displays and SMBP activities and dealer literature. The Shell Centre on the South Bank in London also holds all the company magazines from the inter-war period. Elsewhere, poster archives are, like Shell's, attached to specialist interests such as posters produced during the two World Wars held by the Imperial War Museum. Railway posters and London Underground posters are kept respectively at the London Transport Museum and the

¹⁹ See Teri Edelstein, *Art for All: British Posters for Transport* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2010) and Oliver Green, *Underground Art: London Transport Posters, 1908 to the Present* (London: Laurence King, 1999).

²⁰ See Michael Saler, 1999 and C. Barman, 1979.

²¹ An extensive exploration can be found in David Raizman, *History of Modern Design* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2004).

National Railway Museum, York.²² There seems to be no appetite within the distinct institutions to co-ordinate or integrate the various and disparate parts of the history of the poster in Britain.²³

The Shell posters have also received very little attention in the history of British art and the development of British artists' work is rarely acknowledged to include their work for Shell.²⁴ When commercial work is touched upon it is invariably in relation to the financial needs of the artists to take on commercial commissions in order to supplement their incomes. Charles Harrison, for example, writes of Paul Nash's being 'obliged' to turn his hand to design.²⁵ Francis Spalding also writes of Nash supplementing his income from design.²⁶ The commercial work of British artists is, however, more frequently ignored completely.²⁷ In individual artists' monographs, where it might be expected to find reference to their poster designs there is a similar absence. Paul Nash's posters are relegated to the catalogue section of Andrew Causey's book and Douglas Cooper demotes Sutherland's posters to a footnote.²⁸ This lack of attention to the posters is even more surprising when their importance to the career of an artist like Sutherland is acknowledged. Malcolm Yorke has written that the two posters produced by Sutherland brought him to the notice of Kenneth Clark, 'who soon became a shaping force in Sutherland's career'.²⁹ Clark, as the Director of the National Gallery, was an extremely important mentor for any artist to secure. The interwar debate on the relationship between art, design and industry that will be explored in this thesis is mentioned briefly by Harrison, as well as the point that the participants in the debate were mostly drawn

²² These collections can be viewed online at www.ltmuseumshop.co.uk/ltm/posters.html for London Transport Museum and <http://www.nrm.org.uk/OurCollection/Posters.aspx> for the National Railway Museum. The Imperial War Museum website is at www.iwm.org.uk/

²³ The Victoria and Albert Museum has actively collected posters for over a century. They are chosen by the museum as examples of 'artistic style form and technique'. Catherine Flood, *British Posters: Advertising, Art and Activism* (London: V&A., 2012) p.6. The collection is international with a strong British representation.

²⁴ An unusual exception is the inclusion of a short section on the posters in Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010).

²⁵ Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism, 1900-1939* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1994) p.239.

²⁶ Francis Spalding, *British Art since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) p.107.

²⁷ The posters are not referred to in Chris Stephens', *The History of British Art, Volume 3: 1870-Now* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009).

²⁸ Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash, 1889-1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1980) and Douglas Cooper, *The Work of Graham Sutherland* (London: Lund Humphries, 1961).

²⁹ Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their Times* (London; New York: Tauris Parke, 2001) p.115.

from the ranks of commercial artists, designers and illustrators but he gives no examples of their work.³⁰

Advertising receives a similar lack of interest in histories of the oil industry. These are dominated by its role in the world economy and the debate about who controls the extraction of oil, its pricing and supply.³¹ Issues explored include state involvement and control, energy security and environment degradation.³² The role of advertising and brand building are rarely mentioned. However, the control of the supply of petroleum products in the 1930s had a direct relevance to this thesis. The effect exploration has on the environment is a frequent subject in the histories of the oil industry but the controversial topic of outdoor advertising in the interwar period is ignored. As will be seen, the Achnacarry Agreement of 1928 had an important influence on Shell's advertising in the following decade. It created, in Britain, 'one of the most controlled markets in the world'.³³ Each oil company was allocated a quota - a percentage share of total sales- based on its share in 1928. This meant companies needed to increase the size of the market but not their percentage share of it. One aim of Shell's advertising was to encourage car usage, through tourism, rather than extolling the quality of its products. In his 1997 book, written for the company, Stephen Howarth does acknowledge the importance of advertising in the 1930s as a strategy aimed at adapting to a worldwide glut of oil.³⁴ Achnacarry was a response to this surplus and was aimed at ensuring that it would not lead to a price war but it also meant that a lack of competition between companies had an effect on the way their products were advertised.

Shell's posters were a curious hybrid of fine and commercial art. On a continuum of poster design they included dramatic graphic designs such as those produced, in the first half of the twentieth century, by Edward McKnight Kauffer to paintings by artists such as Vanessa Bell that merely used as an existing image on a

³⁰ Harrison, 1994, p.308.

³¹ See Francisco Parra, *Oil Politics: A Modern History of Petroleum* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

³² A comprehensive history of the oil industry can be found in Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: the Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (London, Pocket Books, 1993) as well as Geoffrey Jones, *State and the Emergence of the British Oil Industry* (London: Macmillan, 1981) and Peter Ellis-Jones, *Oil: A Practical Guide to the Economics of World Petroleum* (Cambridge: Woodhead-Faulkner, 1988).

³³ Jones, 1981, p.236.

³⁴ Stephen Howarth, *A Century in Oil: The 'Shell' Transport and Trading Company 1897-1997* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson.1997).

poster. The objective of this thesis is to explore a cross section of the poster images in order to tease out the relationship between the way artists represented the British landscape to the socio-economic, political and cultural life in inter-war Britain. Whilst much attention has been given to the artists and designers of this period, particularly in relation to modernism, there is a gap in research on the industrial companies and the way they appropriated the work of visual artists for their advertising. One objective of this thesis seeks to repair that omission and explore the relationship between art and industry in the 1930s through the writers, commentators and artists who supported or opposed the integration of fine art with commercial art.

The debate regarding the relationship between artists, designers and industry, as will be seen, had its origins in the nineteenth century, initiated particularly by the Arts and Crafts movement. It continued in the twentieth century and, by the 1920s, the debate was represented vividly within the articles and reviews appearing in the *Studio* magazine.³⁵ The economic difficulties at the end of the decade exacerbated the necessity for artists to diversify into design but there had already been encouragement to do so from the beginning of the century. The *Studio* explored how British design could be improved by the interaction between art, design and commerce, leading to more attractive and marketable products. To facilitate this, the magazine encouraged a debate on the role of artists, including how they saw themselves, in relation to the commercial world.³⁶ In the 1920s, the *Studio* navigated a careful course between satisfying its readers' interest in fine art, whilst introducing and encouraging them to consider the public role of the artist in contemporary society. How artists could improve the standard of design and engage with commercial life was a recurring theme within the magazine. One aspect of how they could do this was to focus on the standard of art and design education. This was a topic that would engage writers and commentators into the 1930s. The *Studio*'s year-books also emphasised the role this could have in improving the quality of manufactured goods. Holt argues that the magazine promoted art that was adapting to changing modern conditions, whilst at the same time making an important

³⁵ A comprehensive survey of this debate in the *Studio* has been explored in Ysanne Holt, 'The call of commerce: the *Studio* magazine in the 1920s', Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, Eds., *The Rise of the Modern Art Market, 1850-1939* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011) pp. 151-173.

³⁶ Summarized comprehensively in Holt, p.152.

contribution to the ambition of offering manufacturers good quality design.³⁷ The Studio participated in the debate between those, in the 1920s, who supported the Arts and Crafts approach of personalised, individual artisanship and those who wished to see a more modernist engagement with the commercial mass production methods and the emerging industrial designer.³⁸ This more modernist approach was helped in the 1930s, by the influx of émigrés from Europe, such as Walter Gropius, whose ideas the Studio would endorse. Throughout the 1920s, the magazine had argued for an end to historical revivalism, elitist design and the anti-machine ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement.³⁹

Shell's posters did not develop in a detached and disinterested environment but were determined by their context, be it cultural, social or political. This thesis will interpret them in the light of contemporary concerns of the 1930s. One of the most important reflections on the reproduction of images was written by Walter Benjamin in 1936. For Benjamin, the mechanical reproduction of images gave a democratic corrective to the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art. The poster could be seen as an antidote to the unique nature of fine art painting. He argued that that even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element, 'its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be'.⁴⁰ Benjamin described this presence as the 'aura' of the work of art and argued that this aura could wither in the age of mechanical reproduction. On the surface it would seem that Shell's reproduction of works of art for advertisements fulfils Benjamin's concept of breaking away from the uniqueness of the object. However, the posters have gained their own unique quality, even aura, by the ephemeral nature that attaches them to a particular time. Shell tried to replicate the aura of fine art around the posters by exhibiting them in art galleries, selling them to the public, presenting them as fine art with the artist's name appearing on the images and

³⁷ Holt makes this point on art adapting to changing modern conditions as distinct from the argument David Peters Corbett makes on an adaptive modernism in the chapter 'Revisionist Modernism in the Twenties' in *The Modernity of English Art, 1914-1930* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997) pp.82-92.

³⁸ Andrew Stephenson, 'Strategies of display and modes of consumption in London art galleries in the inter-war years' in Fletcher and Helmreich, 2011.

³⁹ See Cheryl Buckley, *Designing Modern Britain* (London, Reaktion Books, 2007).

⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. Originally published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1936. Reproduced in Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris, *Art in Modern Culture: an Anthology of Critical Texts* (London: Phaidon Press, 1992) p.29.

displaying them in its offices. This ephemeral nature of the poster places it in a particular moment in time and gives it historical value. Despite being disposable, if it is preserved it becomes a historical document creating a record of the tastes, activities, interests and attitudes of a specific time.⁴¹ The Shell posters have indeed become material sources of their time and they have value as visual records of a place as well as a time. As historical documents they are indicators of the identity and interests of those who produced and consumed them. This was recognised from the earliest beginnings of posters. The French critic, Maurice Talmeyer, wrote in the 1890s that the poster ‘speaks to us only of ourselves, our pleasures, our tastes, our interests, our food, our health, our life’.⁴² This thesis will propose that they ‘speak to us’ of even more issues than Talmeyer suggests.

The relationship between art and commerce was an issue that engaged industrialists, artists, writers, intellectuals, designers and advertisers during the interbellum. This relationship between fine art and advertising is one that will form a substantial part of the story of the Shell posters. This will include critiques on the relationship by commentators who considered this issue important to the economic as well as the cultural wealth of the country. The cultural historian, D. L. Mahieu, has suggested that a ‘web of personal relationships and professional favours’ linked individuals from various fields and this web was a characteristic of the design debate of the inter-war period.⁴³

Whether the posters were, for Shell, more than simply tourist images will be discussed in order to investigate what wider motives may have prompted the company to use landscape paintings as tourist images and whether the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu’s, concept of ‘cultural capital’ is relevant to these images?⁴⁴ Bourdieu pioneered investigative frameworks and terminologies such as cultural, social, and symbolic capital, and the concepts of habitus, field or location. His best known book is *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. In it,

⁴¹ The success or failure of the poster as a medium is discussed in Malcolm Frost, Angharad Lewis, Aidan Winterburn, *Street Talk: The Rise and Fall of the Poster* (Mulgrave, Vic.: Images, 2006).

⁴² Maurice Talmeyer, ‘The Age of the Poster’, *Chateauquian* 24, January 1897, p.462.

⁴³ D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) p.158.

⁴⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University Press, 1984).

Bourdieu argues that judgments of taste are related to social position, or more precisely, are themselves acts of social positioning.

As well as his key term, cultural capital, he also refers to other forms of capital (social, economic, symbolic) and argues that these different forms of capital are assets that define an individual within their social space. Cultural capital refers to competences, skills and qualifications which enable holders to mobilise cultural authority. Class fractions are determined by a combination of these social, economic and cultural capitals. For Bourdieu the social world is divided into fields and these are structured, relatively autonomous, social spaces with their own rules and opinions that shape relations within the fields. Shell was operating in the field of art and advertising, making the company attractive through association with the positive values of art, nature and travel. It assumed and encouraged its potential customers to show the same culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns. The poster artists, Shell and its potential customers had, on the one hand, developed attitudes and dispositions towards art, the countryside and travel and, on the other hand, they were engaged in producing or appreciating the posters that extol the positive values of art and travel. This process of developing dispositions and/or engaging in a 'field' is referred to by Bourdieu as *habitus*. Shell was associating the company with an individual's *habitus* or way of behaving by assuming its customers had a level of taste to appreciate the posters, a desire to visit the British countryside away from the working-class holiday destinations and enough economic capital to own and run a car for pleasure. The company operated within the fields of art and advertising by using fine art and an appreciation of an unspoilt countryside. It was setting itself apart from other manufacturing companies and disguising its function, which was to produce, distribute and sell oil and petrol.

Pierre Bourdieu argued that cultural capital has developed in opposition to economic capital and, for him; capital includes the value of social networks. These networks can be seen in the overlapping fields of commerce, advertising and art which came together to create the Shell posters. In the commercial world, Beddington was aware of the advantages publicity brought to the promotion and selling of a business. He had obtained his job by stating that Shell's advertising was not good enough to sell its products. In the interwar years, commercial patrons like Beddington were part of overlapping networks that brought together business and

creativity to raise the standard of British advertising.⁴⁵ Although Bourdieu does not emphasise social interaction within networks, he does refer to environments where artists make connections.⁴⁶ Bourdieu called his account of the social world ‘relationalist’ and was not concerned with relations between subjects but with relations between positions in fields. Bottero and Crossley have argued that, although Bourdieu gives insufficient attention to social interaction, his model of social space centred on juxtaposed positions was not incompatible with a network model based upon social interaction.⁴⁷

One of Bourdieu’s key resources for acquiring cultural capital was education and it is in this area that the beginnings of networks in the art and design fields can be seen. The painter, Robert Medley, attributed much of the coherence of early twentieth century artistic society to the narrowness of an educational choice of schools for the more culturally inclined parents.⁴⁸ It is not a surprise that, in Higher Education, networks began to be formed and that eleven of the more than fifty Shell artists and designers went to the Royal College of Art and at least seven went to the Slade School of Fine Art. As the focus of the interwar British art world was in the relatively small geographical area of London, it would be reasonable to speculate that, as post-graduates, many of those producing the posters knew each other socially.⁴⁹ There were also formal groupings that included the poster artists. As well as living together, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant were part of the Bloomsbury Group. They were also part of the London Group, along with others who worked for Shell, including Paul Nash and Edward McKnight Kauffer. As will be seen, four out of the six painters in Unit One produced posters: Paul Nash, John Armstrong, Ben Nicholson and Tristram Hillier. The networks created by personal relationships and the connections of individuals were central to the creativity that produced Shell’s posters.

⁴⁵ Other than Beddington, there was Frank Pick at London Underground and Sir Stephen Tallents at the GPO. Paul Rennie, *Modern British Posters: Art, Design & Communication* (London: Black Dog, 2010).

⁴⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996).

⁴⁷ Wendy Bottero and Nick Crossley, ‘Worlds, Fields and Networks: Becker, Bourdieu and the Structures of Social Relations’, *Cultural Sociology*, March 2011: vol. 5, 1: pp.99-119.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939* (London: Viking, 2002) p.90.

⁴⁹ For example the artist Adrian Daintry, who produced poster *The Jungle Lincoln* (1936) exhibited with Paul Nash. Tom Gentleman who became studio head for Shell and produced *Strange Church, Ayot St. Lawrence* (1937) had worked with Edward McKnight Kauffer at Crawford’s Advertising Agency.

Beddington was fortunate in having a figure working for him: John Betjeman, whose forte was personal connections. Whilst working at the *Architectural Review* in the early 1930s, Betjeman came to know many of the artists, architects, preservationists and designers of the day. He worked with Paul Nash on an early Shell Guide book and eventually worked for Beddington for three days a week. Betjeman lived close to, and often visited, the eccentric aristocrat Lord Berners, who produced a poster and contributed to one of the Shell Guides. Berners was part of the social network known as the Bright Young People and these interwar partygoers included, with Betjeman, artists such as Rex Whistler; the photographer Cecil Beaton; writers Evelyn Waugh and H.G. Wells and other aristocrats, such as the Mitford sisters.⁵⁰

Artistic and commercial networks were not just national. Beddington visited America to absorb approaches to advertising in the country. The in-house Shell magazine devoted a considerable amount of space to Shell's advertising and building design abroad. Beddington also used humour inspired by the *New Yorker* magazine in his press advertising.⁵¹ The American, McKnight Kauffer, brought his ideas and influences to Britain and worked closely with Beddington. Artists and designers who were obliged to leave Europe began to work and inspire British Design: Hans Fiebusch and Hans Schleger from Germany and Szegedi Szuts from Budapest. There was also a network of those interested in the preservation of the countryside who admired Shell's stance on removing rural advertising. The campaigner, Clough Williams-Ellis, wrote the introduction for a catalogue to a Shell posters' exhibition, whilst a series of the *New Naturalist* books, which intended to give a scientific background to countryside phenomena, were illustrated by Shell poster artists Clifford and Rosemary Ellis.⁵²

Many of the artists, designers, writers and heads of commercial companies knew each other socially, or through their education or profession. Tamson Pietsch's statement, in relation to British academia, that the participants were 'connected to its networks and advantaged by its cultures of sociability' could equally be applied to

⁵⁰ Taylor, D. J., *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation, 1918-1939* (Rearsby: W. F. Howes, 2007).

⁵¹ Artmonsky, 2006.

⁵² Matless, 1998, p.228.

the networks of art, design and commerce.⁵³ Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, fields and habitus give an insight into how Shell's posters illuminate the importance of social relations and the sophisticated appropriation of fine art that went into their creation. The 1930s was a period of social, economic and political uncertainty but networks that are revealed by the Shell posters made it possible for participants to create social, artistic and work lives for themselves.

In the story of the Shell posters in the 1930s, the person at the centre of the personal relationships that produced seventy landscape posters was the publicity manager for Shell, Jack Beddington. Born on January 30, 1893, John Louis Beddington (Fig.3) was educated at Wellington College and Balliol College, Oxford. At the outbreak of the First World War, he enlisted in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and served until 1919, when he was severely wounded. Thereafter, he served nine years in China for the Asiatic Petroleum Company (a subsidiary of Shell) until he was invalided home in 1928. At the London office of Shell he became successively publicity manager and assistant general manager.⁵⁴ Although he had not been involved specifically with advertising in China, when he came to discuss his future, back in London, with F.L. Halford, the General Manager of Shell UK, he criticised Shell's advertising as commonplace. Halford is said to have replied that if Beddington thought it was so bad he had better take it over and do something about it and, without previous experience, that is what he did.⁵⁵

John Piper described Beddington as 'a great jolly bouncing man'⁵⁶ whilst John Betjeman described him as 'a devoted family man, full of fun and charity'.⁵⁷ Beddington gave Betjeman employment by making him the creator of the *Shell Guides* in the 1930s. As Betjeman later wrote:

When he was at Shell I brought him in the early thirties, a few pasted-up pages of a projected guide to Cornwall. He liked the idea and the result was

⁵³ It was useful for this thesis to draw upon the work of Tamson Pietsch on the importance of networks of personal relationships in the academic world of the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in *Empire of Scholars: Universities, networks and the British academic world 1850-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁵⁴ *The Times* unattributed obituary, 15th April 1959.

⁵⁵ Artmonsky, 2006, p.18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.18.

⁵⁷ A recollection on Beddington's death by John Betjeman in *The Times*, 27th April 1959.

the first of the Shell Guides. In this series, which he brought into existence, he allowed me a free hand in text illustration and typography.⁵⁸

In an example of LeMahieu's 'web of personal relationships', Beddington also introduced Betjeman to Lord Berners, who will feature later in this thesis and through him to Betjeman's future wife, Penelope Chetwode.⁵⁹ The artist and designer Richard Guyatt referred to Beddington's sociability and appearance when he described him as having 'a club-man's chic' with his brushed moustache, bowler hat and rolled umbrella.⁶⁰ His obituary in the *Times* also referred to an aspect of Beddington's working life that was frequently raised, that he was a patron of young artists. 'He enjoyed every minute of his life and wasted none of it whether he was discovering artists, listening to woes and giving practical advice and help'.⁶¹ It was something Beddington encouraged others to credit him with. In a follow-up recollection, printed two days after his obituary, the General Manager of Shell-Mex Ltd., C. M. Vignoles echoed this aspect of Beddington's character. Vignoles said that, 'he sometimes described himself as a frustrated artist and his kindness and encouragement to young painters and writers was almost legendary'.⁶² Beddington even produced a book in 1957 containing images sent to him by young artists in which he emphasised his relationship with and promotion of artists. 'I have never found that artists are unpractical or difficult to get on with, or particularly dirty. Some are, but they are very rarely the best ones. If they wear beards, why shouldn't they?'⁶³ Even in this facetious remark Beddington was establishing a slightly condescending relationship towards the artists he employed and this thesis will interrogate the concept of the 'patron-genius'.

The poster series ended in 1939 when the artist, Eve Kirk, produced a landscape image for the final poster created before the Second World War. This was *The Liffey*, in Dublin and was given the copy line 'Everywhere You Go'.⁶⁴ There had

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ David Heathcote, *A Shell Eye on England: The Shell County Guides 1934-1984* (Faringdon, Libri, 2011) p.14.

⁶⁰ Artmonsky, 2006, p.18. Richard Guyatt (1914-2007) produced two posters for Beddington and became a professor at the Royal College of Art after the war. *The Guardian* obituary, October 27th 2007.

⁶¹ *The Times*, unattributed obituary, 15th April 1959.

⁶² C.M. Vignoles, *The Times*, 17th April 1959.

⁶³ Jack Beddington, *Young Artists of Promise* (London: Studio Publications, 1957) p.8.

⁶⁴ This was one of only two outside Britain. The other was also of the *Liffey* by H. C. Donnell in 1932.

been a two year gap since the previous Shell landscape poster and it completed a total of seventy-one posters produced by Shell, under the direction of Jack Beddington, in the 1930s.⁶⁵ The idea for these posters that showed the landscape of Britain (apart from the two exceptions portraying Dublin) had been initiated by Beddington in 1930. In a letter to Arthur Lett Haines, the partner of the artist, Cedric Morris, Beddington makes it very clear that the landscape poster campaigns were still in the planning stage.

During the spring and summer of 1931 I am hoping to do a series of pictures of different parts of England which will have some slogan, such as 'See Britain First on Shell' around them.⁶⁶

Beddington lists the four artists he had already asked: 'Algernon Newton; Mrs Clarke Hall; Mrs Vanessa Bell and Ted Kauffer'.⁶⁷ Eventually, thirty-one posters were produced in 1931 with a further forty created through the decade. The most prolific year was 1932 with twenty-two posters created by twenty-one artists.⁶⁸ In that year alone, artists commissioned included: Paul Nash; Graham Sutherland; Duncan Grant; Barnett Freedman; Tom Purvis and John Armstrong. These posters were the most important staple of Shell's advertising with press advertising coming second as the most recognisable aspect of its publicity.⁶⁹

The concept of the genius patron will be questioned in Chapter 1 along with the submission that this model is an over simplification of the process that led to the production of seventy one landscape posters. This chapter will investigate what other components could have led to their creation. What effect did the economic slump have on artistic production in the 1930s? Did the concern for the preservation of the British countryside create a receptive market for the posters or was the control of the petroleum market a more important influence? The portrayal of Beddington as a

⁶⁵ A record of all Shell's pictorial advertising including artwork and posters is kept at the Shell Art Collection, The National Motor Museum, Beaulieu, Hampshire.

⁶⁶ Letter from Jack Beddington to Arthur Lett Haines, 16th June 1930 Tate Archive 8317.1.1.3428. It is interesting that Beddington uses 'England' to represent Britain.

⁶⁷ Ibid. There is no record of the first two artists completing their commissions or the work may have been rejected. Vanessa Bell and Edward (Ted) McKnight Kauffer did produce posters; *Alfriston* from Bell and two from Kauffer: *New Forest* and *Stonehenge*. Cedric Morris produced *St. Osyth's Mill*. All were produced in 1931.

⁶⁸ McKnight Kauffer produced a further two designs to add to the two created in 1931.

⁶⁹ Another series of posters in the 1930s depicted occupations, interests and hobbies with slogans such as *Gardeners Prefer Shell*. Again some of the best known artists and designers of the inter-war period were used such as: Tristram Hillier; Ben Nicholson and Hans Schleger (also known as Zero).

genius patron obscures how important the poster was as an advertising medium in the interwar period, as well as the influence of his predecessors on his advertising methods. Chapter 1 will explore the range of elements that led to the creation of the Shell poster campaigns that contradicts the concept of the aesthetically aware individual who acts in isolation from the issues of his time.

The next chapter will investigate the inter-war debate that concerned the relationship between fine art, commercial art and industry.⁷⁰ It explores the reasons for the uneasy relationship between commercial art and industry but also a similarly uneasy relationship between fine and commercial art. Why were so many contributors to the debate concerned about this relationship and in what terms was the discussion framed? The chapter will also explore why and how Shell's advertising was used by those who argued for an integrated approach to the production of fine and commercial art. In reviewing what the writers, commentators and practitioners were saying about these issues, it will be important to investigate the position they took on the equality or inequality of fine and commercial art.

Chapter 3 begins with a quotation from the letter Jack Beddington wrote when he was instructing the artist, Cedric Morris, on the nature and appearance of the sort of site Morris should choose to paint for a potential Shell poster. The chapter will question the concept of 'place' and 'landscape'. It will explore whether the social and political discourses surrounding the portrayal of the British countryside can be revealed by analysing three of Shell's posters as case studies. Did these posters represent a contrast for the motorist between their urban or suburban habitats and between work and leisure?

The way in which Shell portrayed the British landscape in terms of tourist images is the subject of the fourth and final chapter of this thesis. How is the landscape, as portrayed by Shell's posters, represented for tourists and how do the posters function within tourism? Does the tourist poster exist within a triadic relationship with the landscape site and the tourist and, if so, how do the elements complement each other? Whether the posters were, for Shell, more than tourist images will be discussed in order to investigate what wider motives may have

⁷⁰ Throughout the thesis I shall use the term 'commercial art', although writers of the period would also use 'industrial' or 'applied' art to describe visual material commissioned for commercial purposes.

prompted the company to use landscape paintings as tourist images and whether the sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu's, concept of 'cultural capital' is relevant to these images?⁷¹ The issues surrounding tourism are explored in this chapter through the case studies of four Shell posters. One of the posters is part of the 'Conchophilous' series that represented occupations, hobbies and interests and was the only other major Shell poster series of the 1930s.⁷² Tristram Hillier's *Tourists Prefer Shell* from 1936 will reveal many of the issues created by tourism, including whether tourist posters representing unspoilt destinations bring about the spoiling of those destinations. The remaining three posters will be studied to reveal how the artists created illustrations that represented a fantasy image of England for the 1930s' motorist.

⁷¹ Bourdieu, 1984.

⁷² 'Conchophilous' was the punning title coined by Sir Kenneth Clark in his introduction to: *Exhibition by Shell-Mex and B P Ltd of pictures in advertising from 1935 to 1938*: (catalogue of exhibition) / (organised by) Shell-Mex and B P Ltd., held at Shell-Mex House, London, June 30th-July 9th 1938.

Chapter 1

‘Oil’ Painting: The mobile art of Shell

The founts of patronage now flow from business houses, and none of these merchant princes have realised their responsibilities more than Shell.

Looking at this exhibition one might consider them setting out to be the Medici of our time, with Mr Beddington, whose judgement it represents, as Lorenzo.⁷³

Cyril Connolly

I have said enough to show you that I consider Shell-Mex and BP posters of the greatest importance. They provide just the kind of patronage which the modern world and the modern artist needs; a patronage that no single rich man could provide.⁷⁴

Kenneth Clark

For the past seven or eight years, Shell-Mex and BP have been amongst the best patrons of modern art. They are all that a patron should be- they employ young and little-known artists, they provide definite subjects, and they make it possible for an artist's work to be enjoyed by a very large number of people.⁷⁵

Kenneth Clark

The complementary quotations above are indicative of a positive response from a number of critics towards the poster designs produced by the Shell-Mex and BP Ltd. Company (hereafter known as Shell) during the decade before the Second World

⁷³ This was taken from a review by Cyril Connolly of an exhibition in 1934 at the New Burlington Gallery entitled ‘Exhibition of Pictures in Advertising by Shell-Mex and BP Ltd.’. Cyril Connolly, ‘The New Medici’ *Architectural Review*, July 1934, p2-4.

⁷⁴ Sir Kenneth Clark, ‘Painters turn to Posters: The Shell-Mex Exhibition’, *Commercial Art*, Vol. 17, 1934, pp65-72.

⁷⁵ Sir Kenneth Clark, Introduction to *Exhibition of Pictures by Shell-Mex and B.P. Limited*, Exhibition Catalogue, 1938.

War. This presentation of Shell and particularly its Publicity Manager, Jack Beddington, as a patron of the arts attempts to explain the production of art in terms of the man of discernment and taste directing the ‘young and little-known’ artists to create their images in isolation from the historic, economic and cultural activity of the 1930s. The employment of designers and artists by Shell is explained as almost a philanthropic exercise.

This chapter will endeavour to show that this narrative of the genius patron is an over-simplification of the factors and circumstances surrounding the production and reception of the seventy-one images of the British countryside produced by Shell in this decade. The posters were created to encourage tourism by car in order to sell petrol. As images they were praised by the preservationist movement of the 1930s not only for their subject matter but also for the way they were displayed. This chapter will seek to explore the commercial and social factors surrounding the posters’ creation by first looking at the background to the formation of Shell in Britain and examining how its origins may have been a determinant on the nature of Shell’s advertising. Another influential aspect to be explored, affecting the company’s publicity, was the pressure exerted by the preservationist movement during the interwar years and how Shell’s advertising was used by the preservationists. In order to place Shell’s designs within the history of posters, an examination of printing technology will also be explored. It will also be useful to look at the precursors of Shell who used artists in the poster designs, particularly the work of Frank Pick at London Transport.

The seventy-one posters that are the subject of this thesis were produced as three separate campaigns that can be identified by their slogans: *See Britain First*, *Everywhere You Go* and *To Visit Britain’s Landmarks*. The posters were produced by more than fifty artists and their successful reception, indicated in Clark and Connolly’s comments, started an association with the arts that would be a template for Shell’s advertising and a public relations strategy that continues into the twenty-first century. The use of contemporary artists in its publicity and its depiction of the British landscape won it favourable attention and associated the Shell brand with

aesthetics, modernity and the countryside despite there being only an indirect link to petrol through tourism.⁷⁶

By exploring the origins of Shell, the posters will be placed in a particular moment in time which will include an exploration of the economic circumstances that made commercial work an attractive addition to an artist's financial status. The way in which the artists were recruited, briefed and paid will conclude this chapter. The large variety of images used in the 1930s posters are an overwhelming archive that is too unwieldy to be formally analysed individually but the diverse nature of the images can also be seen, because of their quantity, as a range of pictorial representations that yield relationships, themes and associations which will be explored in later chapters. What can they reveal, as signifiers, about issues concerning the commodification and visualisation of the English landscape as well as questions of corporate patronage, national identity and tourism? By establishing, in this chapter, the circumstances surrounding the creation of the images, the model of Beddington as the genius-patron will be seen to be an underestimation of the multiplicity of factors that bring about art production.

Mergers and Cartels

The parent company of Shell-Mex, Royal Dutch Shell, was created by the merger, in 1907, of the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company of Holland and the Shell Transport and Trading Company of the UK.⁷⁷ By the inter-war period the organization had developed into a major multinational oil company with interests in exploration, drilling, production, refining, shipping, distribution, marketing and related services. Its products included oil, kerosene, petrol, heating fuels and hydrocarbon chemicals with its principal markets in the transport sectors of motor vehicles, aviation and shipping. In Britain during the interwar period the company traded as Shell-Mex, a distribution and marketing company born out of the acquisition by Shell in 1921 of Mexican Eagle.

⁷⁶ This area has been explored in, Michael Heller, *Corporate Brand Building at Shell-Mex Ltd. in the Interwar Period*, (Working Paper 23, Queen Mary, University of London, September 2008).

⁷⁷ Howarth, 1997.

In August 1928, Henri Deterding, the chairman of Royal Dutch/Shell leased Achnacarry House near Loch Arkraig in the Highlands of Scotland, supposedly as a holiday retreat.⁷⁸ He invited several similarly powerful oilmen to join him: William Teagle of Standard Oil (New Jersey), Sir John Cadman of Anglo Persian, William Mellon of Gulf and Robert Stewart of Standard Oil (Indiana). Deterding discouraged journalists from investigating the gathering by insisting that it was simply a private vacation in Scotland, a gathering of friends for a fortnight of shooting and fishing. In fact, as Stephen Howarth has pointed out in his history of the company written with the cooperation of Shell as a celebration of its centenary, it was a congress of the world's oil leaders with the purpose of establishing a cartel.⁷⁹ Howarth has also speculated that if the real reason for the meeting had been made public it would have caused a negative response from a large section of the public:

They (the public) viewed the industry more as a service than a commercial supplier, and, enjoying but wary of their own dependence on oil products were highly sensitive to fears of monopoly, cartel and exploitation.⁸⁰

Shell was the second largest oil company after Standard Oil in terms of its success in the domination of production and supply of the world's oil products. But during the 1920s the oil companies had seen profits reduced by over-production and over-capacity. The participants of the house party wanted to end their mutually destructive price warfare and bring stability to the industry. Henri Deterding's proposal was that the oil companies would keep their 1928 market share indefinitely. After two weeks of discussion in Scotland, a seventeen-page document was produced that became known as the Achnacarry Agreement or more cynically the As-Is Agreement. The group of companies conspired to fix prices and supplies from different regions through the agreement, which was contrary to US legislation at the time. It was the 'greatest cartel the world had ever known'.⁸¹ The market most

⁷⁸ John Higdon, *A History of Shell-Mex and BP Limited*, a brochure available at the BP Archive, Warwick University, 145564. The foundation of Shell has been explored in Robert Henriques. *Marcus Samuel: First Viscount Bearstead and Founder of the 'Shell' Transport and Trading Company 1853-1927* (London: Barrie and Rockcliff, 1960).

⁷⁹ Howarth, 1997, p.154. On the establishment of the cartel at the Achnacarry meeting see also; Geoffrey Jones, *The State and Emergence of the British Oil Industry*, (London: The Macmillan Press, 1981) and Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

⁸⁰ Howarth, 1997, p.153.

⁸¹ John Urry, *Societies Beyond Oil: Oil Dregs and Social Futures* (London: New York: Zedbooks, 2013) p.43.

effectively controlled by the arrangement was Britain, where the As-Is Agreement was in place until the Second World War, although the cartel was less effective in other European countries.⁸² The resulting lack of competition in Britain would, I propose, be an important contributing factor in the approach to advertising that Shell adopted in the 1930s.⁸³

Only one year later the dominance of Shell was put under pressure by the Stock Market crash of 1929 which led to a world depression and then, in 1931, the British abandonment of the gold standard which devalued pound sterling by 30% overnight. Despite the difficult economic situation and with the help of the AS-IS Agreement, Shell continued to grow in the 1930s. Howarth's record is helpful in pointing out the three main strategies that helped Shell survive and prosper during the period: amalgamating with other oil companies, research into fuel and chemical development and most relevant to this thesis, advertising.⁸⁴ The first, the establishment of a number of joint operations, had its beginning at Achnacarry. Sir John Cadman, the chairman of Anglo-Persian Oil (APOC), was a participant in the As-Is Agreement. Cadman had realised that a surplus of oil products was depressing prices and, as a further step in improving profitability, agreed to form a joint company with Royal Dutch/Shell. Shell-Mex merged with the marketing and distribution arm of APOC, British Petroleum (BP). The two companies combined would be a joint marketing venture known in Britain as Shell-Mex and BP Limited, whilst Consolidated Petroleum would market the company's products in the East and Africa. Shell held 60% of the shares and the APOC 40%.⁸⁵ The first meeting of the newly formed company took place at the London offices of Royal Dutch/Shell at St Helen's Court on 12th November 1931. The joint company soon established itself at Shell-Mex House on the Thames which produced the highly creative series of posters in the 1930s that are the subject of this thesis. F.L. Halford was first General Manager and there were six Assistant General Managers, one of whom, Jack

⁸² Ferry de Goey, "Henri Deterding: Royal Dutch/Shell," *Business History* 44, no. 4 (2002). p.76.

⁸³ Michael Heller has suggested that restrictive marketing arrangements, such as the As-Is agreement were common in nearly all sectors in Britain amongst major producers at the time. Heller, 2008.

⁸⁴ Howarth, p.164.

⁸⁵ After the merger of Shell with BP, the other major oil company in Britain was Anglo-American which was owned by Standard Oil. Between them these companies controlled 70% of the market for motor oil in Britain. R. W. Ferrier, (1986) 'Petrol Advertising in the Twenties and Thirties: The Case of the British Petroleum Company', *European Journal of Marketing*, 1986, 20 (5) pp. 29-51.

Beddington, who will figure strongly later in this account, was to be in charge of publicity.

Jack Beddington came from a privileged background. The family name had been changed from Samuels by his grandfather. His grandmother, Zilla, was a well-known pianist. Violet Schiff, an aunt, was a literary hostess and friend of Proust's translator Stephen Hudson. Another aunt was Oscar Wilde's friend, the Edwardian novelist, Ada Liverson. Jack's father is mentioned in the pre-war diaries of Marcus Samuel, the founder of Shell, as 'Dining with Mr Beddington'.⁸⁶ Jack Beddington joined Shell-Mex Ltd on March 1st 1928 at the age of 35.⁸⁷ His role was crucial in the second of the strategies Howarth describes for Shell's success in the 1930s, that is, 'a spectacular explosion of advertising'.⁸⁸ He had been part of the advertising committee for Shell on his return and complained so much about the poor standard of the work that he was appointed by F L Halford, the General Manager of Shell, as the Director of the Publicity Department.

The establishment of the cartel, in the As-Is Agreement directly influenced the content of the posters initiated by Beddington. The As-Is Agreement created a marketplace in Britain where the oil companies would keep the same market share that they had in 1928. This would undermine what is a basic objective of advertising: to increase market share. John Hewitt has explored the shift in Shell's advertising from 'reason to buy' marketing that extolled the virtues of Shell products during the 1920s to the campaigns of the 1930s which focussed on landscape images that seem more concerned with public relations and creating 'goodwill'.⁸⁹ Hewitt focuses on the influence of countryside preservation groups on Shell which, although significant, plays down the important factor of the economic security of Shell's position that was created by the establishment of the cartel in 1928. The company was in the strange situation of, on the one hand, not needing to increase their market share but on the other wanting to promote loyalty to their products. The result was for Shell to adopt what would now be called a corporate identity. The company would, under Jack Beddington, associate itself with fine art and the British

⁸⁶ Quoted in Robert Henriques, 1960, p.434.

⁸⁷ No extensive biography of Beddington exists although the self-published Ruth Artmonsky, *Jack Beddington : The Footnote Man*. (Artmonsky Arts, London, 2006) is a useful introduction. Also helpful is Gabriele Ullstien, 'Jack Beddington.' *Design* no. 31 (1951): 15-17.

⁸⁸ Howarth, p.164.

⁸⁹ John Hewitt, 1992, p.152.

countryside. The compliments that would come Shell's way for the good 'taste' of their advertising were directly linked to taking away the necessity of increasing market share through a focus on the superiority of the company's products. The AS-IS Agreement was initiated because over-production was reducing the oil companies' profits. With a homogeneous product like oil where one petrol type was much like another, the companies aimed to increase their individual profits by developing a greater market for their products.

The cartel's aim was to keep market share with the other oil companies fixed. This meant that profitability would have to come from an increase in road vehicles and the subsequent greater demand for oil and petrol rather than an increase in market share. Shell's success, through the 1930s, was based upon this increase in automobile use and it consequently bore some responsibility for the effects of greater road use. The way in which, despite this, Shell managed to win the approval, through its advertising, of those groups campaigning for the preservation of the countryside will be explored in the next section of this chapter. A writer who has explored the relationship between Shell's products and advertising is Patrick Wright.⁹⁰ He sees the advertising of Shell as a way that the company could control the British market when there was nothing to distinguish one company's oil products from another. Although Shell's advertising was successful in increasing awareness of its name, that success was based, partly, upon the lack of product promotion in the posters. Oil and petrol fall into a category of products that are, effectively, invisible in terms of advertising. Like soap powder or deodorants, how they appear has little to do with how they are sold. Advertisers can take one of two approaches to selling them. Either they achieve their purpose more successfully than similar products - cars run more efficiently or clothes wash whiter - or the advertisers attach a lifestyle to the products that implies that if you buy these brands, your everyday life will be more fulfilling. The second method was used by Shell because the AS-IS Agreement left it free to minimize product promotion. Wright does, however, make the important point that Shell's strategy in its advertising involved redefining the countryside in terms of tourism and leisure.

⁹⁰ Patrick Wright and Andrzej Krauze, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985) p.63.

Shell was able to increase its sales of motor spirit from 497,063,049 gallons in 1931 to 651,460,790 gallons in 1938.⁹¹ This was a very healthy increase at a time of economic problems, although how much was due to advertising is impossible to measure. It is clear, however, that Shell regarded its publicity as essential to its success. This could be seen in the number of market agreements between the major oil companies operating in Britain where advertising was highlighted and controlled.⁹² Vernon Nye, who was a senior member of Beddington's team in the 1930s and succeeded him in the 1940s, recalled that advertising was emphasised as a key factor in Shell's success.⁹³ Nye also made the point that whilst Shell's advertising was aimed at creating positive associations with the brand, such as the use of artists, BP's advertising was much more product orientated. Nye believed that this led to BP being the less successful brand.⁹⁴

Although the As-Is Agreement needed to be revised throughout the 1930s and its success internationally was irregular, the market for petroleum products in Britain became one of the most controlled in the world. The three largest companies in Britain in the 1920s, Royal Dutch/Shell, Anglo Persian Oil and Anglo-American Oil were reduced in 1931 when the first two were merged as Shell-Mex and BP Ltd and this company had a close working relationship with Anglo-American. It has also been noted that petrol and oil were relatively new products that meant companies like Shell needed to create the desire to travel if they were to create a demand for its product.⁹⁵ Competition between oil companies virtually disappeared in Britain in the 1930s and it is against this background of creating demand, that Shell conceived the three poster campaigns that featured the British countryside.

⁹¹ Ferrier, 1986, p.51.

⁹² BP Archive, British Petroleum plc, Ref. 64905, 'Advertising – Continental General Racing Agreements', Ref. 77958, 'Marketing Agreements between Anglo-American Oil Co. and SMBP', Ref. 64900, 'Advertising – Continental. General'.

⁹³ Shell Art Collection, Beaulieu, 'Recollections of Shell and BP Advertising by Vernon Nye'.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Stephen L. Harp, *Marketing Michelin Advertising & Cultural Identity in Twentieth Century France* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) p.16.

Preservation Pressures

The three quotations at the beginning of this chapter are examples of the acclaim Shell was receiving in the 1930s in relation to its use of lorry bills. This praise was also based on the fact that the company's mobile advertising was deemed a more acceptable alternative, by the preservation movement of the interwar years, to fixed billboards in the countryside. The use of the company's fleet of delivery lorries as moving hoardings was a strategy that Shell had been using since the First World War. It was not an innovation of Jack Beddington in the 1930s but what he did continue to do was encourage the removal of Shell's roadside advertising, in contrast to other companies who still advertised in countryside locations.⁹⁶ Shell still used fixed urban billboards but, throughout the 1930s, Beddington's policy was to use the lorry bills along with press advertising, the Shell Guides, sports sponsorship and later in the 1930s, the founding of the Shell Film Unit as the five main activities of his publicity department.

The posters had something of the ephemeral nature of cinema posters, in that they were changed every two weeks and placed in thin frames attached to the sides and the tailboard of the company's delivery lorries.⁹⁷ Printed to a size of 30 x 45 inches they were placed inside the black trimmed frames and would have been clearly visible to pedestrians and to following traffic.⁹⁸ This arrangement also echoed the framing of paintings in art galleries and the posters were, unlike larger billboard posters, ideal for exhibiting in galleries; indeed there were exhibitions of Shell's advertising work throughout the 1930s and the posters were also framed and used in Shell offices once they had been removed from the lorries. Shell also displayed the original paintings, created for the posters in the Shell-Mex headquarters.⁹⁹ The three display boards used on the lorries were well-designed and they presented the work of artists and designers in a straightforward way but the posters fought for attention

⁹⁶ Shell was also commended for their uncluttered filling stations. *The Shell Magazine*, May, 1937, Vol.17, p.241, carried a piece on a Wiltshire Shell filling station's first prize in a CPRE competition.

⁹⁷ Descriptions of Shell's delivery system can be found in Mark Haworth-Booth, *E. McKnight Kauffer: A Designer and his Public* (V&A Publications, London, 2005) pp.80-83, Shell-Mex and B.P. Ltd., *25 Years of Shell-Mex and B.P. Ltd Advertising 1932-1957* and John Higdon, *A History of Shell-Mex and B.P. Ltd.*, 1957, a Shell in-house publication available in the Warwick University BP Archive.145564.

⁹⁸ See Figure 2.

⁹⁹ Based upon a conversation with the Shell Archivist, Veronica Davies at Shell House, London, August, 2010.

with the surrounding signs and logos on the vehicle. In amongst this confusing mass of information were several references to the company name, along with the Royal Warrant symbol and the lorry identification number. The posters appear to be almost an after-thought and the effect is busy and confused. Beddington and the publicity department must have been aware of this confusion and the way in which it contradicted the modern image Shell was trying to build. The lorries were painted green and red which, with the plethora of logos, must have made them an eye-catching sight on the roads. Deliveries were made every day from a network of over one thousand local depots. Each depot would have one or two lorries that carried a large tank of kerosene, a quantity of two gallon petrol cans and lubricating oil products, all kept in by cattle truck sides. The driver and his assistant would carry six of the cans at a time into the garages and stores, which were owned by individuals rather than the oil companies.¹⁰⁰ The owners were, therefore, able to sell the products of more than one company, although, of course, the As-Is Agreement supported an increase in consumption rather than individual companies increasing their market share. The companies, seeking to increase consumption, would supply the garages with advertising material to display and this, along with indiscriminate roadside advertising, began to draw the attention of a group of writers, organisations and societies who were concerned with the appearance and preservation of the British countryside.

Enamel signs were thought to be particularly offensive and to be guilty of ‘the “hogging” of the English village’.¹⁰¹ Shell’s removal of signs from the countryside was referred to by preservationist as an example of responsibility and as a selling point for the company. ‘Shell’s ways are different’ was a slogan used in an advertisement in the year book of the Design & Industries Association in 1930.¹⁰² This advertisement emphasised the removal of Shell’s billboards from the countryside. A photograph of this happening also appeared as an illustration to a chapter of the year book. The impact of advertising on the countryside was a cause of regulation throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The Advertisements Regulation Bill gave local authorities power to make byelaws to prohibit advertising

¹⁰⁰ Higdon, 1957.

¹⁰¹ Harry Peach and Noel Carrington, Ed., *The Face of the Land: The Year Book of the Design & Industries Association 1929-1930* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1930) p.88.

¹⁰² Advertisement for ‘Shell and the Countryside’ in *The Face of the Land*, Carrington and Peach, 1930.

hoardings that ‘disfigure the natural beauties of a landscape.’¹⁰³ This was, in the inter-war period, a growing acknowledgement of the value of the landscape and the need for its preservation.¹⁰⁴

This preservation movement developed as an important pressure group during the inter-war years. It has been suggested that movements, like the preservationists of the 1930s, follow a pattern in the way they develop and this can be useful in exploring the way in which this campaign developed.¹⁰⁵ Disquiet about an issue would initially come from an unconnected and diverse group who, in this case, also included those interested, professionally, in the design of everyday objects and together they sought to gain support for their views. If wider public support was forthcoming, they would hope that legislation and public policy would reflect their ideas. Successful activism would also influence the actions of industrial companies who would try to reconcile their activities with the aim of the activists. The Shell posters can be seen as exemplars of how those concerned with the aesthetics of the countryside initiated responses from designers and industrialists during the interwar years.

Essential to this particular movement was the assumption that the taste of a minority was preferable to the majority and this can be seen in two books produced by Clough Williams-Ellis.¹⁰⁶ A self-taught architect, Williams-Ellis promoted the views of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) which was established in 1926. Much later in 1975, in a forward to the reprinted *England and the Octopus*, he explained that his original intention in the book’s publication was to make his readers aware of the aesthetic disaster of ribbon development and the ‘mounting menace of massive assault on our environment by out-door advertising, along our roads, in our fields and even in the sky’.¹⁰⁷ Beddington’s success in positioning Shell as a company aligned with the preservationists can be seen from Williams-Ellis being asked to write a review, in the company magazine, of the 1934

¹⁰³ Quoted in Simon Thurley, *Men from the Ministry: How Britain Saved its Heritage* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013) p.63.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Redman, ‘Landscape Preservation, ‘Advertising Disfigurement’ and English National Identity, c.1890-1914’, *Rural History*, xii (2001) pp.61-83.

¹⁰⁵ Douglas J. Porteous, *Environmental Aesthetics: Ideas, Politics and Planning* (Routledge, London, 1996).

¹⁰⁶ Clough Williams-Ellis, *England and the Octopus* (Geoffrey Bles, London, 1928 reprinted 1975) and Clough Williams-Ellis, Ed., *Britain and the Beast* (London: J.M. Dent, 1937).

¹⁰⁷ Williams-Ellis, 1975, p.12.

exhibition of Shell's posters at the New Burlington Gallery. Here he praised Shell's creativity:

There is advertising and advertising – the Shell sort and the other. The intelligent, the discreet and the witty way which is Shell's, the blatant, the unmannerly method which is the method of the anti-social numskulls who quaintly imagine that to arrest attention is the same as to attract.

Too much of our publicity is Mad Dog publicity – it startles and offends us instead of winning our goodwill by its ingratiating tact.¹⁰⁸

This group of preservation activists, including Williams-Ellis, were seeking to stir up an apathetic public and influence them towards their own views of what was happening to the appearance of the British countryside.¹⁰⁹ The sense of being a minority seemed to be important to the activists: they were the people with the taste and understanding of the perceived dangers to the landscape: 'They are small but passionate voices crying in the wilderness and no one need heed them or pay the smallest attention.'¹¹⁰ This is from a chapter in Williams-Ellis' second book, *Britain and the Beast*, concerning the aesthetic appearance of the country. It was a collection of pieces from a diverse group of authors who Williams-Ellis placed in the select minority that reflected his concerns. In his chapter C.E.M. Joad made it clear that, unlike his fellow preservationists, the general public did not know how to behave in the country or understand its beauty and he was particularly critical of the motorist.¹¹¹ He told an anecdote about asking a motorist why he was listening to his wireless whilst parked on Amberley Down, 'His surprise at the question left him speechless, so I took his number, promised to report him to the police, and walked away cursing him.'¹¹² The self confidence in the superiority of his own views, demonstrated by Joad, is indicative of how the preservationists saw themselves as a minority seeking to impose their ideas of appropriate behaviour on the majority, as

¹⁰⁸ Clough Williams-Ellis, *The Pipeline*, 24 June 1931, p.248.

¹⁰⁹ See David Matless, 1998 for an exploration of the emergence in the 1920s and 1930s of a movement for the planning and preservation of landscape in England. Matless has said that concern for the countryside was not new in the inter-war period. The National Trust had been campaigning since 1893, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings since 1877, the Society for the Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising since 1893, p.25.

¹¹⁰ Williams-Ellis, 1937, p.17.

¹¹¹ C.E.M. Joad, 'The People's Claim' in Williams-Ellis, 1937, p.74..

¹¹² Ibid., p.74.

well as implying that legislation was the way to implement their views. The upper middle-class was uncomfortable with the freedom of travel the working classes and lower middle-class were acquiring. The increase in coach travel and motorcycle ownership was giving these lower classes the ability to travel to any part of the country. The Victorian working class had been confined by the limits of train travel to specific locations, for their leisure, but they were now able to access sites previously the privilege of the upper classes. The seaside destinations, promoted by the railway companies, had become associated with working-class leisure but Shell was selling to the new car-owning middle-class motorist by establishing a strong association with nature and rural Britain.¹¹³ One tactic used by Shell to create this association was to remove its' advertising from rural spaces whilst portraying, in its' posters, these rural spaces as attractive, advertising free; places for the middle-class motorist to visit. The sites chosen were away from railway destinations and only accessible by car.

This minority group included members of the CPRE. *England and the Octopus* promoted the views of the CPRE and these views were largely drawn from the work of the planner, Patrick Abercrombie, who had published *The Preservation of Rural England* in 1926 but, as was seen above, there were other groups and organisations that wanted to preserve the countryside in a fixed ideal of rural England, the preservationists were seeking what David Matless has described as a planned modernism.¹¹⁴ The preservationists were arguing against the unrestricted and unplanned growth of suburbia, outdoor advertising and development: 'Preservationists argued that in the nineteenth century an attitude of *laissez faire* had destroyed the town, and in the twentieth century was destroying the country'.¹¹⁵ The lack of planned suburbs was the focus of criticism from writers such as John Betjeman, employed by Shell in the 1930s, whose 1937 poem *Slough* refers to 'this mess they call a town'.¹¹⁶ Motoring was seen as the principal cause of the defiling of the countryside. C.E.M. Joad put the motorist as the foremost vandal in this process:

¹¹³ Heller, 2008, p.29.

¹¹⁴ David Matless. 'Ages of English Design: Preservation, Modernism and Tales of their History, 1926-1939', *Journal of Design History* 3, no. 4, 1990, 203-212.

¹¹⁵ Matless, 1998, p.28.

¹¹⁶ 'Slough' appears in John Betjeman, *Continual Dew: A Little Book of Bourgeois Verse* (London: John Murray, 1937 reprinted 1977).

Above all and most hated of all, there are the motorists, who, having turned the roads of this country into maelstroms of destruction, have now, in their desperate eagerness to get away from one another, invaded the bye-roads and lanes.¹¹⁷

J.B. Priestley was just as scathing about the effects of motoring:

Long before we went from bad to worse with our arterial roads and petrol stations and horrible brick bungalows, this country must have been an enchantment.¹¹⁸

The success of Shell's poster campaigns is remarkable in the way the company managed to acquire a positive reputation for its advertising despite these scornful opinions expressed on the effects of motoring.

Concerns about the countryside could also appear, without irony, in guide books, devoted to motoring and this was despite the effects of car travel being the cause of the anxiety. In 1929 when describing the borders of Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire, John Prioleau observed 'There is something about these borders which, despite the monstrous disease of buildings, that is spreading plague like in every direction, draws the road farer back again and again.'¹¹⁹ The land was frequently, as in this quotation, referred to as a body with unrestricted growth as a disease. As well as metaphorically, the land is also seen to be literally a healthy place for the pursuit of outdoor leisure. Another impetus behind the preservation movement may have been a nostalgic view of England held by those fighting in the First World War. Valentine Cunningham has pointed out how a number of writers, returning from the War, were determined to preserve the rural England they had known, 'these texts were rewriting the Wind in the Willows twenty-five or so years on and the more insistently, in that the car-mad, Ur-Futurist Mr Toad seemed set now to rule the road.'¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Joad in Williams-Ellis, 1937, p.73.

¹¹⁸ J. B. Priestley and C.B. Ford, *The Beauty of Britain: A Pictorial Survey* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1935) p.1.

¹¹⁹ John Prioleau, *Car and Country* (J M Dent & Sons Limited: London, 1929) p.2.

¹²⁰ Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989) p.229.

The organisations that emerged or developed in the 1920s and 1930s as part of a movement for planning and preservation also had a parallel group in the industries concerned with design and advertising. Harry Peach, who was head of the CPRE's Exhibition Committee and owned the successful Dryad Handicrafts firm, was a leading member of the Design and Industries Association (DIA). The 1929-1930 yearbook of the DIA, *The Face of the Land*, singled out advertising hoardings as being a particularly offensive aspect of the countryside. A chapter devoted to 'The Roadside' contains photographs of what the DIA, referring to roadside billboards, saw as, 'the trail of their own ugliness over our roads'¹²¹ As an organisation founded in 1915, ostensibly to improve the standard of design of everyday things, the DIA also thought of itself as being a minority. It believed that the visual aspects of the country needed a lot of 'tidying up.... before they can seem acceptable to that small minority that really uses its eyes and is capable of experiencing either pain or pleasure according to what it sees'.¹²² The DIA thought this issue important enough to set out in an appendix suggesting regulations for outdoor advertising whose first rule was, 'No hoarding or field signs whatever to be placed alongside country roads, even in areas which are technically urban.'¹²³ Shell was being singled out by the DIA even in the late 1920s as one company that was removing field signs from the roadside. This relatively early policy of transferring advertising from static billboards to the sides of their vehicles was used as an example by the DIA, amongst others, as to how companies should regulate their advertising.

The poster display industry was not unaware of the views of SCAPA and the CPRE. Cyril Sheldon, writing in 1937, gave the impression that the industry was trying to regulate itself before Parliament restricted advertising. Sheldon himself was a member of the family that had started the first Billposters' Association in England in 1898. He listed over 250 separate Acts or Bills of Parliament between 1817 and 1936 which, 'directly or indirectly regulate, restrict, control or prevent the erection of hoardings and other similar structures used for advertising purposes and the exhibition of advertising upon them'.¹²⁴ The four main Acts affecting outdoor advertising were the Advertisements Regulations Acts of 1907 and 1925, the Town

¹²¹ Peach and Carrington, 1930, p.42.

¹²² Ibid., p.11.

¹²³ Ibid., p.144.

¹²⁴ Cyril Sheldon, *A History of Poster Advertising* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1937) p.115.

and Country Planning Act, 1932 and the Ribbon Development Act 1935. Section 47 of the Act of 1932, for protecting land in respect of advertisements, was framed after consultation and agreement with representatives of the advertising industry.

According to Sheldon the Billposters' Association was happy to work with SCAPA. His feelings towards the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) were not as cordial:

These societies have also been very active in their efforts for the suppression of open-air advertising. Their ideas for prohibiting those advertisements have been for the most part extreme and unreasonable.¹²⁵

The appearance and preservation of the countryside was a source of debate between activists, designers, advertisers, the public and legislators. The significance of Shell using relatively small 30 x 45 inches posters, not fixed but moving about the country's roads attached to over three thousand delivery vehicles, was that it gave Shell the opportunity to use images of the countryside in the posters without attracting the criticism that they were damaging the subject of their publicity.¹²⁶ The core purpose of their images was to promote tourism, which in itself would have a significant effect on the appearance of the countryside. Shell appeared to be celebrating the landscape whilst at the same time contributing to the pressures on it.

The poster: art or clutter?

Between the wars there was a polarity of views and attitudes towards the poster. On the one hand the concerns expressed about advertising billboards by groups such as SCAPA and the CPRE were part of the disquiet surrounding the effect of jumbled and unsightly poster displays in urban and rural settings. This anxiety reflected an intense uneasiness with advertising in general and outdoor advertising in particular with the criticism being particularly focussed on the unsightly proliferation and display of posters. However, a contrasting view arose when fine art became linked to the goods and services of the late nineteenth-century industrialised society through the addition of text to cheap and accurately reproducible lithography. By adding

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 115.

¹²⁶ Heller, 2008, p. 29.

words to the lithographic images created by artists, the poster became associated with fine art rather than the typographically-heavy and illustration-free work of the jobbing printers. The new technology of the fast, cheap multi-coloured lithography found its ideal content in the advertising of the large growing national companies. The intended audience for these high quality posters was an increasingly prosperous middle-class and this group found that, because the posters were produced in large quantities on inexpensive paper, they were affordable as objects to be collected. As the twentieth century began, a combination of the strict regulation on advertising spaces that could be sold, coupled with a more conservative approach to visualising a product's qualities, reined in the visual experimentation of poster imagery which had been taking place.¹²⁷ As a result poster collecting became less fashionable. After the First World War the combination of good quality reproduction, inexpensive production costs and limited outlets for advertising, culminated in the dominance of the poster as a publicity medium during the inter-war period.

Cities with their concentration of population and spending power were the ideal site for consumerism as encouraged through advertising. Paul Rennie has suggested that, after the First World War, a mass market was developed, from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century, as the engine of consumption.¹²⁸ The poster was a practical and visual consequence of productive power and its proliferation was an indication of its importance as a medium for advertising. Outside the city, poster advertising was more static where painted signs and enamels were used.¹²⁹ Those concerned with the effect of the poster on the environment, as opposed to their worth as visual objects, were affronted by their unsought visibility. John Hewitt has suggested that the growing middle-class of the inter-war years secured their status with notions of 'taste' that were offended by the unconcealed commercialism of outdoor advertising:

The growing presence of such commodity posters on the street represented a threat to the sort of tasteful consumption that many of the middle-class were

¹²⁷ Paul Rennie, *Modern British Posters: Art, Design & Communication* (London: Black Dog, 2010) p.24.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.21.

trying to secure. This accounts for the aggressive, frenetic tone of the attacks on them.¹³⁰

To counteract the criticisms from those anxious about the proliferation of posters in the city, the Head of London Transport, Frank Pick had received praise for regulating and ordering the display of posters on the Underground and Shell received similar praise for removing its signs from the countryside. In the view of the conservationists and preservationists, Shell's concentration on the lorry bills as the site for their advertising reflected well on the company.¹³¹ The image that appeared in the DIA handbook of 1930 is credited to Shell and indicates, once again, the company's desire to present itself as a preserver of the countryside.¹³² The photograph shows Shell advertising being removed from a rural roadside site. This image must have been supplied by Shell, indicating their enthusiasm to publicise their preservationist credentials.

The problem with the roadside billboards was that they were unavoidable to the passer-by, unlike the other main medium for advertisements in the interwar years, the press. After all the reader bought the newspaper or magazine with the knowledge that advertisements would be part of the publication. These two media formed the majority of the expenditure on publicity by companies such as Shell. Examples of how two precursors to Beddington's work used the relatively recent improvements in printing to establish what would now be called a corporate identity, will be explored below. The approach taken by these companies will also be seen as a strong influence on the campaigns produced by Shell.

The interwar years were a period of expansion for advertising, with national expenditure rising from an estimated £31 million in 1920 to £61.1 million in 1937 and this was despite the economic problems of the 1930s.¹³³ The variety of media available for advertising was quite limited at this time and this could be one reason

¹³⁰ John Hewitt, 'Posters of Distinction: Art, Advertising and the London, Midland and Scottish Railways', *Design Issues*, Vol. 16, No.1, Spring 2000, pp.16-35.

¹³¹ 'Preservation' is the more common term in the 1920s and 1930s. Apart from the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, there was a Commons Preservation Society and in 1928 the first Footpaths Preservation National Conference in Leicester. David Matless in describing the period refers to a 'broad preservationist movement'. Matless, 1998, p.26.

¹³² See Figure 1.

¹³³ T.R. Nevett and the History of Advertising Trust, *Advertising in Britain: A History* (London: Heinemann on behalf of the History of Advertising Trust, 1982) p.146.

why the period has been described as ‘the golden age of poster art’.¹³⁴ Expenditure on poster advertising rose from £3 million in 1920 to £6 million in 1937.¹³⁵ Press advertising took the vast majority of publicity budgets with commercial radio and cinema advertising beginning to account for a small percentage of expenditure.

The poster was, with press advertisements, the most visible publicity medium but its reception was mixed. At the end of the nineteenth-century and into the twentieth, one view was that posters were a menace to the urban landscape, as well as the rural. William Morris had talked about: ‘The daily increasing hideousness of the poster’.¹³⁶ The way posters were displayed, not only in the countryside but on urban sites was the main criticism of advertising but there was also the veracity of the claims made by advertisers. Medical quacks tried to persuade the public that they were suffering from non-existent illnesses. To counteract these abuses, the Advertisers’ Association set up a National Vigilance Committee in 1928 to introduce a sense of responsibility in regard to advertisers’ claims.¹³⁷ Shell not only avoided criticism in its use of lorry bills but also avoided any debate on its product’s claims by having very little text on its posters and even then only the very vague claim that ‘You can be sure of Shell’.

The advantages of poster publicity to the advertiser included the quality of reproduction and the relatively cheap production costs. The origins of the modern poster were, to a great extent, established by the invention and development of colour lithography.¹³⁸ A combination of the growing mass market for consumer goods and services and improvements in printing techniques towards the end of the nineteenth-century made the colour lithographic poster a cheap and effective medium for advertising and publicity. The lithographic process was able to reproduce a wide range of tones, including intense blacks and subtle greys and was a better method of reproducing the work of artists and designers than the earlier woodcut or steel engraving. In 1910 the first ‘offset’ printing machines were introduced and, by then, the artist’s designs could be transferred to the plate

¹³⁴ Oliver Green and Jeremy Rewse-Davies, *Designed for London: 150 Years of Transport Design* (London: Laurence King, 1995) p.87.

¹³⁵ T R Nevett, p.146.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Christian Barman, 1979, p.29.

¹³⁷ The National Vigilance Committee was criticised for lack of objectivity but did much to drive out questionable advertising. See the History of Advertising Trust at www.hatads.org.uk/collections/advertising. Accessed 13th August 2013.

¹³⁸ Rennie, 2010, p.107.

photographically. The introduction of photographically separated colours was an innovation that changed lithography from being a relatively expensive way of reproducing posters at the beginning of the twentieth century to, in the 1920s and 1930s, a high speed inexpensive process capable of high quality prints in very long runs. Armin Hoffman has suggested that lithography was the only reproduction technique that could cope with the demands of advertising's role in industrial production because it was able to make complex statements, use a wide range of colours, and it was fast and capable of printing in large formats.¹³⁹ One of the designers used by Beddington, Barnett Freedman, was clear about how important lithography was to the reproduction of original work:

It affords the nearest approach to actual painting, and the knowledge of colour that a good painter must necessarily acquire in his own studio can be used and in fact, augmented by a close study of the colour lithograph.¹⁴⁰

Without the printing innovations of the early twentieth century, the Shell posters, which had been created in oil paint, watercolour and collage, could not have been reproduced to such a high standard.

Shell used several printers to reproduce their posters, including the Baynard Press, J. Weiner & Co., Chorley and Pickersgill and Johnson Riddle & Co. Firms like the Baynard Press were considered to be high quality printers and their reputation was built upon excellence in book and art reproduction. Percy Bradshaw, writing in 1925 and recommending links between art and advertising had advocated a number of printers that could be relied upon for the quality of their work. He thought that: 'The Baynard Press (Saunders, Phillips and Company) is a modern printing establishment which has demonstrated triumphantly that Art is good business.'¹⁴¹ Bradshaw's puff is also an indication of the way in which lithography blurred the distinctions between art and commerce.

The philosopher, Walter Benjamin was one of the first commentators on the significance of visual reproduction. His particular interests included the rise of mass

¹³⁹ Armin Hoffman, 'Thoughts on the Poster' in *The Twentieth Century Poster: Design of the Avant Garde*, Dawn Ades, Ed. (New York: Abbeville Publishers, 1984) p.91.

¹⁴⁰ Barnett Freedman, 'Everyman his own Lithographer' *Art in England*, RS Lambert, Ed. (London: Pelican Books, 1938) p.109.

¹⁴¹ Percy V. Bradshaw, *Art in Advertising: A Study of British and American Pictorial Publicity* (London: The Press Art School, 1925) p.54.

culture in an interrelation of art and technology.¹⁴² He noted in his 1936 essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, how the lithographic process had enabled artists to work directly onto a reproducible block, bringing immediacy to the production of art that could reflect nineteenth-century culture:

With lithography the technique of reproduction reached an essentially new stage. This much more direct process was distinguished by the tracing of the design on a stone rather than its incision on a block of wood or its etching on a copperplate and permitted graphic art for the first time to put its products on the market, not only in large numbers as hitherto, but also in daily changing forms. Lithography enabled graphic art to illustrate everyday life, and it began to keep pace with printing.¹⁴³

Benjamin highlighted the way in which this process could reproduce multiple copies of an artist's work. It would lead, he believed, to a potentially democratic counteraction to the 'aura' attributed to works of art. Although Benjamin was describing a lithographic process that was directly created by an artist, the development of photo-lithography that could reproduce artists' work from any medium they had worked in took the poster one step further away from the 'aura' of the work of art. Interestingly, as will be seen, the Shell posters, through their presentation and layout, tried to counteract this and maintain the aura of the work of art. The close association between art and advertising and the way in which modern art and the poster share a common history has been described by Kirk Varnedoe, '....modern advertising and modern painting were born together in the late nineteenth-century.'¹⁴⁴

Beddington may have always had in mind that the posters would have a longer life than the short period spent on the delivery lorries. He actively promoted the posters as reproducible equivalents of fine art. Poster collecting had become a hobby for the middle classes towards the end of the nineteenth century but had

¹⁴² Benjamin argued against the fetishization of the 'aura' of the art object. He located a shift in the status of traditional art as technical means of reproduction such as lithography, photography and film began to dominate the imagination of a mass public. Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris, *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts* (London: The Open University, Phaidon, 1992).

¹⁴³ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) in Francis Francina and Jonathan Harris, Eds., 1992, pp. 297-307.

¹⁴⁴ Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Museum of Mod. Art, 1991) p.232.

diminished by the inter-war period, although the exhibition of poster design continued and, in Britain, these exhibitions in the 1930s were dominated by three large organisations: the General Post Office, London Underground and Shell.¹⁴⁵ As well as holding exhibitions, Beddington promoted the status of Shell's posters by selling examples of the posters and exhibition catalogues as well as donating posters to the Victoria and Albert Museum. They were also displayed in Shell offices after they had been circulated to the distribution depots.¹⁴⁶ The exhibitions attracted thousands of visitors and favourable reviews.¹⁴⁷ To counteract negative opinions on poster advertising the posters were being presented as art and therefore not detrimental to the visual appearance of the city or the countryside. However, not all those involved in advertising were convinced of their usefulness. Percy V. Bradshaw, whose family's business was the renting out of billboard sites appeared, in 1925, to be promoting better standards of design but at the same time he denigrated their importance:

In advertising circles it is too generally assumed that the average person is extremely interested in posters.... I believe this assumption to be far from correct, and that a vast number of educated Englishmen concern themselves very little with advertising.¹⁴⁸

Bradshaw appears to have a foot in the two camps that concerned themselves with the poster. On one side were positioned the advertisers, designers and art critics who praised the work of companies like Shell and, on the other, the critics and preservationists who attacked the posters' despoiling of rural and countryside sites. As has already been suggested, some companies, especially Shell, London Underground and the General Post Office (GPO) were cleverly avoiding the criticism by regulating the positioning of their posters and using modern artists and designers. Although little scholarly interest has been given to the history of posters in Britain, there does seem to be a consensus amongst those writers who have

¹⁴⁵ 'Patrons of the Modern Poster' in Rennie, 2010, pp.33-75.

¹⁴⁶ Heller, 2008, p.30.

¹⁴⁷ 'Art Exhibition Shell Advertising', *The Times*, 15th June 1931 p.12, 'High Praise', *The Pipeline*, 3rd February 1932 p.56 and Paul Nash, 'The Artist and the Community', *The Listener*, 20th January 1932.

¹⁴⁸ Percy V. Bradshaw, *Art in Advertising*, 1925, p.vi.

focussed on advertising of the period that the three organisations, above, stand out in the quality and excellence of their poster designs.¹⁴⁹

Precursors of Beddington

The GPO under Sir Stephen Tallents and London Underground (later London Transport) under Frank Pick (1878-1941) were the precursors of the commercial art patronage that influenced Jack Beddington's approach to advertising. Beddington acknowledged both men in an essay in 1938. He described Pick as, 'The most important pioneer of commercial art patronage in this country'.¹⁵⁰ He also credited Pick with preceding Shell with his approach to posters, 'All sorts of people were talking about Underground posters seriously a long time before other posters were taken seriously at all'.¹⁵¹ The GPO was the only other company Beddington highlighted as an intelligent patron of the arts. Under Sir Stephen Tallents he doubted that, 'there is another Government Department in the world that has more ably combined an official fostering of some of the best of its country's artists'.¹⁵²

Frank Pick was the Chief Executive of London Underground in the 1910s and 1920s and, later, the merged London Transport in the 1930s. He had joined as the Head of the Traffic, Development and Advertising Department in 1909. London Underground had no major competitors at the time and this gave Pick the opportunity, like Beddington after the AS-IS agreement, to experiment with advertising. He hoped the company would become the 'peoples' picture gallery' through his patronage of contemporary artists and designers.¹⁵³ Pick provided work for many artists who would also be used by Beddington - Clifford and Rosemary Ellis, Barnett Freedman, Graham Sutherland, Hans Schleger - and, in 1915, was the first to employ E McKnight Kauffer, sometimes referred to as the most gifted

¹⁴⁹ Work on the history of the poster tends to be illustrated books with little text. Dawn Ades book is an exception, Dawn Ades, *The 20th-Century Poster: Design of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Publishers, 1984). Useful information can also be found in Harold H. Hutchinson, *The Poster: an illustrated history from 1860* (London: Studio Vista, 1968), John Barnicoat, *A Concise History of Posters* (London: World of Art Library: Thames & Hudson, 1972). *The Art Journal* Vol. 44, No.,1, Spring 1984, devoted the whole issue to the poster.

¹⁵⁰ Jack Beddington, 'Patronage in Art To-Day', in R.S. Lambert, Ed., *Art in England* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican, 1938) pp.82-87.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.85.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.86.

¹⁵³ See Christian Barman's book on Pick and Michael T. Saler, 1999.

graphic designer of the inter-war period in Britain.¹⁵⁴ He also employed Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy in order to promote modern art and artists during this period and certainly became a model of the patronage that Beddington followed. Although Pick had control of all aspects of London Transport, he thought of its advertising as the most important facet of his work. When describing the London Transport Board he said that, 'It has become something that has a life and being of its own and that life and being are best expressed in its publicity'.¹⁵⁵

Pick's reputation as a commercial art patron was built upon the employment of young and talented artists. The art historian Anthony Blunt believed Pick's patronage of young modern artists was important in the acceptance of modern art to a wide audience in England:

By this means he has familiarised a very wide public with the conventions of modern painting and greatly increased the chances that modern painters, who are not involved in publicity, have of being appreciated and widely enjoyed.¹⁵⁶

The patronage of young artists at a time of economic difficulty was a recurring theme with contemporary commentators on poster design and will be explored later in this chapter. Again, like Beddington, Pick had no apparent qualifications or experience in advertising. He had seen the possibilities of poster advertising as early as 1907 when he began to use the London Underground's poster sites as self-promotion for the company. They had previously been merely seen as a way of raising revenue for the company.¹⁵⁷ At first, he used printing firms who employed their own freelance commercial artists before gradually commissioning his own choices of artists and designers. Again, in a methodology taken up by Beddington, he began to deal with artists directly. Pick also introduced clear distinctions in the design and siting of where the posters would be displayed, so that the previous confusing jumble of advertisements was replaced by a separation of information and

¹⁵⁴ Beddington said, when talking about the demands of commercial art, that McKnight Kauffer was 'the only effective influence in the right direction'. Beddington, 1938, p.84.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Barman, 1979, p.211.

¹⁵⁶ *Spectator*, 5th April 1935, quoted in Mark Haworth-Booth, *E. McKnight Kauffer: A Designer and His Public* (London: V&A Publications, London, 2005) p.70.

¹⁵⁷ Saler, 1999, p.41.

advertising in Underground stations.¹⁵⁸ Pick reserved the prime poster sites around the station entrances for established artists such as - Sutherland, Wadsworth, Bawden and Paul Nash, setting aside special illuminated boards at the Underground station entrances for the company's own pictorial posters and maps.¹⁵⁹ London Underground was a monopoly and commuters were a captive audience, unlike the viewers of Shell's lorry posters, but there are interesting similarities of approach in the two companies' designs (Fig. 3). There is a minimum of text on the posters, with an assumption that the viewer will be motivated to use the London Underground or Shell petrol in order to travel to the illustrated scenes created by Pick's and Beddington's chosen artists.

Pick had worked for the North Eastern Railway in 1902 and it may have been whilst working for a railway company that he began to understand the commercial and environmental effects of poster advertising. It was certainly another railway firm that shows very strong similarities in the design of its poster output to those of Shell. In 1923 a group of Royal Academicians was approached by a fellow artist, Norman Wilkinson, on behalf of the London, Midland, and Scottish Railways (LMS) to design posters for the company. The LMS appeared to have similar motives to Beddington in giving the company what would now be called a corporate image and at the same time giving it an aura of discernment. It can be seen (Fig.4) how both companies used a similar layout of a large image with a band of text below, thus reinforcing the association of the posters with gallery-displayed paintings. There was very little text in both layouts and the companies' names were no larger than the rest of the text. The title of the paintings and the artists' names were displayed below the illustrations in the manner of a painting's label in an art gallery. John Hewitt has pointed out how the printer's name in the LMS posters was in very small print along the bottom edge of the posters, 'where literally and metaphorically, it is outside the frame of art.'¹⁶⁰ The Shell posters display the printers' name in the same way, playing down the importance of reproduction and accentuating the associations with the aura of fine art. The printers may have been 'marginalised' but it was the quality

¹⁵⁸ On display in the Underground see Oliver Green, 'Railway Poster Display: How the Underground Set the Pace' in Teri J. Edelstein, 2010, pp.67-84.

¹⁵⁹ Oliver Green, *Underground Art: London Transport posters, 1908 to the present* (London: Laurence King, 2001) p.9.

¹⁶⁰ John Hewitt, 2000, p.21.

of their work that produced posters that made it possible to mimic gallery-displayed fine art.

Frank Pick had been invited by Sir Stephen Tallents to join the Publicity Committee of the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) in 1926. The EMB had been formed to promote trading relations, at consumer and wholesale levels, between Britain and the Empire.¹⁶¹ As the task involved informing and educating, it was a natural tactic to use a series of posters. Tallents believed that promoting British national culture abroad was best achieved through employing the best artists and designers.¹⁶² When Tallents moved to the GPO in 1933, he developed the same approach by using posters to educate the public, initially by sending posters to schools and then, like the Underground, by using its own space, in this case, Post Offices. Tallents wanted to make sure the GPO posters were of a high quality and to this end he formed a committee that included Kenneth Clark and Jack Beddington.¹⁶³ Tallents' ability to delegate was his main strength and his work at the EMB and the GPO, although not as well remembered as the publicity at Shell and the Underground, was linked by the contributions of Pick and Beddington. D.L. LeMahieu has said that Beddington, Pick and Tallents shared the, 'conviction that the general public aspired to be culturally uplifted'.¹⁶⁴ This conviction may have underpinned their design patronage in the 1930s but all three patrons were primarily associating their respective companies with culture for commercial reasons.¹⁶⁵

Shell Artists and the Depression

Descriptions of British art in the 1930s have focussed on the evolution, acceptance or rejection of Modernism, along with the effects of European politics on art, produced during the decade.¹⁶⁶ The neglected area of the economic pressure on artists and how it affected their work is the subject of this section. It will argue that economic restraints shaped artists' attitudes towards commercial work, as exemplified by the

¹⁶¹ Rennie, 2010, p.48.

¹⁶² D. L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) p.167.

¹⁶³ Unattributed article, 'Twenty Thousand Schools Apply for Posters' in *Commercial Art*, No. 104, February 1935.

¹⁶⁴ LeMahieu, 1988, p.140.

¹⁶⁵ Rennie, 2010, p.33.

¹⁶⁶ See Charles Harrison, 1994, Dennis Farr, *English Art 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p.271 and David Peters Corbett, 1997, LeMahieu, 1988.

Shell posters, and will demonstrate that this affected the development of their careers, along with some of the strategies they used to survive financially.¹⁶⁷

The poster designs produced for London Underground and the LMS in the 1920s indicate that British artists were at ease with producing commissioned work for industrial and commercial companies, although Andrew Stephenson has argued that there was a clearer distinction between fine and commercial art in the 1920s than the 1930s.¹⁶⁸ The relationship between the two will be explored in the next chapter. Shell, in the decade before Beddington took control of its advertising, used artists such as John Banting, who had exhibited with the London Group, and Dacres Adams, the designer Tom Purvis and illustrator H M Bateman to produce humorous or modernist-influenced product related designs.¹⁶⁹ This, however, was nowhere near the scale of patronage Beddington was to introduce at Shell in the 1930s. Royal Academicians commissioned by the LMS could use revenue from commercial work to supplement their incomes but, as will be seen, what changed for artists in the 1930s was the relative importance of commercial work to their earnings.

The economic slump of the 1930s had started with the stock market crash of 1929 in New York. High consumer debt and poor regulation of the stock market had led to a lack of economic confidence and high unemployment which spread throughout the world.¹⁷⁰ In Britain, the art market was not unaffected by the effects of the economic slump and, as William Coldstream reflected later in the decade, artists had been forced by the Depression to reassess their relationship with advertising work in order to guarantee their economic survival:

The 1930s slump affected us all very considerably. Through making money much harder to come by, it caused an immense change in our general outlook. One painter I knew lost all his money and had to become a traveller

¹⁶⁷ The effects of the Depression on the art market are examined in Andrew Stephenson, 'Strategies of Situation: British Modernism and the Slump, 1929-1934', *Oxford Art Journal* 14, no. 2, 1991, pp. 30-51.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ John Hewitt, *The Shell Poster Book* (London: Profile Books, 1998).

¹⁷⁰ My chief sources are; Derek H. Aldcroft, *The British Economy between the Wars* (Oxford: Philip Allan, 1983) and B.W.E. Alford, *Depression and Recovery: British Economic Growth, 1918-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1975).

in vacuum cleaners. Everyone began to be interested in economics and then in politics...It was no longer the thing to be an artist delighting in isolation.¹⁷¹

Coldstream considered himself to be a 'realistic' artist but the abstract work produced in England during the 1920s had led him to a reconsideration of the direction of his own work. The economic situation became the pressing reason for him to take an artistic sabbatical:

At this time I came to the end of the money I had been living on...To relieve the situation I joined the GPO Film Unit which makes documentary films, starting as a general assistant.¹⁷²

Eventually Coldstream began to paint again, at first only at the weekend, and then when his paintings began to sell again later in the 1930s, he returned to painting full time. He had survived the slump in the way that many artists did, by working in art related industries.

It may appear to be a paradox that artists would seek work with commercial and industrial companies at a time of depression and mass unemployment but, as was seen above, advertising expenditure increased during the 1930s. Although much of the old industrial economy was in depression, there were also expanding consumer industries that could provide artists with employment.¹⁷³ The image of the inter-war years as one of economic depression, with slums and unemployment, is an incomplete portrait of the period. Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow have pointed out that unemployment was a localised and minority problem and that whilst the depressed areas of the North spiralled downwards, the consumer industry of the South East and Midlands spiralled upwards.¹⁷⁴ In the 1930s, Shell's growth was helped when Britain became the largest producer of passenger and motor vehicles in Europe, an increase associated with an almost 50 per cent drop in the price of cars between 1924 and 1937.¹⁷⁵ The depression affecting the older industries, particularly

¹⁷¹ William Coldstream, 'The Artist Speaks' in *Art in England* edited by R.S. Lambert (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Limited, 1938) p.101.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.102.

¹⁷³ Martin Pugh, *'We Danced All Night': A Social History of Britain between the Wars* (London: Bodley Head, 2008) pp.96-100.

¹⁷⁴ Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow, *Interwar Britain; A Social and Economic History* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1976) p.45.

¹⁷⁵ Alford, 1975 and Aldcroft, 1983 also explore the contrasts between the depressed and expanding industries of the interwar years.

coal mining, was partly due to a shift towards an alternative energy source - oil. Shell was part of the new expanding industries whilst the depressed industries, steel and engineering, used the old energy source - coal. Life in the inter-war period began to involve the regular and predictable movement of people (commuters, tourists, family groups) and materials. Coal and steam came to be replaced by oil and diesel, Cars, trucks, ships and aircraft all became oil based.¹⁷⁶

A quite distinct division developed between the England of the South and Midlands and the North with its declining industries. A.J.P. Taylor also pointed out how the image of the Depression is not a complete picture of England in the interwar years.¹⁷⁷ Hardship did exist but, as well as the slums, unemployment and poverty, there was another England that was remarkably prosperous and expanding. This was the England described by J.B. Priestley as:

the England of arterial and by pass roads, of filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance halls and cafes, bungalows with tiny garages, cocktail bars, Woolworths, motor coaches, wireless, hiking, factory girls looking like actresses, greyhound racing and dirt tracks, swimming pools and everything given away for cigarette coupons.¹⁷⁸

Despite the (mostly) northern, industrial areas being severely affected by the slump, the 1930s saw the early stages of what would become, after the Second World War, a consumer society. The affluence of those who were in work was a dominating influence on the social patterns of the period. The number of salary earners increased from 8.3% of the occupied population in 1911 to 14.3% in 1938.¹⁷⁹ There was a growth in many forms of leisure such as the cinema, book publishing and holidays. The service industries actually increased their employment figures during the 1930s and it was in these service industries that artists found that they had to seek work, willingly or otherwise.¹⁸⁰

Rather than industrial decline, it was the sudden collapse of the stock market in 1929 that led to the deterioration in the art market.¹⁸¹ This forced many artists,

¹⁷⁶ Urry, 2013, p.45.

¹⁷⁷ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Pelican Books, Harmondsworth, 1970).

¹⁷⁸ J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: William Heinemann, 1934) p.401.

¹⁷⁹ Glynn and Oxborrow, 1976, p.45.

¹⁸⁰ Pugh, 2008.

¹⁸¹ Stephenson, 1991.

without private incomes, to take commissions they might earlier have declined.¹⁸² Many who did have private incomes to support themselves also found this income reducing after the collapse of stocks and shares. This severe downturn of sales on the London art market added to the economic pressures on artists during the 1930s.¹⁸³ One London art gallery, Arthur Tooth and Sons, introduced hire purchase terms in 1935 to help sell paintings. This was somewhat ironic, as paying by instalments had been a contributory factor to the increasing debt that led to the Depression.¹⁸⁴ However it was not only the London market which had collapsed. In New York the market for fine prints had also collapsed. Graham Sutherland, who was to produce three posters for Shell in the 1930s, found he was unable to sell his etchings in America and turned to more commercial work. He designed glassware, stamps, tapestries and crockery as well as posters.¹⁸⁵

British artists were not necessarily being driven into commercial work against their will and many, like Paul Nash, were happy to mix the pure and applied arts before the 1930s and carried on doing so. It was the importance of the commercial work to artists' incomes that changed during the decade. Nash, like Sutherland, worked in a variety of applied arts. He designed posters, china, textiles, book illustrations, a guidebook to Dorset for Shell and even a chocolate box for Cadbury's.¹⁸⁶ Nash, amongst other artists, also turned to journalism to create income. He said that, 'Thank God I seem to be able to write. Journalism is my sole means of subsistence'.¹⁸⁷ In 1932 he wrote an article for *The Listener* that defended and praised the collaboration between artists and industry.¹⁸⁸ The article is an indication of how artists needed to adapt to the economics of the 1930s. He begins by

¹⁸² LeMahahieu, 1988, p.266.

¹⁸³ Along with Stephenson, 1991, the collapse of the art market and the effect of the Depression on British Modernism are investigated in David Mellor in 'British Art in the 1930: Some Economic, Political and Cultural Structures.' in *Class Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s*, edited by Frank Gloversmith (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980) also discusses the effects of the Depression on British Modernism.

¹⁸⁴ Mellor, 1980, p.186.

¹⁸⁵ Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times* (London: Tauris Parke, 2001) has explored the careers of Graham Sutherland, John Piper and Paul Nash, all of whom produced work for Shell.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.50.

¹⁸⁷ Letter from Paul Nash to Hilda Felce, 23 November 1931, quoted in Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash: Writings on Art: 1889-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 221.

¹⁸⁸ Paul Nash, 'The Artist and the Community', *The Listener*, January 1932 reprinted in Paul Nash and Andrew Causey. *Paul Nash: Writings on Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp.68-9.

reminding readers that, ‘The economic position of the artist today is precarious’.¹⁸⁹ The second half of the article focuses on the designing of advertisements and particularly the posters produced for Shell. Nash had just completed his first commission for Shell, *Rye Marshes*, and without referring directly to this he says that, ‘Two great modern forces of industry-a railway company and a petrol organisation have each deliberately chosen to employ the artist-and the right kind of artist-for advertising their doings’.¹⁹⁰ It is not surprising that Nash advocated the involvement of artists in commercial work; he was involved with the DIA and had found the sales of his work drastically reduced in the early thirties. It is interesting how he resolved the concern he had over British art becoming insular and inward-looking through the idea that artists should be encouraged not to turn away from ‘foreign’ culture but that artists should be used for the good of the state to improve standards of design, ‘The responsibility in regard to the artist is the responsibility of the state, and the influential individual should feel through the artist to the community, not only for its enjoyment but for its pride’.¹⁹¹ He concluded by stating that artists had a responsibility to improve public life and raise aesthetic standards in the national culture by engaging with public and private corporations such as London Underground and Shell. Nash reveals important themes of thirties’ British art: how artists could be appreciated and used by the state as well as the relationship of artists to commercial work and the responsibilities of industry towards art. He uses Shell as an example of how the ‘influential individual’ can exercise his aesthetic responsibility. Shell, he says, commissioned posters from the ‘best known modern artists’ as a service to the public:

Mr Beddington, who so ably controls and directs these operations, would explain that all this is done for the better advertisement of Shell, but we have only to observe the thoroughness and distinction of his productions to realise that, consciously or unconsciously, he is discharging an aesthetic responsibility to the public. This is probably the only instance to be found of a British industry’s extensive use of the modern artist.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p.69.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.69.

¹⁹² Ibid., p.69.

The element of sycophancy in Nash's praise of Shell should be seen in the context of the financial difficulties that artists were working under.

The anxiety about the lack of employment for artists appeared to overrule concerns about the ethics of advertising. Cliffe Rowe, a founder member of the Artists' International Association (which will be returned to later), articulated the conditions at that time: 'Employment for artists was very bad. From 1929...there would be ten people in front of you for every job. We were all living in poverty; there was no doubt about that'.¹⁹³ Nash was, understandably, one of many writers, including Cyril Connolly, Sir Kenneth Clark and Williams Clough-Ellis, who praised the advertising work of Shell. In 1934 Clive Bell, referring specifically to artists working for Shell, suggested corporate patrons had superseded the role of any art institutions in fostering modern art.¹⁹⁴ In contrast, there appears to have been little concern, at that time, for the ethics of advertising or the nature of Shell's business. Morris and Radford have drawn attention to this lack of analysis by the artistic community:

The idea that advertising represented in practice the most insidious form of capitalist exploitation and hence was unworthy of the collusion of socially progressive artists and designers does not seem to have surfaced very much in the thirties.¹⁹⁵

Financial self-interest may have been the main reason for this lack of criticism of advertising by artists. The designer James Gardner remembered the importance to his career of meeting such an influential sponsor as Beddington, and it is clear from Gardner's memoirs that the relationship of impoverished artist and patron was not an equal one. He records one phone call in particular from Beddington: 'I want you to meet this client, Gardner, but first you must have a shave, and don't turn up in those arty corduroy trousers'.¹⁹⁶ For Beddington, being poor obviously did not excuse an artist being 'arty' in appearance.

¹⁹³ As quoted in Lynda Morris and Robert Radford. *AIA: The Story of the Artists International Association, 1933 - 1953* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1983) p.9.

¹⁹⁴ Clive Bell, *The New Statesman*, 23 June 1934, p. 946.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.36.

¹⁹⁶ James Gardner. *James Gardner: The Artful Designer: Ideas Off the Drawing Board* (London: Centurion Press, 1993) p.82.

When Myfanwy Evans reflected on the establishment of the magazine, *Axis*, which she published with her husband John Piper, she vividly described the economic hardship suffered by artists.¹⁹⁷ *Axis* was conceived as a journal devoted to non-objective art and included in its eight issues, between 1935 and 1937, contributions from writers and artists such as Herbert Read, Ben Nicholson, Paul Nash, Wassily Kandinsky, Roland Penrose and Piper himself. Evans found Nash to be endearing because he ‘depended desperately on any form of publicity and was constantly without money’.¹⁹⁸ The poverty of the artists made them generous in contributing to the magazine without payment in the hope of gaining publicity for their work. There may have been an element of the same hope in their motives for working for Shell. As well as being paid, their names appeared on the posters that circulated around the country on the side of the company’s lorries and in exhibitions organised by Shell. The fee received by Ben Nicholson for a Shell poster, in comparison with his sales of paintings, must have been extremely welcome:

I remember Ben Nicholson getting down to his last shilling and telephoning in triumph to say that he had managed to persuade one of his few faithful collectors to buy a picture for fifty pounds.¹⁹⁹

Beddington rarely paid more than fifty pounds, except for established artists, for the original work used in the posters. Leonard Rosoman claimed to have been paid a hundred pounds for *Roman Tower, Tutbury* in 1936, but this seems an unlikely deviation from Beddington’s standard rate.²⁰⁰

Another pressure on those seeking commercial work was the increased competition from British artists returning from abroad. The National Government, which had been formed in response to the economic crisis, suspended the Gold Standard in 1931 and this led, in turn, to a devaluation of the pound. The effect on artists living on the continent was almost immediate. The pound lost 41 per cent of its value against the franc between 1929 and 1935.²⁰¹ Paul Fussell has pointed out

¹⁹⁷ *Axis* was never profitable and unlike more established journals no writers or artists were ever paid for their contributions. Frances Spalding, *John Piper, Myfanwy Piper: Lives in Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p.81.

¹⁹⁸ Myfanwy Piper. ‘Back in the Thirties’, *Art and Literature*, Winter, no. 7-8 (1965-66) p.145.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.146.

²⁰⁰ In Ruth Artmonsky, 2006, p.26. Artmonsky describes Rosoman’s first meeting with Beddington and how the newly qualified artist was summoned to Shell-Mex House.

²⁰¹ Quoted in S. N. Broadberry, *The British Economy between the Wars: A Macroeconomic Survey* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) p.125.

that it was not just a financial misfortune but also a blow to national pride, ‘The trapdoor dropped for the English abroad. Suddenly, they were impoverished. For the moment it became unpatriotic to travel and waste money abroad’.²⁰² Future Shell artists, Tristram Hillier and Cedric Morris, were both forced to return to England along with Edward Burra, Christopher Wood and Edward Wadsworth and their reduced incomes required them to seek commercial job opportunities.²⁰³ Hillier described the surprise of finding out his life in France was going to become more insecure:

We had no inkling of the financial crisis that was shaking the western world. Suddenly we were told that the pound sterling had been devalued in relation to the franc and other European currencies and that its purchasing power would henceforth be approximately halved... the problem now was to find enough money for the bare support of my family.²⁰⁴

After trying to live frugally in France for another year, Hillier found that: ‘life in France had become so expensive at the new rate of exchange that we decided to return to London’.²⁰⁵ One advantage of returning to London was that artists, like Hillier and Wadsworth would be able to meet publicity managers like Beddington, which would make them available for commercial work.

During this period a number of refugees, who would contribute to the ‘enrichment of the nation’s artistic life’, arrived in Britain from political and racial persecution in Germany and Russia.²⁰⁶ They preferred the relative freedom of Britain despite the difficult economic conditions and became part of the pool of artists who could be called upon to create advertisements. Amongst the artists who settled in England and worked for Shell were Szegedi Szuts, Hans Feibusch and Hans Schleger. In 1934 the architect Walter Gropius arrived in England and in the following two years Moholy-Nagy and Naum Gabo both settled in England. In 1938 Oskar Kokoschka arrived and Piet Mondrian found a studio in Hampstead before moving on to New York in 1940. McKnight Kauffer had introduced Hans Schleger,

²⁰² Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p.72.

²⁰³ Stephenson, 1991, p.41.

²⁰⁴ Tristram Hillier, *Leda and the Goose: An Autobiography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1954) p.119.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.124.

²⁰⁶ Dennis Farr, *English Art 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) p.271.

professionally known as Zero, to British design circles with an exhibition in 1934.²⁰⁷ Including the poster *Architects prefer Shell*, Zero completed a range of commissions for British institutions.²⁰⁸

A strategy that artists and designers could use to improve their incomes was to group together in order to create interest and publicity for their work, as well as share exhibition space when single artist shows were becoming harder to arrange.²⁰⁹ They could also promote a common outlook and provide mutual support. Two of the groups formed in the 1930s, Unit One and the Artists' International Association had, in their strategies for promoting the work of their members, an awareness of how the income of the artist or designer could be helped through their banding together to put on exhibitions. Nash had announced the formation of Unit One in a letter to *The Times* on 12 June 1933.²¹⁰ Four of the original eleven members of Unit One - Nash, Nicholson, Hillier and John Armstrong - all produced work for Shell; in fact Armstrong produced eight large mural panels for the Shell-Mex House restaurant. The collapse of the art market meant that artists needed to find new buyers and sponsors. Unit One approached this by sending their first exhibition on a provincial tour. Between May 1934 and April 1935 a representative selection of work was seen in cities that included Manchester and Liverpool.²¹¹ The sponsorship of the exhibition by local municipal authorities gave an extra dimension to the debate the work created and, of course, increased the publicity for those artists involved:

Unit One aroused controversy at each showing, it was the subject of a sermon in Liverpool Cathedral, a cartoon in *Ireland's Saturday Night* and of a heated correspondence in the *Liverpool Post and Mercury*.²¹²

The other major group determined to create an interest in art among a new audience was the Artist International Association (AIA). The strategy for seeking new markets for art was different to Unit One but the motive was the same, 'The major and

²⁰⁷ Haworth-Booth, 2005, p.68.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., These included trade marks for John Lewis and Edinburgh Festival posters and the Festival's castle and dove motif.

²⁰⁹ Andrew Stephenson has suggested three strategies were open to artists after the collapse of the art market. Firstly to carry on with easel painting if they had their own means of support. Secondly to adapt their work to produce conventional landscapes or portraits and thirdly to abandon easel painting altogether and develop new forms of visual presentation, e.g. advertising. Stephenson, 1991, p.44.

²¹⁰ Nash and Causey, 2000, pp.97-99.

²¹¹ Harrison, 1994, p.250.

²¹² Ibid., p.250.

continuously maintained theme of the AIA's work... was a determination to create an interest in art in new audiences'.²¹³

In response to the stock market crash of 1929 and the devaluation of the pound in 1931 the strategies adopted by artists to survive financially included moving into design work and grouping together to initiate publicity and gain new markets. The Depression affected a large section of the economy, including the art market, but new consumer industries actually grew during the 1930s and it was these industries, as exemplified by Shell and the motor industry, where artists were able to find employment. In a strong economy, artists, dealers and collectors were happy to produce and consume artefacts but in a collapsing economy artists were drawn into the everyday and commercial. From the artists' perspective their survival in a difficult economic period was a major factor in their involvement in the Shell series of posters.

Jack Beddington: Patron or Client?

The economic conditions of the 1930s that made advertising work so attractive to artists, also made the patronage of Shell through their Publicity Manager, Jack Beddington, a creative challenge.

JB, as he was known, emanated power and so was rather frightening to meet – an alarming high IQ behind an alarming high forehead....looking back I realise I now had a patron.²¹⁴

The quotation above also indicates that the person who managed the patronage could be an intimidating prospect. The process of how Beddington through Shell, positioned himself as patron rather than client, chose artists, briefed them and rewarded the results of their work is the subject of this chapter section. It will seek to illuminate the procedure by which this patronage created over seventy images for Shell's three landscape campaigns of the 1930s.

²¹³ Robert Radford, *Art for a Purpose: The Artists' International Association, 1933-1953* (Winchester: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987) p.10.

²¹⁴ James Gardner, 1993, p.82.

It has already been noted that Frank Pick of London Underground was a model for Beddington's use of artists and designers. Beddington, however, was surprisingly dismissive of the commissioned work of another precursor of his commercial patronage, the railway companies. He criticised their use of Royal Academicians but was particularly referring to the buying of existing paintings rather than commissioning of specific images for advertising.²¹⁵ He was, however, complimentary about Frank Pick's work. He saw himself as an admirer and successor to Pick and, as noted earlier, described him as, 'the most important pioneer of commercial art patronage in this country'.²¹⁶ The word 'pioneer' is interesting and indicates that Beddington imagined himself as inheriting and consolidating Pick's work. Beddington described what he was doing as 'commercial patronage' and positioned himself as patron rather than client:

The kind of patronage in which I am interested, and which I have most to do, is better called, I think, 'commercial patronage' of the Arts; that is to say, the commissioning of artists by an industrial firm.²¹⁷

Contemporary commentators also used the term patron to describe both Shell and Beddington.²¹⁸ Although he worked autonomously within the company, much of the prestige linked with patronage became associated with him. The purpose of his department was to ally the image of the company to art.²¹⁹ The 1930s' commentators and writers observed that patronage in the arts was moving from individuals to the state or corporations. Art historian and Assistant Keeper at the British Museum, Roger Hinks, stated that:

The publicity of the Post Office, of Imperial Airways, of the London Passenger Transport Board, and the Shell-Mex organisation.....shows how these bodies can become patrons of the visual arts.²²⁰

Whether this patronage was enlightened philanthropy or a more self-interested entrepreneurial philosophy was not investigated by commentators such as Clark and

²¹⁵ Jack Beddington, 'Patronage in Art To-day' (1c) in *Art in England*, R. S. Lambert, Ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938) p.85.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.85.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.83.

²¹⁸ As the quotations by Connolly and Clark at the beginning of this chapter indicate.

²¹⁹ Heller, 2008.

²²⁰ Roger Hinks, 'Patronage in Art To-Day' (1a) in R.S. Lambert, 1938, p.76.

Connolly. Shell, in the person of Beddington, saw that their patronage reflected directly on their organisation. Commissioning a variety of artists created positive interest in the company and the resulting images of places of interest that could be visited by car were directly related to Shell's products. The posters were, therefore, successful in promoting Shell's name and creating goodwill.

Indeed, Jack Beddington encouraged the image of himself as the discriminating patron. John Hewitt has explored how this view of Beddington, along with Pick and others, draws on a model of artistic production in which the discerning patron recognises the quality of the artistic producer and gives him encouragement and support.²²¹ It was a discourse that exaggerated, Hewitt suggests, the role of Jack Beddington by presenting the company's advertising as an extension of his own taste. Beddington was presenting himself as a man of discernment who was creating aesthetically pleasing advertising, rather than the producer of product-pushing, countryside-despoiling, fly-posting trash advertising that so displeased the middle-class preservationists. The relationship between the artist and patron is one of the elements that distinguishes the patron from the client, so Beddington is often described as encouraging and supporting the artist rather than merely requesting an artefact for a utilitarian purpose. This relationship is about the patron's or client's motives, the status given to the artist and how much freedom they are given in producing the work. The style and content of the work could be specified by a client but a patron may suggest the content whilst allowing the artist a greater degree of freedom: 'He never told them (the artists) how to design an advertisement, but gave them the subject and size and left them to it.'²²² His obituaries refer to his patronage frequently. John Betjeman wrote that Beddington 'discovered artists' despite many of the Shell posters being produced by established artists such as Vanessa Bell and Rex Whistler.²²³

Being a patron distinguished Shell from the quotidian advertisers who would be referred to as 'clients' whilst an artist would have a patron. The status of the artist is an important element in this relationship. A client would employ someone to complete a specific task whereas a patron would see an artist as being more

²²¹ Hewitt, 1992.

²²² Ullstein, 1951, p.16.

²²³ John Betjeman, Jack Beddington obituary, *The Times*, 27th April 1959.

autonomous. The question of whether the patronage would affect the work, methods or process of any artist does not appear to have been articulated by those involved although, as will be seen, Beddington did express concern for how artists becoming involved with advertising would affect their career.

Beddington situated himself as patron through his relationship with the artists; how he briefed them and the way he reflected on and publicly described his role. With over fifty artists, how he chose them and communicated with them was inevitably varied. With some of the artists there is a strong indication of a social as well as a working relationship. He would spend evenings at the Café Royal with McKnight Kauffer and other Shell artists.²²⁴ When he was planning the first of his major poster campaigns of the 1930s, Beddington outlined his ideas and proposals in a letter to the partner of Cedric Morris, Arthur Lett-Haines.²²⁵ Morris was in his early thirties at this time and an established artist who was a member of the Seven and Five Society. In 1937 he founded the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing whose students would include Lucien Freud and Maggi Hambling. Beddington was writing from 'Shell Corner' before the company moved to Shell-Mex House and it is clear that he knew Lett-Baines and Morris socially. At the end of the letter he thanked them both for their hospitality and congratulated them on their 'lovely garden and house'.²²⁶ Despite being at the start of his career as Publicity Manager, he was very clear, in the letter, about the ideas that he would carry through all the campaigns of the 1930s. Morris was only the fifth artist Beddington had asked to create an image for what he, at this time thought would be eight posters. Eleven were eventually produced for the first of the three campaigns, *See Britain First*, in 1931. The other four artists were Algernon Newton, Edna Clarke Hall, Vanessa Bell and Edward McKnight Kauffer.

The idea that Beddington sought out the young and unrecognised artist is not supported by an examination of those artists who were commissioned for the campaigns. The majority were established designers, illustrators and painters. Writing about this period later, Beddington reflected on the role of patron he had

²²⁴ Alexandra Harris, *The Poster King: Edward McKnight Kauffer* (London, Estorick Foundation, 2011) p.22.

²²⁵ A letter from Jack Beddington to Arthur Lett-Haines, 16th June 1930 in the Tate Archive, 8317.1.1.3428.

²²⁶ Ibid.

established in the 1930s. In 1957, two years before he died, he published *Young Artists of Promise* in which he had collected together examples of the work of over 150 painters and sculptors. In a clear reference to his own pre-war patronage, he regretted that there were no equivalent patrons after the Second World War. 'The great patrons are getting rarer and rarer and being replaced by committees'.²²⁷ When giving advice to potential buyers of paintings he must have been thinking back to his own constructed image as a discoverer of talented painters, seeking out young artists for the poster campaigns: 'There are many small galleries in less fashionable parts of London...where beginners get their first chance. This is where you have to back your own judgement and where the fun really begins'.²²⁸ Beddington has been portrayed as spending his lunchtime going around the West End art galleries and when he saw work that appealed to him, commissioning the artist to do an advertisement for Shell.²²⁹ In fact, rather than discovering artists, many, like Paul Nash and Vanessa Bell already had established careers as painters and others, such as the designers Edward McKnight Kauffer and Barnet Freedman, had already produced posters for London Underground and the GPO.

This role of patron, whether to young, ambitious or well-known artists appears to be one that Beddington embraced enthusiastically and by the end of the 1930s he was confident of his own position. In a contribution to one of the first Pelican paperbacks, *Art in England*, which collected together contributions from writers on and practitioners of art, he described his own standing as a patron during the 1930s.²³⁰ In his essay, Beddington is very specific about the working practices the commissioned artist should have and gives an insight into the practical approach he expects. The artists should know:

that working with a business patron his work is for reproduction, and the result is that after the preliminary sketches have been approved there is a minimum amount of time or trouble wasted, both from my point of view and from that of the lithographer.²³¹

²²⁷ Jack Beddington. *Young Artists of Promise* (Studio Publications, London, 1957) p.6.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.9.

²²⁹ Ullstein, Gabriele. "Jack Beddington." *Design* no. 31 (1951) pp. 15-17.

²³⁰ Jack Beddington, 1938, pp.82-87.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p.84.

The emphasis on the practical approach also comes across in a dismissive description of artists who may think that working in advertising is an easy way to make money. At the same time, he makes it very clear who has the power in the relationship: 'Painting easel pictures for one's own pleasure and executing commissions for men who know what they want are two very different things.'²³² He was quite clear about what was required and even a designer as well-established as McKnight Kauffer was not over confident in being able to convince Beddington of his ideas during planning meetings:

The starting point is a discussion with the client (Beddington) which releases a swarm of first impressions of the product – and some internal questions like 'will my client understand what I propose to do? Will he trust an intuitive solution to the problem?'²³³

Interestingly, McKnight Kauffer, as a graphic designer, describes Beddington as a 'client'. How specific Beddington was in briefing the artists highlights the blurring between Beddington acting as a patron and as a client. A patron would be expected to be less prescriptive in what he required from the commission. Ullstein's flattering article on Beddington gives the impression that artists were not asked for a specific style or approach, 'He never told them how to design an advertisement, but gave them the subject and size and left them to it.'²³⁴ This, however, was not the recollection of Richard Guyatt, who remembers his design, *Racing Motorists Prefer Shell*, for what Kenneth Clark describes as the 'Conchophilous Trades' posters as being altered by Shell. The face of the racing driver had been changed because somebody at Shell (presumably Beddington) thought it 'too handsome'.²³⁵ In the same series, John Piper's design for *Clergymen Prefer Shell* was never used because the association of clergymen with commerce was thought 'disrespectful to the cloth'.²³⁶ The alteration to Guyatt's design may have been because it was a portrait not a landscape but who actually chose the subject matter of the posters is an interesting area to explore. Ullstein implies Beddington gave the artists the subject of

²³² Ibid., p.87.

²³³ Edward McKnight Kauffer, 'The Designer and the Public', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* Vol.85, (1938) p.51.

²³⁴ Ullstein, 1951, p16.

²³⁵ Remembered by Christopher Frayling in his obituary of Richard Guyatt, *The Guardian*, Saturday October 27, 2007.

²³⁶ Quoted in Francis Spalding, 2009, p.95.

the design but Francis Spalding describes Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell as ‘choosing’ the sites for their paintings to be used in the early 1930s, ‘Vanessa found her motif close to Charleston in the church at Alfriston. Duncan chose the bridge at St. Ives in Huntingdonshire, which would have been familiar to him’.²³⁷ The level of instruction may have been dependent on the status of the artist.

When Beddington described his own view of dealing with artists he could not resist being facetious but still implied an equality, if not superiority, in his relationship with those he commissioned:

I have never found artists are either impractical or difficult to get on with, or particularly dirty. Some are, but they are rarely the best ones. If they wear beards, why shouldn’t they? If they like to have strange hats, why shouldn’t they? If you will ignore this and remember that they are probably just as intelligent and just as hardworking...as you are.²³⁸

An example of how Beddington approached the artists appears in the 1930 letter to Lett-Haines. He is uncharacteristically nervous of the artist’s willingness to be involved with commercial work and gives the reason for not having previously approached Morris, ‘Because I was very doubtful whether it would be to his advantage at his present stage to be associated with advertising.’²³⁹ The financial crisis of the 1930s had not become fully apparent in the summer of 1930 but, as the decade progressed, a relative increase in autonomy gave Beddington much more confidence in his role as a patron of artists.²⁴⁰ He began to realise the importance of his position as artists found making a living more difficult. When he responded, in 1939 to some ideas for posters presented by Morris’ students he had become much more assertive, ‘I am afraid a lot of the suggestions made are no good.’²⁴¹ The choice of scene, as with Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, may have been left to the artist but Beddington makes clear, in the letter to Lett-Haines, what type of scene he is looking for:

²³⁷ Francis Spalding, *Duncan Grant* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997) p.316.

²³⁸ Beddington, 1957, p.8.

²³⁹ Beddington to Lett-Haines, 1930.

²⁴⁰ This may have been because Beddington moved from being a member of Shell’s advertising committee to being in sole charge as Publicity Manager. Ullstein, 1951, p.15.

²⁴¹ Letter from Jack Beddington to Cedric Morris, 17th July 1939 in the Tate archive, 8317.1.1.3445.

It is essential from our point of view that the spot should be the kind of place which people would like to go and see and that it should be presented in as suitable a manner as possible, that is to say the object of the advertisements is to induce people to go and see places that they might not otherwise do.²⁴²

There is an implication that more traditional tourist destinations, and possibly those accessible by train are not what he is looking for. This is generally true of all the sites eventually used, although McKnight Kauffer's *Stonehenge* was an exception in that it was already a popular tourist site, but not one accessible by train. At the end of the letter to Morris he wrote that there was a small committee that judged the work and who, 'are not always so well satisfied as I am about the merits of my own ideas.'²⁴³ This indicates that he had, as yet, not become in sole charge of publicity but it could also be a device to soften the blow of rejection for the artist.

As the Publicity Department became established in Shell-Mex House in the years leading up to the Second World War, Beddington built up a team with Tom Gentleman as Head of the Studio and John Betjeman as one of the copywriters. Betjeman's role for Shell is an interesting one in that, although his main area of interest was writing or supervising the production of the *Shell Guides*, he appears to have had a role in other areas of the company's advertising. Betjeman had proposed, as early as 1933, creating the *Shell Guides* to English counties whilst he was still working at the *Architectural Review*, which would later publish them. He had been paid twenty pounds to produce a dummy for the first proposed *Shell Guide* and in a letter from 1933 he pleaded with Beddington to be given complete control of their design and content and in the same letter made a case for being employed by Shell rather than the *Architectural Review*:

I would very much like to have the opportunity of getting away from my present unappreciated position and doing the guides on my own with some other publisher...I would demand no more than a living wage...less than I get now because I should be doing something I liked...and work solely for Shell.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Beddington to Lett-Haines 1930.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ John Betjeman and Candida Lycett Green, 1994, p.125.

Initially Beddington agreed to the first request but not to the second, 'I don't see much chance of you getting away from the *Arch. Rev.* to Shell. I am convinced that it would be a great mistake at the moment to try and do such a thing.'²⁴⁵ However, by August 1935 Beddington must have changed his mind and Betjeman was working at Shell-Mex House on the banks of the Thames from Monday to Wednesday, 11am to 4.30pm.²⁴⁶ He was given a desk in a large office near the company's Church of England chapel and he shared the office with Beddington's other aide, William Scudamore Mitchell. His involvement in the day to day advertising decisions is demonstrated in a letter to the novelist Anthony Powell in which he returned some suggestions and ideas Powell had made for advertisements. Betjeman had shown them to Beddington but he had not been impressed, 'He says they are very good but ones that always occur to people when they first think of Shell and BP advertising'.²⁴⁷ Betjeman was well known for his cheerfulness and sociability and probably facilitated the communication between Shell and the artists. It seems logical that Betjeman should be involved in the later campaigns, especially *To Visit Britain's Landmarks*, which began with a landscape by his friend and neighbour Lord Berners. Bevis Hillier believed that he suggested subjects for the three landscape campaigns.²⁴⁸

The amount paid for the posters remained at a similar level throughout the 1930s. The method of payment Beddington had proposed in his letter to Lett-Haines, was one that he maintained for the rest of the decade. The artist, in Morris' case, would be paid ten pounds for the completed work and fifty pounds if the design was accepted.²⁴⁹ The way in which the commissioned artists and designers were paid was appreciated by them. Beddington was able to pay the artists directly from the Publicity Department, rather than an invoice going through a lengthy and elaborate accounting process at Shell, which was more familiar with dealing with very large sums of money.²⁵⁰ When Beddington wrote to Morris, accepting his design, he said he was delighted with the painting and: 'My secretary will send you a cheque in a

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p.126.

²⁴⁶ Betjeman's hours of working at Shell are mentioned several times in his letters, along with a number of letters to Jack Beddington.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p.179.

²⁴⁸ Bevis Hillier, *John Betjeman: New Fame, New Love, 1934-1958* (London: John Murray, 2002) p.77.

²⁴⁹ Beddington to Lett-Haines 1930.

²⁵⁰ Mark Haworth-Booth, 2005, p.77.

day or two'.²⁵¹ The amount appears to have varied little over ten years although Salvador Dali was offered £75 pounds to design a poster that unfortunately was never completed.²⁵² Paul Nash was paid 50 guineas in 1938 for *Kimmeridge Forest, Dorset*, part of the *To Visit Britain's Landmarks* campaign, an increase on Morris' payment of only two and a half per cent over eight years.²⁵³

Jack Beddington, like Frank Pick before him, was one of the personalities who came to represent the patronage of large commercial companies. It can be seen that Beddington, by commissioning the artists, paying them directly from his department, and meeting and socialising with them, became the embodiment of Shell's association with art but also positioned himself as a man of taste, the discerning patron who just happened to be working for Shell.

This chapter has explored the circumstances and context surrounding the creation of three poster campaigns for Shell by their Publicity Manager, Jack Beddington. A discourse was created and persists that presents figures like Beddington as the genius patron of young undiscovered artists who were given the rare opportunity to present their work to the public through the medium of Shell's advertising and the generosity of the patron.²⁵⁴ This model of artistic production, that represented Beddington as a discerning patron who sought out the unknown artists in small London galleries, is one that Beddington encouraged. It has been shown that the economic and social circumstances that the posters played a part in were more complex and interesting than a simple reading of Beddington's role as commercial patron implies.

The restructuring of Shell and the cartel the company formed with its commercial rivals took away any motive for competitive advertising and gave Beddington the freedom to take a more subtle approach to encouraging motorists to use Shell's products. Concerns being expressed during the interwar period about the preservation and appearance of the British countryside were addressed by Shell not just in the content of its advertising but also in the context. By using mobile poster

²⁵¹ Letter from Beddington to Cedric Morris, 21st June 1930, Tate Archive, 8317/1/1/3429.

²⁵² A letter from John Betjeman to Salvador Dali, August 26th, 1936 in the Dali Foundation.

²⁵³ Letter to Paul Nash from B.A. Spendlove, Secretary to Jack Beddington, 8/2/1938, Tate Archive 8313/2/2/7.

²⁵⁴ Paul Rennie, in 2010, described Beddington as directing 'work to promising artists and designers'. Paul Rennie, 2010, p.60.

sites on their lorries, Shell was able to deflect any criticism that they were contributing to this despoiling, by advertising, of the British landscape. The posters were part of the commodification of the countryside that aimed to encourage the car owning middle-classes to visit the sites portrayed. The removal of roadside billboards by the company was used by the preservationist as an example of responsible advertising and helped to avert any criticism of Shell.

Beddington's campaigns were also able to use the relatively new improvements in printing technology. Offset lithographic printing was able to reproduce the work of artists accurately and the simplicity of Shell's designs had been pioneered by the railway companies and particularly Frank Pick at London Underground. Pick was a model for Beddington as the individualistic commercial patron who was able to use subtle advertising because of a lack of competition in their industries. The relationship of Beddington to the artists and designers should also be seen in the context of the economics of the 1930s. The slump created a pool of artists and designers who had either found the economic situation had affected their sales or had to return to Britain because living abroad had become too expensive. These artists were joined, as the 1930s progressed, by others fleeing the politically and socially unstable conditions in Europe. Beddington had little need to unearth new artists when established artists were grateful for his commissions and for the prompt payments from his department's budget. The interaction between economic and cultural issues and how the poster campaigns both reflected and affected these issues is more complex and interesting than a simple reading of the genius patron model of artistic production.

Chapter 2

‘Art and Industry in Alliance’ or in opposition? ²⁵⁵

It is good business for the petrol-peddler to hide his opulence behind the livery of art.²⁵⁶

This chapter will investigate the inter-war debate that concerned the relationship between fine art, commercial art and industry which is illustrated by the above, rather cynical quotation, from a commercial art journal. It indicates the uneasy relationship between commercial art and industry in the 1930s. I shall argue that the discussion, between those who saw a clear demarcation between the two fields of fine and commercial art, and those who saw them as part of a unified creative process, was one that engaged not just the practitioners of fine and commercial work but writers, critics, educators and even government committees. It will show that the poster campaigns produced by Shell were frequently used as exemplars of a successful integration of the two disciplines. Those writers and commentators, discussed in the later sections of this chapter, who suggested fine and commercial art had equal status, could look at the range of artists used by Shell as an example of the merging of the two disciplines. Those who maintained fine and commercial art were separate and unequal could argue that Shell were not unifying art and design but, by using a range of artists’ paintings without reference to its products, Shell were merely adapting fine art to its posters rather than the fine artists producing commercial designs on the advantages of Shell’s oil and petrol. The views of some of the prominent and less well-known observers of the period will be explored, including the reasons why many of them thought British design needed to be improved.

Manufacturing and commerce, in the 1930s, were developing an understanding of the contribution that artists and designers could make towards the quality of their goods and services. This involvement was debated and encouraged by a number of writers and critics, of whom Herbert Read, Nikolaus Pevsner,

²⁵⁵ ‘Art and Industry in Alliance’ was the title of an anonymous article in *The Shell Magazine*, July 1934, pp.313-314.

²⁵⁶ John Cuff, ‘Post Office Publicity’, *Penrose Annual*, 41, 1939, p.22.

Kenneth Clark and Anthony Blunt, are amongst the better-remembered names. Publicity managers, such as Jack Beddington and Frank Pick at London Transport, also made their contributions to the discourse through journals and speeches in the 1930s. Others, whose involvement has been less well remembered, included John de La Valette (who organised the 1935 Exhibition of British Art in Industry at the Royal Academy and who edited the subsequent book of commentaries on the exhibition); Harold Curwen (founder of the Curwen Press); Sir William Llewellyn; (President of the Royal Academy) and directors of advertising agencies, such as John A Milne.²⁵⁷ As practitioners, Paul Nash and Edward McKnight Kauffer were amongst the artists and designers who articulated their ideas on the relationship of art to industry. They promoted an equality of status between those who created fine and commercial work, and their work for Shell was frequently referred to as a model for the successful use of artists in advertising.

The thirties was a decade that saw a culmination of this debate, but it was initiated in the nineteenth century by the development of machine-made goods. Towards the end of that century, members of the Arts and Crafts movement were disparaging of the effect the Industrial Revolution had on the standard of manufactured goods. William Morris and his followers proposed a solution which meant returning to handcrafts and although Morris despised the mass-produced goods of the Industrial Revolution, he did believe that art and everyday life should be inseparable:

It is the province of art to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before him, a life to which the perception and creation of beauty, the enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be felt to be as necessary to man as his daily bread.²⁵⁸

Morris' solution was not seen, by those concerned with the quality of British design, to be appropriate for the needs of the 1930s. Rather than returning to producing

²⁵⁷ De La Valette seems an oddly reactionary choice for an exhibition that sought to improve the future standard of British design. He regarded the French art that had been exhibited in London before the First World War as 'noxious', (p.6) and Futurism as 'the futile meanderings of unoccupied minds'. John de La Valette, *The Conquest of Ugliness: a collection of contemporary views on the place of art in industry* (London: Methuen, 1935).

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Peter Stansky, *William Morris* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983) p.81.

handcrafts, the debate was on how or whether art could be used by commerce or even whether art and design were essentially the same activity.

Throughout the chapter I will use the term ‘commercial art’, although writers of the period would also use ‘industrial’ or ‘applied’ art to describe visual material commissioned for commercial purposes. The term ‘commercial art’ was still relatively recent in the 1930s and was used both in referring to fine art used in advertisements and to commissioned illustration.²⁵⁹ There was no clear distinction between these two activities as to where, or if, they met and overlapped. On one end of a continuum, an existing painting could be used in an advertisement; on the other, there was a specific elucidation of a product’s qualities through commissioned illustration.

What would come to be called commercial art developed through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth as the mobility of goods and people, led to the development of consumer economies. When production exceeded consumption, it made advertising necessary to ensure continued production and profit. Advertising would also, if possible, create an increased share of the market.²⁶⁰ Shell’s three landscape poster campaigns of the 1930s exemplify the increased sophistication of a form of advertising, where the product’s characteristics were not used; rather it was implied that there would be a transformational benefit for the consumer from using petrol and oil. By purchasing these products, consumers would be able to associate themselves with a romantic enjoyment of the countryside. Shell was not selling petrol but a lifestyle choice. It was attempting to sell its goods by appealing to consumers through means other than information, in this case by using imagery that implied contentment might be achieved through tourism.

During the 1930s Shell produced a fourth poster campaign, not based upon landscapes but upon occupations, which suggested that a number of professions would endorse Shell’s products. John Armstrong’s poster for this campaign, in 1933, was entitled ‘Artists Prefer Shell’, (Fig. 4). It was a part of the ‘Conchophilous

²⁵⁹ The term ‘commercial art’ dates from the turn of the twentieth century, see, Michele Helene Bogart, *Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

²⁶⁰ Liz McFall, *Advertising: A Cultural Economy* (London: SAGE, 2004). Shell, as was seen in Chapter 1, did not need to increase its share of the market because of the As-Is agreement although it did want to increase its overall sales.

Trades' series of posters which were described by the Director of the National Gallery, Kenneth Clark, as seeming, 'to me the best series so far'. On the surface, the poster can be read as a recommendation by artists to use Shell's petrol and oil but it also seems to indicate the relationship of artists to the patronage of the company. The poster consists of three elements on a blue/grey background. This background and one of the elements, the artist's palette, have been rendered as though painted on a canvas with the paint subsequently scraped away or alternatively painted roughly on wood or cardboard.²⁶¹ The other two elements are a conch shell and what appears to be a Greek goblet. The shell is rendered with some tonal variation, whilst the goblet is slightly flattened, and the horses walking around the cup are in imitation of Greek pottery design.²⁶²

The poster has the forced naive quality of Armstrong's other work and presents itself, like much of Shell's publicity, as a painting that just happens to be used as a poster. The textured background and palette signal that this is not a graphic piece but a reproduction of a painting and the three elements make up a specific reference to a connection between Shell and art. The palette, unusually represented as black, and reminiscent of a pool of oil, stands in to represent the artist. The conch is an obvious visual pun on the slogan 'Artists Prefer Shell' and an alternative to Shell's scallop symbol but the slogan could also be interpreted as referring to artists preferring Shell as an employer. The most interesting element is the goblet, a naive rendering of an object recalling classical Greek art. Using classical imagery was a feature of Armstrong's painting in the inter-war years and by including the goblet he references himself as an artist who 'Prefers Shell' one who also attempts to connect Shell with high culture. One objective of Shell's posters in the 1930s was to associate the company with modern art and culture, and Armstrong's poster clearly signals this intention.

The poster is a modern semi-abstract representation of the objects, influenced by naive painting but with a reference to classical art as represented by the goblet. Like other British artists of the period, Armstrong showed a willingness to

²⁶¹ Armstrong may have been influenced here by the work of the Cornish naïve painter, Alfred Wallis. His friend and co-founder of Unit One, Ben Nicholson, had discovered Wallis in 1928. Charles Harrison, 1981 p.188.

²⁶² Armstrong frequently used pottery in his work and even designed a cooking pot for Clarice Cliffe in the 1930s with a similar horse motif.

incorporate elements of the past into work that they wished to be seen as modern.²⁶³ While the painting appeared to be produced independently by a creative individual, its real purpose was to create an image for a commercial company. It attempts to resolve any opposition between a romantic perception of art and its commercial use. 'Artists Prefer Shell' illustrates the secondment of art and artists into advertising and the question as to whether this was desirable, or practical, for artists and for industry is the core of the debate explored in this chapter.

Armstrong is an example of an artist who could move between fine and commercial work in the 1920s and 30s and his commissioned work is an instance of the adaptability common to many of his contemporaries.²⁶⁴ He was a prolific designer, producing work for the General Post Office and Imperial Chemical Industries as well as a number of posters for Shell. However, he is usually remembered, either in the context of the formation of the art group, Unit One, and the development of British abstraction in the 1930s, or else categorized as a surrealist.²⁶⁵ Of the other six painters who formed Unit One in 1933, the same year that Armstrong designed the poster, four would produce posters for Shell, and they would later be joined by another, Tristram Hillier.²⁶⁶ The fact that four young artists from Unit One could also produce commercial work indicates that an artist working in commerce was becoming natural and acceptable.²⁶⁷ The membership of Unit One also showed that it was not necessarily acceptable for a commercial artist to be given the same status as a fine artist.²⁶⁸ Paul Nash had suggested the successful designer, Edward McKnight Kauffer as a founder member but this was rejected by the time the composition of the group was finalised.²⁶⁹ Some historians have argued that the 1930s was a period when links between the fine artist and the commercial artist was

²⁶³ This area has been explored by Alexandra Harris in *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010).

²⁶⁴ David Peters Corbett refers to him as an 'exemplar' of this flexibility in, David Peters Corbett, 1997 p.90.

²⁶⁵ Charles Harrison describes his painting as 'working in the style which owed much to Chirico's later work'. Harrison, 1994, p.235.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p.240.

²⁶⁷ The art critic, Herbert Read was one who encouraged the employment of artists in industry and in 'The Artist in Modern Civilisation', in *Design for To-Day*, Vol. 3, May 1934, p.192, and specifically suggested abstract artists. In the same journal a number of artists, including Dame Laura Knight, C.R.W. Nevinson and Mark Gertler were commended for their work with Cadburys in 'Famous Artists Design for Cadburys', *Design for To-Day*, Vol. 2, December, 1933, p.vii.

²⁶⁸ The four artists who produced posters for Shell were: Paul Nash (3); Ben Nicholson (1) John Armstrong (2); Tristram Hillier (2).

²⁶⁹ Harrison, 1994, p.240.

at its closest.²⁷⁰ Kauffer's rejection by Unit One, shows that there was friction between artists who worked exclusively on commercial commissions and those who created both fine and commercial work. Kauffer's experience illustrates that it was acceptable for fine artists to move into commercial work but not for a commercial artist to be considered suitable for a fine art group. The 'strong link' between the two disciplines worked in only one direction and Kauffer's rejection by Unit One indicates, as others have argued, that the status of artists who worked on commercial rather than fine art was unresolved in this period.²⁷¹

Shell was not the only company to commission fine artists and commercial designers, but the quantity and variety of its designs produced in the 1930s makes them an ideal subject for the exploration of these issues. The reaction to Shell's posters by their potential customers is unavailable because of lack of evidence but there is contemporary evidence of their effect upon writers and critics through newspaper and journal articles. These contemporaneous reactions can reveal the posters' place in the debate on the relationship between art and commercial work.

Historical analysis of advertising in the first half of the twentieth century has often taken the position that its practice was unsophisticated and basic. Some writers have even argued that advertising at the beginning of the century was mainly informational and concerned with explaining what a product did and only moved to a more persuasive format in the second half of the century.²⁷² During the inter-war period, when Shell was producing its posters, advertising has been described as only making 'rudimentary associations between products and desirable qualities'.²⁷³ Any examination of poster design in this period contradicts this view, which also cannot be found among contemporaries. Shell's publicity reveals a more sophisticated approach and is certainly not 'rudimentary'. The subject of advertising was addressed by one of the first applied psychologists, Walter Dill Scott, in his 1909 book, *The Psychology of Advertising* (updated and reprinted in Britain in 1932). It showed that even in the inter-war period, commentators on advertising considered it to be much more complex than it had been at the turn of the century. In his

²⁷⁰ Sarah Lambert, 'Prints and Book Illustration', in *Thirties: British Art and Design before the War*, exh. cat., Hayward Gallery, October, 1979-January 13, 1980 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), p.82.

²⁷¹ Teri J. Edelstein, 2010 p.18.

²⁷² McFall, 2004, p.93.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.46.

introduction to the revised 1932 edition, D.T. Howard says that a comparison between contemporary advertising and that of the previous 30 years would reveal ‘the difference to be astonishing’.²⁷⁴

The three landscape poster campaigns and the ‘Conchophilous’ series created by Shell in the 1930s did not emerge autonomously from the advertising culture of the inter-war period but there are aspects of the campaigns that, together, make them noteworthy and unique: the single patron who commissioned them; their lack of reference to a visualised product; and the diversity of artists and designers used as well as their relationship to the art movements of the period. Together, these elements made for an exceptional series of images but they grew out of the increasing sophistication of advertising. This sophistication was produced by adapting or combining ideas and practices that emerged in product marketing in the inter-war period.²⁷⁵

Shell’s publicity provides a lens through which the relationship between fine and commercial art can be explored. Were the two really ‘in alliance’, or was there a conflict between the commercial and art worlds? The objective of Shell’s advertising was to create goodwill towards the company’s name through its poster images. The next section of this chapter will, briefly, explore how the poster became one of the main instruments of advertising. In order to give some context regarding Shell’s commissioning of artists and designers it will look at the increasing importance of the poster as a means of advertising. Shell became part of the art and industry debate by shifting from commodity-oriented advertising to promotion of the company through its association with art and landscape.

The range of artists commissioned by Shell was a factor in bringing its advertising into the art and commerce debate. They covered the spectrum from artists of the avant-garde to designers concerned solely with commercial work. Shell employed artists who were associated with areas of art’s development during this period and these included, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson Edward McKnight Kauffer and Tristram Hillier. British art and design was represented by artists who would have an

²⁷⁴ Walter Dill Scott and D.T. Howard, *The Psychology of Advertising: A Simple Exposition of the Principles of Psychology in Their Relation to Successful Advertising. Completely revised by D. T. Howard* (London: Pitman, 1932) p.1.

²⁷⁵ Explored in T. R. Nevett, 1982.

influence over most of the twentieth century, ranging from Vanessa Bell, who was allied with post-impressionism before the First World War, to Graham Sutherland, who would be a leading British artist after the Second World War until his death in 1980.²⁷⁶

The development of Shell's poster advertising

‘Good posters are good business as well as good art’²⁷⁷

This quotation from W. S. Crawford, who was, with Charles Higham, one of the two most influential heads of advertising agencies in the 1920s and 1930s, indicates the on-going discourse on the relationship between art and advertising during the inter-war period.²⁷⁸ Shell was often discussed as a positive example of this relationship, and the company's poster campaigns of the 1930s built upon an approach to advertising used since the appearance of the modern poster in the late nineteenth century.²⁷⁹ This ‘modern’ poster was different from its predecessors due to a combination of improved printing technology and a growing mass market for consumer goods that began in the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁸⁰ Although some attention was given to the history of the poster in Chapter One, it is useful to extend the background of Shell's medium of choice. As an advertising medium, it is generally accepted to have emerged in the 1860s in Paris and to have quickly spread to London, Berlin and New York.²⁸¹ The technology that produced these new posters was the use of flat, polished stones as a printing surface along with the opposition of water and oil to create colour lithography. This process had emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century but the larger stones required for posters were not generally available until the end of the century.²⁸² As a medium it differed from its

²⁷⁶ Sutherland's life is recorded in, Ronald Alley and Graham Vivian Sutherland, *Graham Sutherland* (London: Tate Gallery, 1982).

²⁷⁷ W.S. Crawford, “Making the Empire ‘Come Alive’” in *Commercial Art*, Vol. 1 December 1926 No. 6 p.241.

²⁷⁸ Crawford's and Higham's careers are discussed in, T.R. Nevett, 1982, pp.145-150

²⁷⁹ For an example of a positive review of Shell's work see Cyril Connolly, "The New Medici." *The Architectural Review*, July (1934) pp. 2-4. Discussed in Chapter 1.

²⁸⁰ The history and origins of the poster, particularly in Britain are surveyed in; T. J. Edelstein, Ed., 2010, Paul Rennie, 2010, Oliver Green, 1999.

²⁸¹ Rennie, 2010 p.12.

²⁸² Michael Twyman, ‘Production: From Chromolithography to Photolithography’ in T. J. Edelstein, 2010, p.43.

predecessors by integrating text and image visually. It could also produce large-scale works and a full range of colour. The interplay between art and advertising was highlighted and made possible by lithography's faithful representation of artists' images in the inter-war period.

By the 1920s and 1930s, the visual impact of posters on the environment had become a concern to many commentators. Outdoor advertisements in the town and the country were often considered offensive. Signs were thought to be 'hogging' the English village.²⁸³ Whilst in the cities, the main concern was the haphazard display of posters.²⁸⁴ It was the careless proliferation of hoardings that prompted the architect Clough Williams-Ellis to say that, 'many of our larger towns have allowed their main approaches to be devastated'.²⁸⁵ The rise of industrial companies such as Shell produced a market of consumption, and in order to promote that consumption they found sites for the display of advertising posters in the urban environment.²⁸⁶ Changes in transportation, first with the railways and then with motor travel, provided additional sites, such as stations and garages, which were both inside and outside of the city. The use of a larger scale as well as colour improved the spectacular effect of images, and this in turn meant that the poster could be viewed and absorbed quickly, whilst on the move, from a passing Shell lorry, from a taxi or bus, or as a train stopped at a station.²⁸⁷ By responding to these characteristics of modernity - industrialisation, improved technology, consumerism, mobility and urban living - the poster reached its zenith in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁸⁸

Despite being only one element, although an important one, of the advertising industry, Shell's posters are a useful source material for the exploration of the relationship between art and commerce in the 1930s.²⁸⁹ The core objective of any advertising is to promote sales and retain or increase a share of the market, and Shell used the mobile poster as its main promotional tool. The modern poster had, by the interwar period, become the most appreciated and respected of advertising

²⁸³ Harry Peach and Noel Carrington, *The Face of the Land: The Year Book of the Design and Industries Association, 1929-30* (London; Design and Association Industries, 1930) p.88.

²⁸⁴ David Matless, 1998, p.47.

²⁸⁵ Clough Williams-Ellis, 1929 p.128.

²⁸⁶ These developments are surveyed in Bogart, 1995.

²⁸⁷ The growth of advertising during the interwar years is explored in T. R. Nevett, 1982, pp. 145-168

²⁸⁸ Green, 1999, p.6.

²⁸⁹ Liz McFall has said that advertising may be a mirror (of the spirit of the age) but, 'it is an odd sort of mirror that both selects from and distorts the reality depicted'. McFall, 2004, p.2.

media.²⁹⁰ It remained an important element of marketing after the Second World War but its dominance declined with the increasing ascendancy of radio and television, along with quality colour advertisements in magazines.²⁹¹ The poster was at the height of its usefulness to advertising during the interwar period before technology provided other avenues for advertising.

The improved print technology in the nineteenth century had led to new opportunities for artists to reach a larger number of people and these new print technologies meant that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, posters, magazine and book illustration, along with print advertising, were giving artists novel openings to earn money through commercial patronage.²⁹² Despite the Depression these opportunities were particularly rewarding in the 1920s and 1930, due to the expansion in advertising, with national expenditure, for all advertising, rising from an estimated £31 million in 1920 to £59 million in 1938.²⁹³ The spending on outdoor advertising, such as Shell's posters, doubled in the same period.²⁹⁴ This was a significant increase at a time of low inflation and although expenditure does not equate to sophistication, it does indicate the level of importance given by manufacturers to the role of advertising.²⁹⁵

The environment for advertising may, superficially, have appeared bleak in the 1930s, with a major recession from 1929-32, but this was followed by a slow revival of economic activity through the rest of the decade.²⁹⁶ Unemployment was not as severe as in Germany and the United States and those in employment were relatively prosperous, which meant a growth in the number of consumer products being produced and bought.²⁹⁷ An advantage that Shell held was that car ownership increased tenfold between 1914 and 1935.²⁹⁸ The growth in consumer goods was helped by improvements in the infrastructure of the country, especially those of improved roads, and the near completion of the National Grid for electricity

²⁹⁰ Green, 1990, p.43.

²⁹¹ T.R. Nevett, 1982, p.191.

²⁹² Bogart, 1995, p.15.

²⁹³ T.R. Nevett, 1982, p.146.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p.146.

²⁹⁵ Britain went through 'boom and bust' in the 1930s but overall inflation was low for the decade, see Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

²⁹⁶ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009) p.xxi.

²⁹⁷ Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: Harper Press, 2010) p.viii.

²⁹⁸ Martin Pugh, *'We Danced All Night': A Social History of Britain between the Wars* (London: Bodley Head, 2008) p.243.

distribution by 1933. This made electricity both more widely available and reliable. By the end of the 1930s, two houses out of every three were wired for electricity.²⁹⁹ This stimulated growth in all sectors that used electricity: the cinema, broadcasting, underground trains and the manufacture of domestic appliances. This economic stimulus gave more spending power to consumers including those purchasing their first car.

The advertising industry responded enthusiastically to this growth in consumption and expanded throughout the inter-war years. The industry was able to review and analyse itself through journals such as *Commercial Art*, *Penrose Annual* and *Art and Industry*. As was seen above, the publication of a book such as Scott's *The Psychology of Advertising* indicated the interest that was being taken in advertising's role in cultural life. His argument was that consumers do not act rationally and therefore could be easily influenced. He suggested that emotion, sympathy and sentimentality are all factors that increase consumer suggestibility.³⁰⁰ In 1933 F. R. Leavis' *Culture and Environment* appeared and was intended to bring an analytical and sceptical approach to advertising, as well as to be used as a teaching guide in schools. Leavis believed tradition was important and provided standards of thought and behaviour which could determine the future. He disliked the Americanisation of the English language, particularly in advertising, and the book was intended to train readers' powers of discrimination.³⁰¹ Leavis wanted to help teachers to train children to see through what he saw as the debasement of the English language under the influence of advertising. He was interested in preserving the cultural continuity of English life and saw this debasement of language as a corruption of emotional life and the quality of living.

Shell's advertising in the 1920s became more sophisticated as it evolved from concentrating on showing the cans of oil and petrol, particularly in press advertising.³⁰² It moved towards an increased use of humour and what Beddington's predecessor as advertising manager, E.W. Decalour, called the 'use of the illustration

²⁹⁹ Juliet Gardiner, 2010, p.447.

³⁰⁰ A review of Scott's work can be found in Duane P. Schultz and Sydney Ellen Schultz, *A History of Modern Psychology* (Fort Worth; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

³⁰¹ See Gary Day, *Re-Reading Leavis: Culture and Literary Criticism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

³⁰² John Hewitt says that, 'the actual cans of oil and petrol disappeared from the designs in the mid-1920s in, John Hewitt, 1992 pp.121-39 p.122.

of abstract ideas connected with Shell products – such as their excellence, universal distribution, also purity, power, speed, uniformity etc.’.³⁰³ These abstract ideas would be dropped from being illustrated visually, as well as in copy, from Shell’s 1930s landscape posters but, in the mid-1920s, Decalour had dismissed the reliance on merely illustrating the packaging for Shell’s products or using ‘scenic’ art.³⁰⁴ This may have been the case in press advertising but Shell was certainly using illustrations of their products’ packaging and distribution in their lorry bills (Figs. 5 and 6). In this 1920 lorry bill, the cans used to transport oil and petrol to retailers are featured.³⁰⁵ The poster familiarised customers with the packaging for its products but, more importantly, tried to communicate a message about the company. The five identical cans imply that the quality of what they contain does not vary but is the same in every can bought. The word ‘SHELL’ has been turned into three dimensional containers and appears as being filled with the contents of the cans. By using white, Shell was hoping the viewer would associate the petrol and oil with an absence of impurities, and of a consistent quality from one container to another. The slogan ‘See Britain First’ is an appeal to patriotism and the three colours used in the poster - red, white and blue - support this in a subtle way.

Decalour may have dismissively suggested Shell were not using ‘scenic’ art when he was in charge of the company’s publicity but one poster, he produced in 1925 contradicts his assertion (Fig. 7). Although the poster is superficially similar to the work commissioned by Beddington, there are specific differences. Unlike the later posters, product illustration and cars were included. The poster is comparable to those that would be produced in the 1930s when Beddington still used the same slogan, but the inclusion of cars and motorists make this clearly an advertisement in the style of a tourist poster. The use of figures in the foreground, facing into the scene, is a common trope of the tourist poster. There is none of the ambiguity of Beddington’s posters, which had the appearance of landscape paintings with no reference to petrol. In this poster one of the cans of petrol is even shown on the running board of the most prominent car. The couple in the foreground pose, looking out at the scene, giving the viewer the opportunity of imagining doing the same

³⁰³ E.W. Decalour, “Some Notes on Art Work in ‘Shell’ Advertising” in *Commercial Art, Volume 1, July 1926*, p.41.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.41.

³⁰⁵ The number of filling stations increased during the interwar years but motorists still needed to carry cans of petrol to be sure of not running out of fuel, especially in rural areas. See David Jeremiah, ‘Filling Up: The British Experience, 1896-1940.’ *Journal of Design History* 8, no. 2, 1995: 97-116.

thing. The two other standing figures are women, who seem to be offered a lift by the man driving the open topped car. An atmosphere of freedom and leisure is implied. The man is on his way to, or from, a golf course and the open road winds away through the landscape. There is also the excitement of the women being offered a lift by a man in a convertible car. The foreground activity focuses on the enjoyment of tourism rather than the serious appreciation of a sublime landscape. By excluding cars and motorists from his posters, Beddington avoided giving visual form to the tourists whose effect on the landscape concerned many in the 1930s.³⁰⁶

Another pre-Beddington poster which refers to the more ‘abstract ideas’ of Decalour was an image by the French poster designer Jean D’Ylen, who developed an image of green and red horses for Shell, composed of mechanical parts, ‘embodying the ideas of speed and endurance’ (Fig. 8).³⁰⁷ Shell used this image in several press advertisements. It consists of a female charioteer who appears surprised by the power and ‘quick start’ given to her chariot by the blue and red horses representing oil and petrol. The horses are mechanical versions of real horses and Shell was offering a visual representation of power and strength that is equivalent to the metaphorical ‘horsepower’. Shell’s scallop motif is displayed prominently on the golden chariot and with a female charioteer in flowing costume, Shell was again associating itself with the art and culture of the classical world. The image is brought into the modern age by the machine-like horses that, apart from their colour, recall the ability of mass production to replicate identical objects. Using a woman as a charioteer hints at a British reference through the story of Boudicca, but it could be a more prosaic attempt to increase the sense of shock created by the ‘quick-start’ by making the assumption that a woman would appear more surprised than a man, who at the time would be expected to be more in control.

Shell also used humour in its press advertising throughout the inter-war period and much of it reveals how the aspiring middle-class motorist was targeted. By commissioning the cartoonist, H. M. Bateman, Shell was trying to give the impression to the new middle-class taking up motoring, that the more established upper middle-class would recommend Shell. Bateman’s humour frequently concentrated on ridiculing those who did not know or understand the acceptable behaviour of the upper classes (Fig.9). Shell was associating itself with this

³⁰⁶ See Matless, 1998, pp.61-100.

³⁰⁷ Decalour, 1926, p.41.

dominant class through Bateman and reassuring the less confident that they would be doing the ‘right’ thing by using Shell and this is made absolutely clear in Bateman’s work for Shell (Fig 10). Associating a product with the upper classes was, and is, a common approach in advertising.

Another motoring-related company, Dunlop, used a similar tactic in their 1930 advertisement (Fig.11). Here the advertisement is overtly about the safety of tyres on wet roads but the illustration, through the evening dress of the figures and the chauffeur-driven car, demonstrates that it is really about showing the upper classes using Dunlop. These strategies illustrate that, even in the 1920s, advertisers had already moved from offering specific information on a product to being a vehicle of social communication.³⁰⁸ Shell is appealing to its potential customers through a notion of achieving class confidence. The transformational benefits of using Shell products are enhanced by framing the merchandise alongside the consumer’s personal aspirations.³⁰⁹

Decalour’s article on the advertising he was producing concentrates on the humour and abstract representation of Shell’s products, as does another article by Charles Knight writing later in the same journal.³¹⁰ Shell’s posters were often produced anonymously in the 1920s and, apart from D.C. Fouqueray in 1925, there were no commissions for fine artists to produce landscape work.³¹¹ Those companies, noted for building their reputations for good taste by employing artists and designers, did not usually in the 1920s include Shell. The posters of the railway companies, London, Midland and Scottish (LMS) and the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER), were generally well received although there was some criticism of their use of fine artists.³¹² *Commercial Art* was particularly scathing about the previously referred to LMS hiring of the Royal Academician, Norman Wilkinson, in 1924 to recruit fellow Academicians, like Stanhope Forbes. In their review of LMS’s work *Commercial Art* said, ‘the railway company that spent so much on the poster is

³⁰⁸ deWaal Malefyt and Moeran, 2003,p.2.

³⁰⁹ Liz McFall, 2004 p.45.

³¹⁰ C.C. Knight, ‘The Right Spirit in Advertising’ in *Commercial Art*, December 1929.

³¹¹ Hewitt, 1992 p.121.

³¹² In an anonymous article in *Commercial Art*, the posters of LNER were described as ‘by artists of the modern school who bring a new outlook and technique to their task, which is vigorous and refreshing’. ‘Fine Printing and Design in Railway Posters’, *Commercial Art*, Vol. XIV, No. 83. May 1933, p.169.

almost forgotten'.³¹³ Percy Bradshaw wrote in 1925 in a survey of *Art in Advertising*, expressing similar doubts about LMS's output:

Remember that there are many distinguished artists and illustrators whose work would be more suitable for advertising purposes than a series of characteristic pictures by R.A.s.³¹⁴

Where Shell had to use the resource of their delivery lorries, the railway companies had the advantage that they could make money from exploiting their station sites by using them for their own publicity and renting the space to other companies.

Pick, at London Underground, and Stephen Tallents, at the Empire Marketing Board and later the General Post Office, successfully used designers and artists to improve the publicity being produced for their organisations. Pick, like Beddington 20 years later, had no experience of advertising when he was given responsibility for publicity at London Underground in 1908: he had worked for one of the large railway companies who were already using the work of artists to create coloured lithographic posters. Pick's approach was to use illustrations commissioned from artists and designers with little text.³¹⁵ He also pleased those concerned with the spread of advertising in city streets and the countryside by not only overseeing the quality of his publicity but by making sure posters in Underground stations were in controlled spaces and of regular appearance (Fig.12). Shell built upon this by removing its billboards from the countryside and using its delivery lorries as the main site for its posters. Beddington must have absorbed Pick's approach when he took control of Shell's publicity in the early 1930s.

The shift taking place in British advertising away from an emphasis on commodity-orientated publicity can be seen in the writing of the advertising executive, William Crawford, who commented in 1931:

³¹³ S.T. Jones, 'The Art of the Poster' in *Commercial Art*, No. 3, October 1924, p.127.

³¹⁴ Percy V. Bradshaw, *Art in Advertising* (London: Press Art School, 1925) p.280.

³¹⁵ Green, 2001, p.8.

The real power of advertising is not to sell goods, but to form habits of thinking. This is rarely understood.....it is more important to build goodwill than sell a great quantity of goods.³¹⁶

Crawford's phrase, 'habits of thinking', implies a more sophisticated approach to advertising than fulfilling a consumer's basic needs or providing information on a product. Advertising should, instead, develop a relationship with a company through associating a product with personal and lifestyle choices. This was an early example of 'brand building', where a company intends to be associated with positive characteristics and achieve, as Crawford says, a sense of goodwill towards its business.³¹⁷ Beddington, like Pick, aimed to build goodwill towards his company rather than promote the qualities of Shell's products, and the policy he chose built upon the ideas of Pick and others. In his view, posters artistically rendered and strategically placed would promote a positive attitude toward Shell and at the same time give the consumer the experience of the range of art and design being produced in Britain at that time. The growth of cities, increased mobility, and the rise of commercial entertainment, improved printing technology, and increased spending on advertising swelled the quantity of images presented to the consumer between 1918 and 1939. This increased demand for images produced new career opportunities for artists. Conditions were ideal for the interaction between art and advertisers.

Art versus industry-

The legacy of William Morris

This chapter section will explore the beginnings of the art and industry debate in the nineteenth century, looking at William Morris' role and some early examples of fine art in advertising that preceded Shell's posters. The involvement of artists in designing for industry, and industry's commitment to using artists, had both been a source of debate since the development of the machine-made products of the

³¹⁶ Sir William Crawford, 'How to Succeed in Advertising' in *'World's Press News'*, Library 2, 1931, p.22.

³¹⁷ The history of brand building is explored in, R.A. Church and Andrew Godley, *The Emergence of Modern Marketing* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

Industrial Revolution. In the 1930s many of the writers referred to above evoked the name of William Morris as part of this debate and whilst his contribution to British design was valued and appreciated, some of the antipathy between art and commerce could be traced to his rejection of industrial processes. One concern of those looking back from the 1930s was that Morris had doubted that industrial objects could be art. However, Michael T. Saler has argued that men like Frank Pick at London Underground followed Morris' belief even if industrial objects could not be art, art could be integrated into everyday life.³¹⁸ Jack Beddington certainly followed Pick in bringing art into the fabric of daily living. In 1935 the Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University, H.S. Goodhart-Rendel, traced much discussion on commercial art, or as he called it, 'mechanical ornament' back to Morris but he suggested the problem with Morris' legacy was his preference for hand tools over machinery, a preference that Goodhart-Rendel found to be a false opposition:

Actually the distinction between tool and machine is one that is impossible to draw. Which, for example, is a turning lathe and which is a moulding plane?³¹⁹

Herbert Read, in his original 1932 introduction to his book *Art and Industry*, was more positive about Morris, proposing that it was not true that Morris had any desire to abolish the machine and return to handcraft but rather that he believed there was something 'inconsistent' between art and industry and therefore the solution - which was also Read's position - was that industry needed reforming. 'He (Morris) did not believe that industrial design or anything else could be transformed without a transformation of society'.³²⁰ Nevertheless, whilst Morris' contribution, to design, was admired, his rejection of mass production and promotion of handcraft, for what De La Valette described as 'as much social as aesthetic' reasons, was seen to hold back the development of good industrial design.³²¹

Morris' ideas had been taken further and applied to industrial design in Germany in the early part of the twentieth century. As a response to this competition from abroad, in 1915 the Design and Industries Association was formed in London

³¹⁸ Michael T. Saler, 1999.

³¹⁹ H. S. Goodhart-Rendel, 'The Fitness of Ornament' in De La Valette, 1935, p.39.

³²⁰ Herbert Read, 1953 p.10.

³²¹ De La Valette, 1935, p.39.

by a group of industrialists, business people and designers, with the purpose of promoting the application of design to industrial manufacturing.³²² Frank Pick was a founder member of the DIA and the Association set out to reconcile the ideas of Morris to the machine age by integrating art with industry. As Saler has explained, 'They undertook to rescue the arts and crafts' ideals from faddish antiquarians who made knickknacks for Liberty's'.³²³ This was a positive change towards art, design and manufacturing working more closely together.

Since the examples of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, groups of concerned designers and industrialists had attempted to reform the practice of design and manufacturing in Britain. The DIA had been established as independent from government, but after the First World War the fine versus commercial art debate continued to be driven, in particular, by the perceived superiority of design in other European countries especially Germany. The Gorell Report, in 1932, led to the government establishing the Council for Art and Industry (CAI) in 1933. The report wondered how 'an artistic nation...now finds itself handicapped in the world market by lack of artistic quality in so many of its manufacturers'.³²⁴ The report also called for, 'an end to the existing divorce between 'fine' and 'industrial' art'.³²⁵ Rather than a unanimously positive reception from those in favour of fine and commercial art unification, such as Herbert Read, it was criticised by him for maintaining the idea that the artist was external and should be imported into industry rather than designers being trained to work within manufacturing.³²⁶ The Gorell Report was an example of how even those trying to reform the relationship of the disciplines could be criticised for maintaining them as distinct.

Morris' legacy of reforming the relationship of art and industry, both positively and negatively, can be seen in the Royal Academy Exhibition of British

³²² Paul Rennie, 2010, p.35.

³²³ Saler, 1999, p.73.

³²⁴ Lord Gorell, *Art and Industry: Report of the Committee appointed by the Board of Trade under the Chairmanship of Lord Gorell* (London: HMSO, 1932) p.8.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.12.

³²⁶ Read, 1934, appendix A, p.134-136, 'The Gorell Report'. The Gorell report is often relegated in discussion of 1930s design as merely the instigator of the CAI although Yasuko Suga has suggested its importance in the state patronage and institutionalisation of modern design. See Yasuko Suga, 'Purgatory of Taste' or Projector of Industrial Britain? The British Institute of Industrial Art', *Journal of Design History*, 2003 Vol.16, No.2, pp.167-185.

Art in Industry, mounted at Burlington House in 1932. This was the first time since the First World War that the Royal Academy had presented commercial art positively, and the display was followed by a book of commentaries on the exhibition. In his introduction, as editor, the Honorary Organising Secretary, John de La Valette, showed some interest in the unification of fine and commercial arts, but weakened his argument by describing the disciplines as having a ‘borderline’, a ‘dividing line’ between the two:

If there is a dividing line between the ‘fine’ and other arts, can it be said that the former are concerned with capturing and rendering the beauty that resides in all created things, while the latter attempt to impart beauty to the works of man’s own hands? ³²⁷

De La Valette described the ‘line of demarcation’ between artists and craftsmen as ‘faint’ but by referring to a demarcation he was endorsing the separation of the two disciplines. The exhibition seems to have been out of step with those who, in the thirties, were trying to unify fine and commercial art. Andrew Causey has suggested the Royal Academy exhibition was ‘too traditional, too expensive’.³²⁸ Although he was represented in the exhibition, Paul Nash, in a letter to *The Times*, was contemptuous of it: ‘Artists, manufacturers, and other authorities throughout the country know the Royal Academy exhibition is largely a misrepresentation, a kind of treachery.’³²⁹

The censure of the exhibition for concentrating on luxury goods echoed criticism of Morris, current in the 1930s, that his work was expensive and elitist. Nash thought that rather than displaying well designed everyday objects, instead it had chosen to show ‘expensive flummery’.³³⁰ (The exhibition appears, in fact, to have had only one example of Shell’s advertising, a poster for Winter Shell.)³³¹ Herbert Read was also dismissive of the exhibition, pointing out that the poster

³²⁷ De La Valette, 1935, p.3.

³²⁸ Nash and Causey, 2000, p.113.

³²⁹ Paul Nash, Letter to *The Times*, 18th February 1935.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, Nash.

³³¹ The Royal Academy Exhibition of Art in Industry, *Illustrated Souvenir*, 1935, p.36. This souvenir catalogue does not list all the exhibits but apart from the unattributed Shell poster, does show a poster for British Petroleum by Clifford and Rosemary Ellis.

section was particularly poor and was ‘an outrageous misrepresentation of what is actually being done by artists in this country’.³³²

Ironically, it was an émigré academic from Britain’s main rival in manufacturing, Germany, who undertook, arguably, the most complete survey of 1930s’ English design: Nikolaus Pevsner’s *Industrial Art in England* (1937).³³³ Before Pevsner presented a number of reasons for the predominately poor design of English goods, he reviewed the background to the current situation as he found it. In his survey Morris was frequently referred to in positive terms for the quality of his creations and his influence on twentieth century design. Pevsner reported that the pioneers of the modern movement, such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Gropius, had confirmed the debt they owed to Morris.³³⁴ Although he was positive on Morris’ legacy, he ignored the criticism of the expense of Morris’ output and even stated that good design should be applied to all goods, no matter what their selling cost.³³⁵ Throughout his survey, Pevsner emphasised that, ‘the aesthetic value of the inexpensive product is the question that really matters’.³³⁶

Morris was the most prominent figure in the late nineteenth century debate on design, but a figure contemporary to Morris who came to public attention by generating controversy in using fine art for commercial work was the industrialist Lord Leverhulme. He sought to legitimise his products by incorporating examples of high culture into his advertising.³³⁷ In the nineteenth century, paintings that had some narrative connection to a product would simply be purchased and adapted for advertising without necessarily consulting the artist about the use to which they would be put. Famously, Sir John Everett Millais’ painting, *A Child’s World* (Fig.13) was bought and used in 1886 by A&F Pears to advertise their soap without objection

³³² Herbert Read, ‘Novelism at the RA’, *Architectural Review*, February 1935.

³³³ Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Inquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1937).

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.206.

³³⁵ Timothy Mowl has suggested Pevsner’s ‘insistence that Morris was a true pioneer of the Modern Movement can only have been tactical, a move to flatter the susceptible English art-buffs’. Timothy Mowl, *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betjeman versus Pevsner* (London, John Murray, 2000) p.86.

³³⁶ Pevsner, 1937, p.200.

³³⁷ Lord Leverhulme was the head of Lever Brothers who produced cleaning products such as Sunlight Soap. He was one of the earliest British industrialists to buy fine art to be used in advertising. When his son became head of the company he was also a prodigious advertiser, spending over £2 million over twenty years. T.R. Nevett, 1982, p.74.

from Millais.³³⁸ But in another case, Leverhulme had caused a robust debate on using paintings for advertising when, in 1889, he had bought, from the Royal Academy, a painting by W.R. Frith called, *The New Frock* (Fig.14). Leverhulme had the work reproduced, without Frith's permission, to use as an advertisement for Sunlight Soap with the caption 'so clean'. Frith expressed his displeasure in letters to the *Pall Mall Gazette* but no copyright agreement had been made and Leverhulme quickly defended himself by saying, in an early example of the educational argument for using paintings in advertising, that he was improving the standard of advertising by using fine artists.³³⁹

Leverhulme's son also became involved in the inter-war debate on art and industry when he became head of Lever Brothers and was interviewed in a 1926 edition of *Commercial Art*. It was unusual for the head of a large industrial company to be questioned in the journal although *Commercial Art* was a key forum for the discourse on the relationship of fine and commercial art throughout the inter-war period.³⁴⁰ The majority of those involved in this discussion were connected to the fine and commercial art worlds: designers, artists, art directors, writers or those, like Jack Beddington, who controlled the publicity of their companies. The author of the interview, Jessica Walker, quickly established her position on the relationship between fine and commercial art:

Among all the enlightened thinkers on art at the present time there is a crescent [sic] desire to see art, not as a thing apart from life, but as a force intimately connected with objects in everyday use.³⁴¹

The presumption that Walker knew the views of 'all enlightened thinkers' is an example of the approach of a journal which was promoting the idea that the worlds of fine and commercial art should intersect. Interviewing Lord Leverhulme was a way of giving authority to the view that these two worlds were converging from an

³³⁸ The painting had been bought by a rival of Leverhulme, Thomas Barratt at Pears. He had realised that, 'as long as you engrave a brand name in peoples' minds, it doesn't matter if they know anything else about it'. See Adam Macqueen, *The King of Sunlight: How William Lever Cleaned up the World* (London, Bantam, 2004) p.40.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.48.

³⁴⁰ *Commercial Art* was published by Commercial Art Limited in 5 volumes (42 issues) between October 1922 and June 1926.

³⁴¹ Jessica Walker, 'The Power of Art in Commercial Advertising: An Interview with Lord Leverhulme' *Commercial Art*, Vol. 1, no.3, 1926, p.103. Walker appears to be mobilising an Arts and Crafts discourse in this article.

industrialist's perspective. In the interview, Leverhulme takes the pragmatic view that art sells goods. 'If we get advertisements drawn by good artists, they sell our goods infinitely more quickly than if they had been advertised in some less artistic manner'.³⁴² Leverhulme may appear to have been unsophisticated about his reasons for using paintings but he was surely aware of the kudos given to his products by their association with fine art and how the cultural status of painting would be connected to the product. Rather than enhance a product's status through association with fine art, there were those who thought using fine art merely drew attention to the art rather than the product.³⁴³ The presence of these opposing views was an indication of the complicated relationship that existed between the art world and commercial work.³⁴⁴

'The Conquest of Ugliness':"³⁴⁵

Contrasting views on the fine versus commercial art debate

Shell advertisements and designs must, if they are to serve their purpose, please the eye and be at one with the public taste, thereby creating that goodwill without which no enterprise, however mighty, can really prosper.³⁴⁶

This chapter section will explore the motivation that created the discourse on the relationship of fine and commercial art and how advertising art was seen as a rare success in British design. It will use contemporary opinion on the reasons for their relative status as well as on whether they should be regarded as the same activity. Shell's publicity was not only referred to in this debate but, I would argue, was a key contributor to creating the debate. Shell was amongst a small number of major organisations which used their patronage to employ many of the best known artists

³⁴² Ibid., p.105.

³⁴³ For example the comments directed at the LMS above.

³⁴⁴ See Liz McFall, 2004.

³⁴⁵ This was the title of the book of commentaries on the 1935 Royal Academy exhibition entitled 'Exhibition of British Art in Industry'. John de La Valette, 1935.

³⁴⁶ Anonymous author, 'Shell Advertising', *The Shell Magazine*, Vol. 19, 1939, p.99.

and designers of the period.³⁴⁷ Beddington and Shell are ideal subjects to explore this debate because Shell was amongst those companies that shaped this relationship between fine art and industry. During the 1930s, Beddington attempted to make the spheres of art and advertising overlap, blurring the separate identities of fine and commercial art.

The quotation at the head of the section, taken from the company's in-house magazine at the end of the 1930s is, superficially, uncomplicated in its summation of the company's approach to advertising. The phrase 'at one with the public taste' is in contrast, as will be seen, with the view taken by some commentators of the period that Shell was actually developing public taste and using its advertising to familiarise the public with contemporary fine art. The director of the National Gallery, Kenneth Clark, described Shell's posters in 1934 in this way:

they give an introduction to the art of painting to thousands of people who, in ordinary circumstances, seldom see a good picture. As the public taste improves so the Shell posters will get better and better.³⁴⁸

The educational aspect of poster advertising, as will be seen, was one of the arguments in favour of allying fine and commercial art in this decade.³⁴⁹ Other arguments in favour included the cultural status that would be attached to a company's products, improving the quality of British design as well as the extra income provided to artists through commercial patronage. Those against the blurring of the two fields would suggest that using paintings in advertisements drew attention to the paintings rather than the products, or that the romantic notion of the artist's freedom, independence and self-expression, would be compromised by the needs of commercial work. That this debate was contentious can be deduced from the many writers who sought to elevate or equate the status of commercial art to that of fine art.

³⁴⁷ Foremost patrons of poster design in the 1930s included; Frank Pick at London Underground, Sir Stephen Tallens at the Empire Marketing Board and the GPO as well as the work of the Ministry of Information. Paul Rennie, 2010, pp.33-75.

³⁴⁸ Kenneth Clark quoted in 'Art and Advertising in Alliance' *The Shell Magazine*, July 1934, p.313.

³⁴⁹ Shell encouraged this educational aim of their posters through their distribution to the public. They could be bought from the company for 2/6 with a special price for schools, 1/- each post free. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

Advertising art, particularly the posters produced by Shell in the 1930s, were frequently referenced as the only successful sector of British design. The quality of British design was perceived to be inferior in comparison to that of other countries. The artist and designer Paul Nash thought that the standard of British design was so deplorable that participation in international exhibitions of commercial art had ‘gained us a ridiculous reputation’.³⁵⁰ There was a view that manufacturing was alienated from the creative artists who might improve product design and, through this improved design, increase commercial potential. There was also a perception that some artists felt themselves unable to engage with what they considered as the lesser pursuit of commercial art. This chapter section will explore the way in which manufacturing, commerce and artists were being encouraged by critics such as Nikolaus Pevsner, Herbert Read, Kenneth Clark and Roger Fry, to explore the contribution that fine art could make towards the quality of British goods and services.

These individual commentators were concerned that this alienation of manufacturing and commerce from art was leading to stagnation in the development of British design. The motivation for this concern was primarily economic.³⁵¹ Paul Nash acknowledged this when he wrote, ‘There is only one road to prosperity- namely, to call in the aesthetic resources of the nation’.³⁵² The patronage of men like Jack Beddington, the publicity manager at Shell, was essential in facilitating a new cooperation between art and commerce and it was the involvement of men like Beddington which led Pevsner to say ‘how strong the desire for better commercial design had become’.³⁵³

Throughout this period advertising was repeatedly seen as the only example of the successful use of artists in British design. In 1925, the art critic, Roger Fry wrote that, ‘Modern industry, dependent on mass production and therefore reluctant

³⁵⁰ Paul Nash, ‘The Artist and the Community’, *The Listener*, 24th September 1932, p.343.

³⁵¹ Jules Lubbock has argued that the idea that there was a moral and social advantage to good design was used to advance the interests of limited groups of people, in Jules Lubbock, *The Tyranny of Taste: The Politics of Architecture and Design in Britain 1550-1960* (New Haven; London, Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, Yale University Press, 1995).

³⁵² Paul Nash, ‘The Artist in Industry’, *Week-end Review*, 24 September 1932, p.343.

³⁵³ Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Inquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1937) p.125.

to change design, was supportive of art mainly through advertising'.³⁵⁴ Fry did acknowledge that commissioning and printing posters was much less expensive than producing product designs but, a year later, he returned to the example being set to manufacturers by advertising:

What is interesting to me in this new business (advertising) is that I see a possibility of commerce doing something to redress the balance in favour of art – that balance which is so ruthlessly upset in the other direction by driving all artists out of the business of designing the textiles, pottery, etc., of ordinary use.³⁵⁵

The use of artists and designers by an industrial company, such as Shell, was perceived as an example of quality design but the overall standard of advertising, earlier in the inter-war period, could still attract criticism from some design reformers. The illustrator and teacher Percy Bradshaw, who in 1925 had surveyed and collected together examples of advertisements in *Art in Advertising*, criticised the ability of those involved in commercial art: 'one is forced to the conclusion that comparatively few advertisers or their agents, are men of taste'.³⁵⁶ Two years later, Gilbert Russell, a copywriter, complained that 'too many advertisements are crude and ugly and blatant'.³⁵⁷ These writers and critics provided evidence that even though advertising was seen as one of the few successful areas of design, there was a compelling desire that it could still be improved further. When this debate focussed on manufacturers' reluctance to commission artists and some artists' reluctance to engage with commerce, the templates frequently given for the successful involvement of artists in commerce were Shell and the London Underground. Pevsner, Fry, Kauffer and Nash all suggested that the successful commissioning of artists by the two companies could be an example to manufacturers that they could employ artists in designing their products.

When surveying the overall standard of British design Pevsner and Kauffer both highlighted advertising as a rare success. In contrast to the views of Bradshaw

³⁵⁴ Roger Fry, 'Poster Design and Mr. McKnight Kauffer', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 23 May 1925, p.236.

³⁵⁵ Roger Fry, 'Art and Commerce', 1926, reproduced in Roger Fry and C.D. Goodwin, *Art and the Market* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1998) p.120.

³⁵⁶ Percy V. Bradshaw, 1925 p.22.

³⁵⁷ Gilbert Russell, *Advertisement Writing* (London: Earnest Benn, 1927) p.122.

and Gilbert, Pevsner regretted that the design of manufactured objects was not of as high a standard as commercial art, 'As advertising art in England is, generally speaking, on a higher level than industrial design, the increasing importance of the advertising artist is certainly no matter for regret'.³⁵⁸ It was often the poster rather than advertising in general that received praise for its quality. As early as 1924, the poster designer, Edward McKnight Kauffer had, unsurprisingly, expressed the opinion that the artistic qualities of posters were among the few positive aspects of British design:

There are obvious reasons for neglecting artistic qualities in objects produced en masse, but there is no excuse for neglecting them in the poster.

Industrialism has been often blamed for the deterioration of public taste: the poster is one of the means through which industrialism can improve it.³⁵⁹

Two years later, Roger Fry also found that the preparation of advertising material was the only area where industry was nurturing artists. He commented that, in particular, 'the poster has become the great weapon of industrial companies and the poster designer their great ally'.³⁶⁰ When Paul Nash expressed his regret that fine artists were not being employed to design products, he also complemented the advertising industry for demonstrating how they could be used. It was, he said; '...a reminder that this (fine art in advertising) is probably the only instance to be found of a British industry's extensive use of the modern artist'.³⁶¹

A view began to emerge, in the 1920s and 1930s, that the standard of British design was inadequate. This view began to appear in government committee reports. The problem was not a lack of agreement on what constituted good design. The 1937 report for the government, by the Council for Art and Industry (written under the chairmanship of Frank Pick), *The Working Class Home*, revealed what the committee considered to be superior design in manufactured goods.³⁶² The report illustrated that it was not just economics driving design reform but there was also the argument, used in support of Shell's posters, that good design was educational and

³⁵⁸ Pevsner, 1937, p.127.

³⁵⁹ Edward McKnight Kauffer, *The Art of the Poster* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1924) p.29.

³⁶⁰ Roger Fry, 'Art and Commerce', 1926, reproduced in Roger Fry and C. D. Goodwin, 1998, p.120.

³⁶¹ Paul Nash and Andrew Causey, *Paul Nash: Writings on Art* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000) p.69.

³⁶² Council for Art and Industry, *The Working Class Home: Its Furnishing and Equipment*. (HMSO, 1937).

had a morally and socially improving influence on the population. There was an assumption that the uncluttered, decoration-free, hygienic home with simple but sturdy furniture would encourage its occupiers to be spiritually and intellectually stimulated.³⁶³

The importance of the relationship of art and commerce prompted *Commercial Art* in its first issue, in 1922, to ask, 'Cannot Art and Commerce be indissolubly united...?... Our contention is that its (arts) use in Commerce is constant, immense and indispensable'.³⁶⁴ By asking the question, *Commercial Art* assumed there was a discussion taking place. Coverage of poster art in the non-specialist press could be demeaning and condescending to poster artists. What was, superficially, expressed as a positive aspect of fine art being used in posters, that they were educational, was expressed as a patronising indication of the relative status of fine and commercial work. A frequently used phrase, in the press to describe poster displays was 'the Poor Man's Picture Gallery'.³⁶⁵

Contradictory views on the standing and relationship of the two fields of fine and commercial art could appear almost concurrently within the same journal. The two quotations below are taken from *The Artist*; a journal aimed at amateur and aspiring artists and were written within two months of each other:

Some people differentiate between the poster designer and the artist, but none can deny that Newbould is a fine artist as well as a great poster designer.³⁶⁶

It must be made early (the choice of a career in commercial art) as it is almost impossible to change to commercial art after spending considerable time studying fine art.³⁶⁷

In the first quotation, the editor of *The Artist*, Harold Sawkins, describes Frank Newbould as being both artist and designer.³⁶⁸ Newbould produced brightly coloured designs for the L.N.E.R. which showed a cosmetic, modernist simplicity

³⁶³ See Lubbock, 1995, p.313.

³⁶⁴ 'Our Philosophy', *Commercial Art*, No. 1, October 1922, p.1.

³⁶⁵ An example of this phrase, from the Morning Post, is quoted in Cecil Dandridge, 'Advertising Notes', *London & North Eastern Railway Magazine* 20, No.5, May 1930, p.240.

³⁶⁶ Harold Sawkins, "Frank Newbould by the Editor." *The Artist*, Vol.viii, no. 5, 1935, p.154.

³⁶⁷ A. Cecil Wade, "Commercial Art as a Career." *The Artist*, Vol.ix, no. 1, 1935, p.18.

³⁶⁸ Although Newbould was a prolific poster artist, he did not produce any posters for Shell. During the 1920s he was on a retainer from the LNER to work exclusively for them. See T. J. Edelstein, 2010 p.112.

and clarity (Fig.15). He does not seem to have produced anything other than poster designs, but an interesting episode in 1929 highlighted the fluid and disputed relationship and status of artists and designers. William Teasdale, the publicity manager of L.N.E.R., proposed that, in a new contract for the company's five retained designers including Newbould, they should be paid in pounds rather than guineas. The five designers objected to the lowering of their status that this change implied and the proposal was dropped.³⁶⁹ The impact that Teasdale's use of fine artists was having can be seen in a cartoon from 1924 which shows a railway porter grumbling, 'I thought I got a job on the railway, but I think I have struck a Blinking Art Gallery' (Fig.16).³⁷⁰ In Sawkin's article, on Newbould, he also refers to 'some people' who regard artists and poster designers as not being equal and interchangeable. A. Cecil Wade, the author of the second quotation, could be categorised as one of those people when he makes a clear distinction between the two careers. He indicated that a fine artist would find it 'impossible' to become a commercial artist.³⁷¹ The work initiated by Jack Beddington at Shell would contradict Wade's view, with many of Britain's fine and commercial artists producing work for the company.

The reputation of many commercial artists, like Newbould, was high in the 1930s but not every commentator agreed they should be in complete control of advertising design. Esme Roberts was a designer who produced several posters for London Transport in the 1930s, and she believed it was a team process.³⁷² In a 1935 article in *Commercial Art* she disputed how much responsibility an artist should have. 'I disagree entirely with a view that has been expressed, that the artist should be responsible for the complete design, layout and copy of an advertisement'.³⁷³ She argued that the artist is only one of a team which included a copy-writer and a typographer, rather than one person being responsible for the design of a poster. Her position was that the 'artist' was a distinct role, quite separate from these others who were involved in creating a poster. She cited Shell as a perfect example, in their

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p.23.

³⁷⁰ 'The Poster Age', *London & North Eastern Railway Magazine* 14, No.160, April 1924, p.107.

³⁷¹ Cecil Wade was a well-known typographer of the 1930 producing books that include; Cecil Wade, *Modern Lettering from A to Z* (London: Pitman, 1932) and *Commercial Art as a Career* (London: Pitman, 1937).

³⁷² Examples of her posters are available at the London Transport Museum and can be viewed at: <http://www.ltmcollection.org/posters/artist> (Accessed 17th June 2012).

³⁷³ Esme Roberts, 'An Artist Criticises Advertising.' *Commercial Art* Vol.18, no. 103 (1935): p.18.

‘Janus’ advertisements (Fig.17), of the co-ordination of artist and copywriter. Her view was that although copy was important it should be kept to the minimum. Without the copy ‘That’s Shell- that was’, the illustration, she claims, would be meaningless. Shell’s landscape posters would also be good examples of her view that a minimum of copy was needed in advertising.

Like Cecil A. Wade, the artist Wyndham Lewis thought the work of fine and commercial artists was incompatible and that the former was superior to the latter. His views on this relationship were expressed in an article in *Commercial Art* reviewing an ‘Art and Industry’ exhibition.³⁷⁴ Although already a leading avant-garde artist before the First World War, in the 1930s he produced very little painting and was mainly concerned with his fiction and non-fiction writing, as well as his work as critic.³⁷⁵ David Peters Corbett has described Lewis as believing that the avant-garde artist had been marginalised by post-war culture.³⁷⁶ He seems an unlikely candidate to be positive about an exhibition devoted to ‘Art and Industry’ and the ambivalence of a fine artist towards commercial art is evident in the article. He begins it by describing his willingness to welcome any sign that the ‘applied arts are on the road to overtaking pictorial experiment’.³⁷⁷ This statement could be seen as ironic, as his views become clear in the rest of the article. In it he condemns design in the exhibition for its slick, streamlined, biscuit coloured and chic appearance. By dismissing these qualities, and at the same time displaying his confidence in his own work, he makes it clear that he believes the commercial artist far inferior to the fine artist. Those qualities of applied art he described led, he believed, to a failure ‘to draw level with the creations of the most experimental gallery-art (of which I am a celebrated exponent)’.³⁷⁸ Lewis offers no definition of art but firmly asserts that commercial art is not, to his mind, ‘art’.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁴ Wyndham Lewis, "Wyndham Lewis Asks, 'What Is Industrial Art?'" *Commercial Art* 18, no. 105, 1935, pp. 83-87.

³⁷⁵ Charles Harrison describes Lewis as having produced ‘a few paintings’ in the 1930s. Charles Harrison, 1994 p.324.

³⁷⁶ David Peters Corbett, 1997 p.134.

³⁷⁷ Lewis, 1935, p.83.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.86.

³⁷⁹ Lewis’ paintings had become unsaleable in the interwar period, apart from his portraits but he wrote over twenty three books between 1920 and 1939. Charles Harrison describes him as important in this prior to the 1920s and 30s, ‘by virtue of the quality and originality of his work and in his role as a spokesman for the ideology and practice of radicalism in art’. Harrison, 1981, p.162.

One fine artist who disagreed with Lewis was C.R.W. Nevinson. Although initially a friend of Lewis, Nevinson had fallen out with him by the 1930s and took the opposite view on artists and designers. He believed that there was no real distinction between fine and commercial art. In his autobiography Nevinson wrote that, 'The term "commercial artist" is one I will never admit- I consider men such as MacKnight Kauffer to be fine artists'.³⁸⁰ Along with Nevinson, Paul Nash took the opposite view to Lewis in his approach to the discourse on the relationship of fine to commercial art. Nash treated all his pictorial work as the same creative process. Nash, with his unified approach, and Lewis, with his dismissal of commercial art as inferior, are examples of the fluid and disputed links between the two practices.

The argument that fine art enhanced advertising was used in the 1930s, but the use of painters was not necessarily always regarded as successful. The chocolate manufacturer Cadbury Bros. in 1933 followed Shell's example by commissioning twelve contemporary artists to produce designs for the boxes containing their chocolates. They also followed Shell in exhibiting the designs in central London at the Leicester Galleries. However, whilst an article in the journal *Commercial Art* admired the company's attempt to get away from what was described dismissively as the 'chocolate-boxy' image of their product's packaging, it was also critical of the artists' designs.³⁸¹ Despite the reputations of artists such as C.R.W. Nevinson, Mark Gertler and Laura Knight, their paintings were compared unfavourably with Shell's poster designs. Gertler's design was described as suffering from 'the extra handicap of translation from a rough surfaced canvas to smooth paper and from solid, uneven paint to flat reproduction'.³⁸² What these comments indicate is that there was not an uncritical acceptance of using talented painters to design for industry. There was an understanding, within the pages of *Commercial Art*, that a product's characteristics needed more than a superficial use of fine art.³⁸³

An argument used in favour of involving fine artists was that there was a tradition of them working commercially in the past and they had always regarded

³⁸⁰ C.R.W. Nevinson, *Paint and Prejudice* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938) p.70.

³⁸¹ Unattributed article titled "Famous Artists Design Chocolate Boxes: An Exhibition of Designs for Cadbury Bros. Ltd., by Twelve of Britain's Leading Artists" *Commercial Art*, Vol. 15, December 1933, pp.198-201.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p.199.

³⁸³ A more positive response to the designs appeared in a contemporary journal, which described the designs as 'making a strong appeal to connoisseurs of art'. 'Famous Artists design for Cadburys', *Design for To-Day*, December 1933, p.vii.

their work as commodities; it therefore enhanced rather than detracted from the status of the interwar artist to undertake commercial work. The example of the Renaissance was particularly useful in equating the fine and commercial artist in this way. As was highlighted at the beginning of Chapter One, Cyril Connolly used this argument in describing the patronage of Jack Beddington at Shell as ‘The New Medici’.³⁸⁴ In a 1927 article in *Commercial Art*, businessman, Sir Herbert Morgan, in a similar argument to Connolly, used this line of reasoning when discussing the designer Fred Taylor. ‘The so called commercial artist is really in the same position as the early Italian artists’. Morgan wrote, ‘The latter were employed by the Church for propaganda purposes’.³⁸⁵ In the same article Morgan acknowledged the need for posters to be readable whilst on the move. He was thinking of the motorist or the train or bus passenger but his analysis could also have been applied to Shell’s posters on their delivery lorries: ‘It is the first essential that it (the poster) should be read by those on the run, and this is a generation of movement’.³⁸⁶

As well as referencing the Renaissance to suggest there was a precedent for fine artists to produce work to order, the most interesting and the freshest suggestion in this interwar debate was that the work of fine and commercial artists should be seen as equitable because they were producing it through the same process.³⁸⁷ Frank Pick, at London Transport, strongly believed that the task of both artists and designers had the same creative foundation. He considered that art and design should be based on a combination of life’s experiences and an understanding of nature. In a 1933 address to the Imperial Industries Club, he called these starting points, ‘design in life’ and ‘design in Nature’.³⁸⁸ In his speech he established the role of the artist before discussing that of the designer: ‘It is the task of artists and sculptors to catch the values from the design of life and add these to the design of nature, to express them through it’.³⁸⁹

Having established his interpretation of the role of the artist, Pick firmly expressed his view that the designer should work from the same starting points. Pick

³⁸⁴ See Chapter 1, Cyril Connolly, "The New Medici." *The Architectural Review* no. July (1934): 2-4.

³⁸⁵ Sir Herbert Morgan, "Fred Taylor." *Commercial Art* 2, no. 1, January 1927, p.7.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

³⁸⁷ G Group.

³⁸⁸ Recorded in Frank Pick. "Design in Industry." *Design For To-Day*, January, 1934, p. 37-39. Pick describes recording from the environment as, ‘Design in Nature’ and trying to capture psychology effects as ‘Design in life’.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.38.

did not make any distinction between the design and the art processes in the talk and sought to establish the equivalence of their practice:

From design in Nature and design in life I come at last to my subject design in industry. Can it really differ in substance and quality from the design of which I have been speaking? I do not think so.³⁹⁰

The argument of the arts' journalist, Edward Crankshaw in 1934, was not so well reasoned as Pick's when he expressed his views on the discourse surrounding fine and commercial art.³⁹¹ He found the metaphor of the borderline a useful starting point for discussing what could be considered fine or applied art and decided that, 'we must extend the boundaries of applied art until they include a great deal of what is usually said to be fine art'.³⁹² Using sculptor Eric Gill's recently completed figures for Broadcasting House as an example of fine art that could also be considered to be a commissioned design for a corporation's new building, and therefore a blurring of the two categories, he concluded that, 'the terms fine and applied art are misleading, and damaging to the understanding of art as a whole'.³⁹³ His article is built around what he describes as a shifting borderline but he rather inconsistently concluded that the terms fine and applied art are false.

One of the artists who produced work for Beddington at Shell, Paul Nash, was an example of an artist who accepted that there was no difference in the status of his work, whether commercial or fine art. His case demonstrates how interested a contemporary artist could be in the possibility of working in a variety of media. His work for Shell was not an 'extra-curricular' addition to his easel paintings but was interwoven symbiotically with his fine art work. His output, along with his painting, included book illustrations, pattern papers, glass, ceramic decorations and textiles, as

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p.38.

³⁹¹ The term 'applied art' refers to applying aesthetics to everyday objects including advertisements and posters whereas 'commercial art' was used in referring to two-dimensional work. Crankshaw refers to typography several times in the article, as 'applied' art implying that, for him, the phrase is interchangeable with 'commercial' art. Crankshaw worked for the *Times*, *The Bookman* and in 1933 replaced Paul Nash on the *Weekend Review*.

³⁹² Edward Crankshaw, "Fine and Applied Art" *Design for To-Day*, Vol.2, no. 13, May 1934, p.159.

³⁹³ Ibid., p.159.

well as extensive writing on art.³⁹⁴ The variety of design work he produced can be seen in the notes, in 1932, he made for his unfinished autobiography:

I become art critic to *The Listener* with Herbert Read. Publication of Room and Book, my essays on Decoration.Zwimmer [sic] exhibition to launch the book. Making designs for UrneBuriall.....Exhibition of book illustrations, etc. at Batsfords. Edward James wants a glass bathroom for Tilly Losch.³⁹⁵

Nash was positive about artists producing commercial work both for their own development and for the education of public taste.³⁹⁶ He appeared to be in favour of the integrated professional practice pioneered between the wars by the German art school, the Bauhaus.³⁹⁷

Nash's statements and images illustrated his consistent approach to fine and commercial work but not all artists, as was seen by Cadbury, produced designs that reflected their easel work. Ben Nicholson, for example, was at the peak of his production of formal abstract compositions in 1937, works which appear to be free of external references, when he produced the rather anodyne image for one of the career related series of Shell posters (Fig.18).³⁹⁸ This poster has some of the bold relationship of shapes reminiscent of his abstracts and the minimal use of colour in his work of the late 1930s. It appears less experimental than his easel painting and this leads to the poster failing to arrest the viewer's attention. Paul Nash also created a poster in the careers series (Fig.19). This poster, *Footballers Prefer Shell*, in 1935, incorporates the flattening of space and bold use of geometric shapes that was closer to the abstract work of Nicholson than Nicholson's own poster. It is more successful in appearing to incorporate avant-garde ideas of abstraction into a commercial design. The football identifies the subject of the poster but it is set against an attractive arrangement of shapes with the image divided into simple but striking areas of colour.

³⁹⁴ Nash's work was 'commercial' using the word in the same sense as the journal *Commercial Art*, that is, graphic art for commercial uses such as advertising, packaging, etc.

³⁹⁵ Paul Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography* (London: Columbus, 1988) p.185.

³⁹⁶ Alan Powers, *Art and Print: The Curwen Story* (London: Tate, 2008).

³⁹⁷ Moholy-Nagy tried to establish an English Bauhaus in the 1930s and Herbert Read made a failed attempt to bring together Moholy-Nagy and Nash amongst others to fill commissions in the Bauhaus way. See, Achim Borchardt-Hume, *Albers and Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006) p.87.

³⁹⁸ Nicholson's work is explored in, Chris Stephens, *Ben Nicholson in England: A Continuous Line* (London: Tate, 2008).

As was noted above, the art critic Herbert Read, was a friend and champion of Nash and promoted a unified approach to design in his writing. When he spoke to the Design In Industry group in 1934, he made a number of points about artists and designers that were later incorporated in his article, 'The Artist in Modern Civilisation', in the magazine *Design For-Today*.³⁹⁹ In the context of his speech, the implication of the title was that the designer was the artist in modern civilisation because he organised, controlled and managed 'life'. He described Le Corbusier as an abstract artist and extended this description to:

the designer of steel and plywood furniture, as obviously as machine-made pottery and glass, is a designer of abstract forms, and according to his sensibility and genius, designs greater or lesser works of art'.⁴⁰⁰

Read was dismissive of those industrialists who, unlike Shell, employed designers but were incapable of understanding their importance because 'industry is run for the most part by people who have no understanding of the meaning of art and no inclination to resign any of their powers to the artist'.⁴⁰¹ Read's argument was that the designer was an artist but his role was unappreciated by those running British industry.⁴⁰² It is clear that some of those interested in improving the relationship between fine and commercial art saw these as discreet activities whereas an artist like Paul Nash and a writer like Herbert Read thought artists and designers worked through the same creative process to produce outcomes of equal importance.

Unsurprisingly, the report on 'Design and the Designer in Industry' in 1937, lamented the 'existence of a certain amount of mutual distrust between artists and manufacturers'.⁴⁰³ This mistrust was not just in one direction: manufacturers distrusting artists. Nikolaus Pevsner, for example, was aware that artists, through

³⁹⁹ Read had been writing on art for the Listener since 1929 and in the same year this article appeared published his book, *Art and Industry (the Principles of Industrial Design)* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934). This was extensively based upon the ideas of the Bauhaus. See James King, *The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990).

⁴⁰⁰ Herbert Read, "The Artist in Modern Civilisation." *Design For-Today*, no. 13, 1934, p.192

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p.192. Read had already written on his views on this in Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1931).

⁴⁰² Presumably this did not apply to Nash's work for Shell and therefore to the company. Read and Nash worked together frequently including in the formation of 'Unit One. See Harrison, 1981, p.248.

⁴⁰³ Report by the Council for Art and Industry, *Design and the Designer in Industry* (London: HMSO, 1937) p.6.

their disdain of commercial work, could be a hindrance to developing a good relationship between art and industry:

. . .the artist has begun to consider himself as a superior being to whom the ordinary person ought to look up. His task is to express his own infinitely important and interesting experiences and thoughts. We suffer badly from this morbid conception⁴⁰⁴

The founder of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius, made a similar point to Pevsner's in one of his first speeches after moving to Britain in 1934. 'Our object...was to liberate the creative artist from his other-worldliness and reintegrate him into the workaday world of realities.'⁴⁰⁵

One reason for the disdain of some artists towards commercial work, put forward by Pevsner and others, was that businesses were unwilling to pay artists and freelance designers enough for their work. John A Milne, the managing director of a printing company, complained that this was a main cause preventing good artists and designers turning their talents to industry: 'they are not paid the proper price for what they are capable of producing'.⁴⁰⁶ At Shell, Jack Beddington seems to have been willing to pay his artists a price that artists were happy to accept for their work. He rarely paid more than 50 pounds for the original work used in the posters, although Leonard Rosoman claimed to have been paid 100 pounds for the poster, *Roman Tower, Tutbury* in 1936.⁴⁰⁷ This, however, seems an unlikely deviation from Beddington's standard rate. One of the most successful designers of the interwar period who frequently worked for Beddington, Edward McKnight Kauffer, had no complaints about Shell, but complained that a reluctance to pay appropriate fees to artists was because many manufacturers regarded artists as undisciplined and irresponsible.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴ Pevsner, 1937, p.198.

⁴⁰⁵ Walter Gropius, from a paper read to the Design and Industries Association, reprinted in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 19 May, 1934.

⁴⁰⁶ John A. Milne, 'Beauty In Merchandise' in John de La Valette, 1935, p.27.

⁴⁰⁷ In Ruth Artmonsky, 2006, p.26. Artmonsky describes Rosoman's first meeting with Beddington and how the newly qualified artist was summoned to Shell-Mex House.

⁴⁰⁸ Kauffer seems to have had a very good relationship with Beddington. He even wrote to him asking to be paid for a poster he was working on before it was finished. Mark Haworth-Booth, 2005, p.80.

Even his fees are sometimes considered an impertinence, the attitude of the employer being “What does he do for them?”...It is usually forgotten....that he has spent most of his life preparing himself for the occasion.⁴⁰⁹

Pay and employment were the major concerns of the Society of Industrial Artists, which was formed in 1930 at a meeting in a Fleet Street pub. In 1932, Paul Nash was elected President and Chairman, with the aim of promoting good design in commerce by the employment of SIA members.⁴¹⁰ The SIA aimed ‘to secure a recognised status for artists working for industry and commerce’.⁴¹¹ Meanwhile, while the Society was concerned with its members’ employment opportunities, the Government, in the wake of the liquidation of the British Institute of Industrial Art, had formed the Council for Art and Industry.⁴¹² This was established by the Board of Trade in 1934, with the aim of improving the design of British goods. The SIA and the CAI’s objectives were completely different in that the SIA’s concern was for the livelihoods of its members during a difficult economic period. Commissions from industry would be very welcome when the art market was not thriving.⁴¹³ The CAI was more concerned with the competitiveness of British goods and how better design could improve that competitiveness.

Pevsner wrote extensively on the subject of designer’s pay and thought that it was a major determiner of the quality of design and he also believed the relatively poor salaries paid to in-house designers were a major hindrance to improving design in industry.⁴¹⁴ Pevsner claimed that bad payment was one of the causes of poor quality of work and his recommendation was that staff designers should be replaced by artists, commercial artists and architects. He recommended the use of painters but warned against employing poor artists: ‘Nobody would suggest that worthless

⁴⁰⁹ Edward McKnight Kauffer, 1938, p.61.

⁴¹⁰ Charles Harrison, 1994 p.239.

⁴¹¹ Arts Council of Great Britain, *Thirties: British Art and Design before the War* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979) pp.280-2.

⁴¹² See Yasuko Suga, 2003.

⁴¹³ The collapse of the art market and the effect of the Depression on British art are investigated in Andrew Stephenson, 1991, pp. 30-51. David Mellor in "British Art in the 1930: Some Economic, Political and Cultural Structures." In *Class Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s*, edited by Frank Gloversmith (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980) also discusses the effects of the Depression on British art.

⁴¹⁴ Pevsner suggested that, ‘No young designer leaving art school can count on ever reaching a creditable salary’. Pevsner, 1937, p.193.

pictures should be bought in order to keep mediocre painters alive'.⁴¹⁵ He was very forthright in calling for drastic change: 'Bad design cannot be abolished without abolishing bad designers'.⁴¹⁶ Herbert Read, despite writing prolifically on art and design, including *Art and Industry* in 1934, had little to say on pay concentrating on education as the focus of reform in the standard of British Design.⁴¹⁷

Pevsner was not solely interested in manufactured objects but he also looked at the involvement of artists in poster design and used them as an example of the successful integration of art and commercial goals. He also endorsed the educational role of well-designed posters that was, as has been seen, a recurring motive and purpose for design reform:

Take some of the best commercial artists in London. They know their job and design posters, packages and catalogues, the social value of which is higher than that of any good portrait or landscape which they may paint and exhibit, while the aesthetic value is certainly not lower.⁴¹⁸

The project initiated by Beddington, to integrate the work of artists into commerce, was not wholly original but by bringing artists and designers together, he managed to produce a series of posters that portrayed Britain as a beautiful country and, at the same time, introduced some of the characteristics of modern art into advertising: the simplification of form, the flattening of visual space, and the strange juxtaposition of objects. He extended the work of the railway companies, especially London Underground, by portraying landscapes away from train destinations and, through his commissions, attempted to extend the enjoyment of art to a wide audience.

What this chapter section has shown is that there was a debate in progress in the 1920s and 1930s as to whether commercial and fine art should be seen as separate practices or, as appears to be the case in Paul Nash's work, that no borderline should exist between them. Those contributing to the debate included Wyndham Lewis and Herbert Read but other contributors offered their opinions and the same journal could include both sides of the debate. Clarity was not helped by

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p.197.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p.197.

⁴¹⁷ Herbert Read, 1934. The fourth and final part is devoted to art education.

⁴¹⁸ Pevsner, 1937, p.198.

the various names given to two-dimensional design work. Commercial, Industrial or Applied Art were all used to describe the areas of illustration, typography or poster design. There was a consensus that British design was lagging behind other countries and that a more integrated approach to art and design would be a foundation for an improvement in the standard and economic success of British goods. Shell's posters were frequently cited as an example of what could be achieved by this integration.

Nash and McKnight Kauffer on Art versus Industry

It is interesting to explore the views on art and industry of two practitioners of commercial art, specifically Paul Nash and Edward McKnight Kauffer: one primarily an artist, and the other almost exclusively a designer.⁴¹⁹ Paul Nash was one of the artists, even in the early 1930s, who realised the falseness of the distinction between fine and applied art, although he did not underestimate the difficulties in bringing artists and manufacturing together. He stated that, 'the whole conception of a working partnership between art and industry is essentially ambitious, far more so than the negotiating parties are aware.'⁴²⁰ As an established artist, he sought to eliminate lingering prejudices against commercial art, and his articles, in the early 1930s, expressed his views on the subject.⁴²¹ In 1932, the same year that he created the poster *Rye Marshes* for Shell, he wrote *Room and Book* in which he explored some of his own ideas on 'decoration'. In the introduction he bemoaned the poor relationship between art and commerce: 'We have not even the sense to recognise the artist's relation to commerce and try to make of art a "business proposition"'.⁴²² Later in the same year Nash returned to his theme of the underuse, or misuse, of artists in the designing of products. He recognised that attempts were frequently made to bring art and industry together, but that in most people's minds 'these two factions are constitutionally incompatible'⁴²³.

Paul Nash also produced two posters for Shell in the 1930s that could sit comfortably with his landscape work of the period. Nash's policy of producing high quality work for both his painting and his commercial work can be seen in the first

⁴¹⁹ Kauffer gave up painting in 1921 after the group he belonged to, X Group, collapsed, although he did produce a small number of paintings in the 1930s. See Mark Haworth-Booth, 2005, p.28.

⁴²⁰ Paul Nash, 'The Artist and Industry', *Week-end Review*, 24 September 1932, p.343.

⁴²¹ D.L. LeMahieu, 1988, p.269.

⁴²² Paul Nash, *Room and Book* (London: Soncino Press, 1932) p.xviii.

⁴²³ Paul Nash, 'The Artist and the Community', *The Listener*, 20th January 1932, pp.100-1.

landscape poster for Shell. He had moved to Rye at the beginning of the decade and in 1932 created Rye Marshes for the company (Fig.20). He presented the scene as a geometric version of a natural landscape where even the clouds have been straightened so they resemble dressed blocks of stone. The buildings and boats are simplified into toy-like forms, whilst the river and the road form a zig-zag course leading from the foreground to the sea in the distance. This route is not a straightforward pathway, though. It gives the impression of a need to negotiate a way through, as though the land is a maze to be navigated. The geometric forms appear to be imposing orderliness on the landscape. The way in which Anthony Bertram described an earlier painting could also be applied to Rye Marshes. He wrote that Nash was, ‘taking a ruler, as it were, to slap the romantic into obedience’.⁴²⁴ Nash could have been used by Edward Crankshaw as an example of there being no distinction between fine and commercial art and the ‘border-line’ he described, between fine and commercial art, could not be said to exist in the work Nash produced for Shell.⁴²⁵

An indication of how essential commercial design was to his output was that, in 1937, Nash moved to Dorset for a year to produce a Shell guide to the county.⁴²⁶ John Betjeman, as the driving force behind the guides, also commissioned Nash, whilst he was in Dorset, to produce a poster for the ‘Follies’ campaign with the headline, ‘To Visit Britain’s Landmarks’. This poster, *Kemmeridge Folly*, of 1937 (Fig.21), is in a loose watercolour style similar to other work Nash was producing in Dorset that year.⁴²⁷ Once again he produced a poster that has all the qualities of his paintings. He gave an everyday travel poster something new: a representation of feelings associated with that place. An invitation, by Shell to visit a Dorset landmark becomes as subtle an image as any that Paul Nash produced as fine art.

Whilst he continued to explore his criticisms concerning the divide between art and industry, he also praised the work of Jack Beddington at Shell. It might be argued that he was merely flattering a patron but Nash does not seem to have picked out any of his other employers for such praise and was genuinely appreciative of

⁴²⁴ Cyril Anthony George Bertram and Paul Nash, *Paul Nash* (London, Ernest Benn, 1923) p.140.

⁴²⁵ Crankshaw, 1934, p.159.

⁴²⁶ An excellent survey of the Shell Guides can be found in, David Heathcote, *A Shell Eye on England: The Shell County Guides, 1934-1984* (Faringdon, Libri Pub., 2011).

⁴²⁷ Examples of these can be seen in the exhibition catalogue, Paul Nash and David Fraser Jenkins, *Paul Nash: The Elements* (London, Scala, 2010).

Beddington's work. He described Shell as having deliberately chosen to employ 'the right kind of artist' in its advertising.⁴²⁸ The theme of Nash's article was that the ability of British artists was being underused and misunderstood by manufacturers, and he gave the example of Shell's advertising as 'the only instance to be found of a British industry's extensive use of the modern artist'.⁴²⁹ He said that, although Beddington believed that his approach was done for the benefit of Shell's advertising, he was, consciously or unconsciously, discharging an aesthetic responsibility to the public. Even as early as 1932, when Beddington was in the early stages of the work he did for Shell, and up to the time he left Shell at the start of the Second World War, he was recognised as an unusual example of the successful cooperation between art and industry.

A speech by Edward McKnight Kauffer at the Royal Society of Arts in 1938 gives a good sense of Kauffer's ideas on the relationship between art and commerce and also reveals his relationship to Jack Beddington.⁴³⁰ The speech was introduced by Beddington who was, again, seeking to bring art and commerce together. By explaining in his introduction that the relationship with Kauffer was not always easy, he highlighted the need for patrons and artists to understand each other. He had worked with Kauffer for several years and whilst he admitted that he had argued with the designer, he also acknowledged that he had been influenced by Kauffer in his attitude to art and particularly his attitude to artists.⁴³¹

In the speech itself, Kauffer gave an insight into his working method and his belief that posters should be regarded as works of art, although of a kind that were distinguished by being used in commerce. Like Nash, Kauffer was articulate about the importance of the artist's approach to working with industry. Advertising was only memorable, he believed, when artists had devoted themselves to it. In one passage of the speech he encapsulated the questions that an artist should ask himself when working for commerce rather than producing his own personal, visual interpretations of the world:

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p.101.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p.101.

⁴³⁰ A speech by Kauffer reported in Edward McKnight Kauffer, 1938, pp.51-70.

⁴³¹ Ibid., p.52. Jack Beddington's introduction to Kauffer's speech.

He may ask himself – is all this true? Am I helping to present to the public something of vital importance? Will life be enriched in any way if my design is so conceived that it will persuade those who look at it to act, to think? Can an artist in fact conscientiously believe even for a moment and lend his support to a statement or argument – that of selling?⁴³²

On the surface, the solemn consideration of an artist's state of mind when he designed posters might appear exaggerated by Kauffer, but he was reflecting both the economic need of manufacturing to be more competitive, by using artists to advertise their goods, and also an awareness of the impact posters might have in widening the visual language of the viewer.⁴³³ Kauffer employed the educational objective when he expressed later in his speech that he hoped that contemporary artists would be able to transmit their ideas through advertising and that the public, 'will learn to appreciate a new experience, and the medium through which it is commissioned will become of first-rate importance in the social scheme'.⁴³⁴

Beddington was also aware of this educative role of posters and, as chairman, in the question and answer session following Kauffer's speech, offered an anecdote to illustrate his viewpoint:

Very often people say to me, 'Your advertisements are extraordinarily good, but they are a long way ahead of the public.' When I ask, 'Aren't you a member of the public?' they seem to resent it.⁴³⁵

Echoing the earlier perception of the railway posters, Kauffer firmly believed that they could become the art galleries of the common man. In 1924 he edited *The Art of the Poster*, an attempt to 'free the art of the Poster from the abuse to which it is so often subjected'.⁴³⁶ Kauffer continued to write throughout the twenties and thirties, promoting the aesthetics and mission of commercial art.⁴³⁷ Art critic Roger Fry

⁴³² McKnight Kauffer, 1938, pp.58-9.

⁴³³ The benefit of visual education was frequently expressed in the 1930s particularly by Herbert Read, who believed that the 'education of the consumer in aesthetic appreciation' was a problem that needed to be solved in order to improve the standard of British design. Read, 1934, p.126.

⁴³⁴ Kauffer, 1938, p.66.

⁴³⁵ Beddington, 1938, p.70.

⁴³⁶ Kauffer, 1924, p.xi.

⁴³⁷ See D.L. LeMahieu, 1988 p.209.

praised Kauffer's posters because, 'at last people have got accustomed to genuine works of art on the walls of tubes, trams and lifts.'⁴³⁸

For the art historian Anthony Blunt, Kauffer was a refreshing example of the lack of distinction between fine and commercial art. Blunt had become a Marxist whilst studying at Cambridge and said that it was there that 'Art for art's sake, Pure Form, went by the board totally'⁴³⁹. He firmly believed artists should engage with society and understood that some artists found a way of making a living from advertising, although that meant that they were using 'one of the most artificial devices of capitalism in order to live by their art at all'.⁴⁴⁰ When Blunt was writing a review of Kauffer's work at Lund Humphries Galleries in 1935, he made the point that it was only prejudice that a poster was thought of as a frivolity:

Mr McKnight Kauffer is an artist who makes me resent the division of the arts into major and minor. Since he is not a pure painter or architect, but an illustrator and a designer of book covers and posters he must technically be classed as minor....I was led to think 'If he is a minor, who then is major - at any rate among his English contemporaries?'⁴⁴¹

Conclusion

This chapter began with the debate that was initiated by the development of machine goods in the nineteenth century. Advertising patron, Jack Beddington made contemporary artists accessible to the public in a way that fulfilled the Arts and Crafts movement's belief in the fusion of art with the everyday. Beddington brought William Morris' ideal of the unity between art and the everyday world to Shell. In the 1930s, partly for reasons of economic necessity, the separate fields of art and commerce were being urged by a number of writers and institutions to work together

⁴³⁸ Roger Fry, 'Poster Designs and Mr McKnight Kauffer', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 23 May 1925, p.237.

⁴³⁹ Anthony Blunt, 'From Bloomsbury to Marxism', *Studio International*, November 1973.

⁴⁴⁰ Anthony Blunt, 'Art under Capitalism and Socialism', *The Mind in Chains. Socialism and the Cultural Revolution*, Edited by C. Day Lewis (London: Frederick Muller, 1937) p.113. Although Blunt probably had little sympathy with a capitalist company like Shell, he did propose in this chapter that the solution to the concept of painting as a unique possession, was that original paintings could be commissioned in order to have them copied in large quantities for people to enjoy. Just what Shell was doing with their poster campaigns.

⁴⁴¹ Anthony Blunt, *The Manchester Guardian*, 15th March 1935.

for the benefit not just of profit but for the improvement in aesthetic understanding of the public. Jack Beddington's advertising work was frequently singled out as a template for cooperation between the commonly mismatched spheres of art and industry. Beddington's role was that of facilitator between his company and artists. This was a position so rare in British industry that Shell's advertising was seen as one of a handful of exemplars available to those trying to improve British design. The Gorell Report made a point about the accessibility of good design when it recognised that 'It is probably true for every person who visits a museum or gallery, a thousand enter a shop to buy a cup and saucer'.⁴⁴² Beddington was not a manufacturer of products to be retailed but he used his mobile poster campaigns to give the public access to the contemporary art of the period and to sell the motorist a life-style that involved the freedom to visit rural parts of Britain.

The chapter has drawn from journals, books, lectures and newspaper articles in the interwar period that were devoted to discussing the relationship between fine and commercial art and the improvement in the standard of British commercial art. This debate on the relationship between fine and commercial art, that had its beginnings in the growth of manufactured goods in the nineteenth century, reached an intense level in the 1930s. Whilst many writers, artists and official committees believed British commercial art was inadequate, Shell's advertising was considered an exception to the mediocrity of contemporary commercial work. Writers such as Connolly, Read, and Clark, using Shell as an example of good advertising, must have reinforced and encouraged Beddington that his series of landscape posters were a critical success and reassured the company to persevere with this approach throughout the 1930s and even in the post-war period.

The debates consistently focussed upon the relationship and role of artists and designers to industry. Should artists initiate and develop designs, or merely be used to add decoration to existing products? C.R.W. Nevinson said that, 'the distinction between a statue on the Underground and a poster on the same railway is beyond me', but some artists saw themselves as above commercial work and many designers were regarded as poorly paid drudges.⁴⁴³ Shell selected both artists (such as Graham Sutherland) and designers, (such as Edward McKnight Kauffer) for their

⁴⁴² Quoted in Juliet Gardiner, 2010, p.345.

⁴⁴³ C.R.W. Nevinson, 1938, p.70.

poster campaigns. The Shell posters were frequently referenced and praised, not just for their quality, but also for establishing access to contemporary art for the public. The availability of good design was a central issue in the art and industry debate of the 1930s and the Shell posters made art available to the public through advertising. As well as seeing the posters on Shell's vehicles, the posters could be bought cheaply and seen in frequent exhibitions.

Chapter 3

A Place in the Country:

British Landscape in the 1930s

It is essential from our point of view that the spot should be the kind of place which people would like to go and see, and that it should be presented in as suitable a manner as possible, that is to say the object of these advertisements is to induce people to go and see places that they might not otherwise do. A picture of Canterbury Cathedral in an earthquake would not be suitable, nor would a picture of Leytonstone High Street.⁴⁴⁴

In this quotation, previously introduced in Chapter 1, Jack Beddington instructed the artist Cedric Morris on what was required in a landscape painting to be used in one of his poster campaigns. The twin aspects of his instruction which indicate the concerns of this chapter are ‘the spot should be the kind of place which people would like to go and see’, and ‘it should be presented in as suitable manner as possible’. Beddington’s ‘kind of place’ is specific and particular. He is asking the artist to construct an image of this place and the scrutiny of the concept of ‘place’ is the subject of the first section of this chapter. Beddington made it clear what he did not want the chosen place to be. He outlined what he considered to be important but also what he considered to be unimportant. He rejected the mundane, urban and ordinary of Leytonstone High Street. This unremarkable road in London’s East End was a typical 1930s’ mixture of shops, offices and a tube station. Beddington set up an opposition between the quotidian urban area and Shell’s intention to depict older rural landscapes, but he also asked for more than a contrast with the ordinary. He wanted motorists to visit places ‘they might not otherwise do’. This implies that he wanted to establish destinations away from existing tourist sites and particularly, I would suggest, the destinations of the railway companies, like the seaside town or

⁴⁴⁴ Letter from Jack Beddington to Arthur Lett Haines, Cedric Morris’ partner, commissioning Morris for the first series of landscape posters produced for Shell in the 1930s. 16th June 1930 Tate Archive 8317.1.1.3428.

the historic city. David Matless has said that the competition between road and rail was exemplified by their respective posters.⁴⁴⁵ The opening up, he suggests, of rural spaces beyond the orbit of a railway station was highlighted by the presence of competing posters from the railway companies as well as those companies promoting motor travel. This increased incursion into the countryside by the motor car was a concern for preservationists such as Cyril Joad, who in 1934, was aware of this rivalry in tourist transportation and suggested that the 'motor's capacity for ubiquitous penetration' had created a new situation.⁴⁴⁶

Before investigating the concept of 'place', it is important to establish that the case studies presented in this chapter will explore three of Shell's posters in terms of their origins as landscape paintings. Place also has a relationship to time and this forms one of the many levels and themes which were addressed by the posters. Posters, such as Shell's, were a hybrid of art and advertising and the poster has been described as 'hovering between art and commerce'.⁴⁴⁷ The previous chapter explored the relationship between art and advertising in the 1930s whilst this chapter's objective is to use the three landscape posters as case studies that reveal the social and political discourses that surrounded the portrayal of the British landscape in the 1930s.

Beddington encouraged the artists to make a selection of a place, to frame it and present it as a destination for the motoring tourist. Simon Pugh has described landscapes, like the posters, as a 'spectacle of nature, within the city, a pleasure to compete with other commodities for sale, display and consumption in the arcades and shops of the metropolis'.⁴⁴⁸ Beddington was 'selling' these images as destinations for the urban or suburban motorist. They would present an idea of the countryside to contrast with their own surroundings. They were displayed on lorry boards that travelled in these surroundings between local depots and garages and shops selling petrol, to be viewed by those who worked and lived away from the

⁴⁴⁵ David Matless, 'The New Outdoors' in Timothy Wilcox, *Day in the Sun: Outdoor Pursuits in Art in the 1930s* (London: Philip Wilson, 2006) p.10.

⁴⁴⁶ C E M Joad, *A Charter for Ramblers, or The Future of the Countryside* (London: Hutchinson, 1934) p.97.

⁴⁴⁷ Malcolm Frost, Angharad Lewis and Aidan Lewis, *Street Talk: The Rise and Fall of the Poster* (Victoria: The Images Publishing, 2006) p.18.

⁴⁴⁸ Simon Pugh, *Reading Landscape: Country, City, Capital* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) p.3.

portrayed scenes. He implied the destination should be a peaceful, calming site not 'Canterbury Cathedral in an earthquake'. Beddington advised the artists not to choose places in which the potential tourist already lived or worked. The familiarity or ordinariness of 'Leytonstone High Street' would not act as a spectacle of nature within the city. The banality of an everyday shopping street was where the posters would be seen and they should create a contrast with that banality, not represent it.

The countryside represented a further contrast with the city, a contrast of commerce and work against leisure. Beddington wanted the poster images to encourage people to 'go and see' in their leisure time. They represented the freedom to roam in a motor car; which was one of the defining social changes of the 1930s. The countryside, for the motorist, represented what Fred Inglis has described as 'a certain intensity of longing and anticipation'.⁴⁴⁹ This 'countryside' is a generality. Artists were commissioned by Beddington to choose, frame and give value to particular scenes. He encouraged the artist to avoid the mundane and banal and the three posters studied below exemplified what makes the artist's chosen places interesting and uncommon.

Before exploring the choice of places made by the Shell artists that fulfil Beddington's instructions, it is useful to examine the concept of 'landscape'. W.J.T. Mitchell has stated that 'Landscape could be seen as the first cognitive encounter with a place, an apprehension of its spatial vectors'.⁴⁵⁰ Mitchell describes spatial practices, such as tourism, as activating the place and being the object of imaginary renderings. He suggests that we approach landscape as a verb rather than a noun. "not just what landscape 'is' or 'means' but what it does, how it works as a cultural practice".⁴⁵¹ Landscape is concerned with the representation of a portion of the earth that can be seen from one spot but, as Mitchell states, what it does overlays the natural characteristics of the land. Landscape combines two ideas: that of focussing on a portion of land with the vision that is used to see that land. The artist and viewer are not part of but rather outside the landscape place. Thus, the Shell artists view the landscape as outsiders. They are not participating in the social space but observing it. There is an implied intention that the motorist should find the same viewpoint as the

⁴⁴⁹ Fred Inglis, 'Landscape as Popular Culture' in Pugh, 1990, pp.197-213.

⁴⁵⁰ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994) p.x.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

artist and observe the scene with the same lack of participation, although it could be argued that the motorist passing through the landscape is a form of participation. The motorist viewing the posters is not intending to live in the landscape but to observe it for him or herself. This is reflected in the way the posters lack signs of motoring tourism. People and roads are rarely represented, and there are no car parks, cafes, or petrol stations.

Sightseeing motorists are part of the ‘cultures of landscape’, a term associated with David Matless.⁴⁵² Matless focussed on the regulation and cultural discourses associated with the landscape. His work was a development of an approach that emphasised what landscape means culturally rather than on the external physical nature of landscape.⁴⁵³ How we view the landscape is dependent on our cultural perspective. *How* we see is dependent on our education and socialisation and is as important as *what* we see. Beddington expected his poster artists would choose and represent a landscape using their own methods but he would have assumed it would be based upon the cultural values, attitudes and expectations that were prevalent in British interbellum art. At the same time, however, he makes his expectations clear, steering the artist away from the mundane or familiar: ‘To see places they might not otherwise do’.⁴⁵⁴ The poster landscapes are more than a unit of visual space: they are the product of the culture of interwar Britain. Landscape can be seen as a cultural production composed of actions, beliefs and practices.⁴⁵⁵

The posters, at the most basic level, are intended to provoke travel. The desire to see particular scenes and to travel purposefully is culturally generated. It represents self-improvement and notions of countryside preservation, aesthetics, national identity and freedom. Matless describes the landscape as; ‘a vehicle of social and self-identity, as a site for the claiming of cultural authority, as a generator of profit, as a space for different kinds of living’.⁴⁵⁶ The Shell posters can be interpreted through Matless’ description. The company manipulated their potential customers’ sense of self-identity and social position by claiming cultural authority through fine art, making a profit for the company by exploiting the countryside to

⁴⁵² David Matless is a Professor of Cultural Geography. He has written extensively on landscape and culture in twentieth century England. See David Matless, 1998.

⁴⁵³ Summarised in John Wylie, *Landscape* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

⁴⁵⁴ Beddington, 1930

⁴⁵⁵ Wylie, 2007.

⁴⁵⁶ Matless, 2007, p.12.

sell petrol and promoting a way of living that included motor tourism. Shell rendered the countryside as an object to be consumed.

The historical or cultural associations that a place may acquire are not so much dependent on its physical characteristics but on the links we make with its past, the events which took place there and uses to which the landscape has been put. The landscape is both natural and cultural. This is what Matless calls a 'relational hybridity', where the historical or cultural associations that a particular landscape has acquired are as much dependent on the links we make with its past as on its physical characteristics. Beddington suggested places in the landscape that could be used as posters and this term 'place' has been usefully described by Marc Augé as being in opposition to his concept of 'non-place. If place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, he proposes, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.⁴⁵⁷ These three elements of the relational, the historical, and that concerned with identity, are ideas that we overlay culturally on the physical landscape and help to inform the creation of landscape images.

Exploring the social forces that are involved in the construction of particular places is useful in studying Beddington's practice of commissioning images of the places he thought appropriate to encourage the sale of oil and petrol. What social forces do these images illuminate? Ian Jeffrey, when exploring how landscape was envisaged in the 1930s, has said that there was often a 'background of disquiet, of threats to be countered and fears to be allayed'.⁴⁵⁸ Matless argued that the power of landscape was its ability to be 'simultaneously a site of economic, social, political and aesthetic value'.⁴⁵⁹ Shell's places are comfortably rural and more evidently man-made rather than the possibly more threatening wilderness or woodland. Shell could be seen to be reinforcing the British middle-class' sense of existence, of being in-place within the image of Britain, particularly England. Landscape can be seen to be an essential facet of human activity and revealing of the values Matless describes. How places were chosen and used by the artists commissioned by Shell is the subject of the next section.

⁴⁵⁷ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 2008) pp. 77-78.

⁴⁵⁸ Ian Jeffrey, *The British Landscape: 1920-1950* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984) p.7.

⁴⁵⁹ Matless, 2007, p.11.

Choosing the locations

The locations chosen by the artists working for Shell reveal what constituted a suitable 'place' that would encourage the middle-class motorist to make a journey to the site. These sites had to have meaning for the artist and the viewer and it is noticeable that Shell's posters do not show those rare sites in Britain that are almost free of human activity such as the Highlands of Scotland. The poster images represent places where some sort of human activity is evident. These are not non-places for the motorist. As Augé proposed, they are, relational, historical or are concerned with identity. The locations are suggested destinations for motorists but what is it that constitutes a suitable destination and what can be discovered about their geographical location within Britain? The choice of location reveals aspects of the social and cultural organization of the 1930s. Stuart C Aitken and Leo E Zonn, when exploring the concept of place in film, hypothesize a relationship between representing place and the social structure:

Representation reinforces a set of social structures that help individuals to make sense of surroundings that are otherwise chaotic and random, and define and locate themselves with respect to their surroundings.⁴⁶⁰

Aitken and Zonn also emphasise how important these images are to our sense of place and self in the world. That sense of place is, they say, 'constituted by the practice of looking and is, in effect, a study of images'.⁴⁶¹

What do the posters' geographic locations within Britain signify? There is certainly a north-south division but does that division illuminate social and cultural organisation of Britain in the 1930s? John Hewitt has pointed out that:

In the first half of the 1930s, 80 per cent of the places referred to in Shell's countryside campaigns were south of a line from Bristol to the Wash and half of these were clustered in the south east.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶⁰ Stuart C. Aitken and Leo Zonn, *Place, Power, Situation, and Spectacle: A Geography of Film* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994) p.6.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁴⁶² John Hewitt, 1992, pp. 121-139.

The assertion of Hewitt's that the locations are clustered in the south of England is correct, although his percentage of places is not accurate. Taking the three campaigns, *See Britain First, Everywhere You Go*, and *To Visit Britain's Landmarks* together, of the seventy-one posters, fifty-one are south of Hewitt's imagined line between Bristol and the Wash and twenty north of it, a ratio of 61% to 39%. If the campaigns are examined separately *See Britain First's* ratio is 33% above the line and 67% below. *Everywhere You Go's* is 44% above the line and 54% below and the final campaign of the 1930s, *To Visit Britain's Landmarks'* ratio is 35% above and 65% below. Hewitt does specify 'the first half of the 1930s and if this is taken to mean the first two campaigns that ran until 1934, the two campaigns together still have a ratio of 42% above the line from Bristol to the Wash and 58% below.

The first and last campaigns have headlines that contain the word 'Britain' but sites outside England are limited. There are four in Scotland, four in Wales, two are in Ireland and one is on the Isle of Man. By looking at the English sites it can be seen that there is a heavy bias towards southern England. If Lincoln and Derbyshire are taken to be part of the north of England then the relationship between the regions strongly favours the south. Only eight of the posters are set in the north, compared with fifty in the south of the country. This imbalance, surprisingly, excluded some of the best known destinations in Britain such as the Lake District, which was popular as a tourist destination even before it was established as a National Park in 1951 and is not the subject of a single poster. This may simply be because motorists were more numerous in the south and Shell was encouraging them, as David Heathcote has said, to, 'find a more "real", authentic experience of the middle-class identity – the solid values and history of the country – in places that were neither industrial nor metropolitan.'⁴⁶³ A car journey from the south to the Lake District would also be a major undertaking on 1930s' roads.

Beddington relied heavily on landscape images for advertising rather than promoting the advantages of his company's products in order, as he said, to 'induce people to go and see places'. He was also trying to promote a modern image for Shell but it has been suggested that landscape art could be considered to be anti-modern. Charles Harrison describes landscape art of the twentieth century as having

⁴⁶³ David D Heathcote, 2011 p.4.

been 'regarded as too marginal to be worth contesting, except by those concerned to reassert traditional - which is to say provincial - values'.⁴⁶⁴ It is interesting that Harrison should say 'provincial' associating it, as he does, with the portrayal of landscape as non-metropolitan, or not sophisticated. On the other hand, Patrick Wright has suggested that Shell, particularly in the later 1930s' posters, used:

a modernist style to link the unfamiliarity with which the countryside appears to the city-dweller with the strangeness of what, for all its oddity, is actually accepted as proper to 'modern art'.⁴⁶⁵

He also suggests that although the posters are nostalgic, they are also 'stridently modern'.⁴⁶⁶ The landscape art used by Shell has a particular target: the motorist.

It is not coincidental that Shell also produced guidebooks that gave detailed information on what the motorist should look for, whilst the posters aimed at attracting their initial interest. Of the twelve 'Shell Guides' to British counties, produced before the Second World War, only three were above the imaginary Severn-Wash line. They were: Derbyshire, the West Coast of Scotland and Northumberland and Durham. The remaining guides were overwhelmingly focussed on the West of England and were particularly written for the touring motorist.

Touring books were very popular in the interwar years. A text from the 1920s that exemplifies the romantic tourism of the period was H.V. Morton's *In Search of England*,⁴⁶⁷ published in 1927, in which he describes his tour around what he calls the *real* England and at the same time relates the countryside with national identity. 'The village and the English countryside are the germs of all we are and all we have become.'⁴⁶⁸ Touring was not a new phenomenon of the twentieth century but the novelty of Morton's book lies in the fact that his tour is by motor car and it is this new found freedom of travel for the motoring middle-class that inspired the book. In 1905 there were 15,800 cars on Britain's roads, in 1920 200,000 and in 1939 there were more than 2 million private cars, more than 400,000 motorbikes and 488,000 goods vehicles.⁴⁶⁹ Morton highlights how the twentieth century had become

⁴⁶⁴ Charles Harrison, 1994, p.211.

⁴⁶⁵ Patrick Wright, 2009 p.65.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., p.65.

⁴⁶⁷ H. V. Morton, *In Search of England*, (London, Methuen Publishing, 1927).

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p.2.

⁴⁶⁹ Sean Glynn and John Oxborrow, *Interwar Britain: A Social and Economic History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976) p.106.

the time of the motor-car, following on from the previous age of the railways. In a book that was set to encourage penetration of the countryside, Morton, without any obvious irony, seems to deplore the phenomenon of increased travel. Its success can be seen from its seventeen editions between 1927 and 1932, with four editions in 1932 alone. Although encouraging motorcar tourism, he is set against mass tourism of the working class. He is particularly critical of, 'charabanc parties from large manufacturing towns, who behave with a barbaric lack of manners which might have been outrageous, had it not been unconscious.'⁴⁷⁰ Nevertheless, he thought that what he called 'many intelligent men and women'⁴⁷¹ were discovering the countryside for themselves. He even suggests an interest in topography as a patriotic duty:

When the public really feels that these signposts along the road which the English people have followed in the course of their development are not dead shells of the past but a living inspiration to the present, the future, and in addition, that they possess a personal interest in them as part of the common racial heritage, then we shall have advanced a long way.⁴⁷²

Morton was making the link between landscape and patriotism that Shell's posters would echo with their copy line of 'See Britain First'.

JB Priestley's *English Journey* (1933) also described travelling around Britain by car but where his book focussed on the towns and cities of England, the Shell Guides were designed to encourage motorists to find interest in the villages and rural countryside. Shell's guidebooks of the 1930s were another aspect of advertising that supplemented the posters and included some of the same writers and artists, like John Betjeman, Paul Nash and John Piper. There was an emphasis in the guides and the posters, towards more obscure and difficult to find sites and away from the popular seaside resorts. Shell's posters often used subjects that could only be found by using country roads and tracks. Two of them, *Llanthony Abbey* and *Ayot St Lawrence*, for example, can only be approached on winding rural roads. Making these destinations difficult to find fulfilled a desire of the middle-classes to avoid the working-class seaside resorts. There was an emphasis on the pleasure of discovery for the motorist. This exploration and detection of the countryside by the middle

⁴⁷⁰ Morton, p.viii.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., p.viii.

⁴⁷² Ibid., p.viii.

class has been described by John Urry as taking the heritage tradition to heart.⁴⁷³ In 1930s' Britain travel had become democratised. Rail and road travel were available to all classes with some road travel for the working classes through bus routes and charabanc excursions as well as some independent travel through the relatively affordable motorbike. What distinguished travel for the middle class was the destination. Urry points out that 'extensive distinctions of taste were established between different *places*. Where one travelled to became of considerable significance.'⁴⁷⁴ The Shell posters did not illustrate artificial constructed tourist destinations such as seaside towns but places that existed in their own right and were 'real'. Lucy R. Lippard has explained how when a place became popular and too populous it lost its attraction 'when the intimacy is vanishing because its pleasures are shared by too many, its popularity wanes'.⁴⁷⁵ She also makes the point that a site is made more popular by artists who provided images for others to seek out.

The poster images offered sites that were outside the motorist's normal place of residence or work. Although some represented working environments such as the farm or the fishing village, these were still in contrast to the city dweller's experience of work and were idealised images of the work place. As will be seen these working places often represented obsolete or declining working environments. Indeed the final campaign of the 1930s focussed on the opposite of the useful working building, the folly. The posters encouraged the motorists' need for a separate experience from their everyday lives. The relationship between the urban and rural is central to the posters' aim of encouraging their target viewers to seek out images of the countryside:

Minimally there must be certain aspects of the place to be visited which distinguishes it from what is conventionally encountered in everyday life.

⁴⁷³ John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) p.93. Although describing the emergence of the middle-class in America in the interwar years, his analysis of what he calls the 'service' middle-class is applicable in England, especially in South-East of England. The service-class 'serviced' capital as it became divorced from its' ownership and control. It formed its own intra-class organisations (universities and colleges, bureaucracies and careers, professions and credentials) and gradually came to make itself a separate class.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.130.

⁴⁷⁵ Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997).

Tourism results in a basic binary division between ordinary/every day and the extraordinary.⁴⁷⁶

The role of the traveller in creating landscapes that are thought of as picturesque and worth seeking out has been explored by Greg Ringer.⁴⁷⁷ He describes tourism as a cultural process, as well as a form of economic development. Landscapes can be created in the minds of the traveller as a destination that fulfils a function. This function can be the pleasure in its picturesque appearance and will be a reinforcement of the motorists' self-esteem in being able to appreciate it, or alternatively, as an association of that landscape with a sense of national identity. Ringer emphasises the attitudes that generate these landscapes: 'Through their attitudes and activities, visitors, residents and the tourism industry work out values and goals.'⁴⁷⁸ The selection of the destination illuminates and helps to clarify the association the traveller brings to the individual landscape. The choice of landscape reveals a wealth of social information regarding the associations connected to the destination. The visible landscape reflects the human values and ideologies of the resident and viewer. The landscape artist plays an important role in creating a visual representation that reflects these values.

Images are so important to the travel industry that the business is largely based on their production and re-production. These images are 'markers' and the marker is one of three components that make up the destination site, the other two being the site itself and the visitor.⁴⁷⁹ This marker is the most interesting component, without which the sightseer would not be able to recognise the site and the site itself would not exist. Dean MacCannell describes images of the sites as 'off-sight markers'. These images, in the case of the English landscape, serve to project the attractiveness and uniqueness of the countryside into the lives of the urban and suburban middle class who are the intended recipients of Shell's posters. It is the intention of Shell to create a myth of this English countryside that re-enforces its role as a symbol for national identity. As Ringer says, the purpose is to work through dream and myth and to:

⁴⁷⁶ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 2002) p.11.

⁴⁷⁷ Greg Ringer, Ed, *Destinations: Cultural Landscapes of Tourism* (London, Routledge, 1998).

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., p.1.

⁴⁷⁹ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

insinuate dreams and myths into the public perception of places that may come in time, to stand, like icons, logos or mottoes, as shorthand statements of their character.⁴⁸⁰

Shell posters provided a visual destination for the motorist in the inter-war years. These images generated a purpose for the driver, a destination. Urry has also pointed out that these destinations could not be left to chance:

People have to learn how, when and where to gaze. Clear markers have to be provided and in some cases the object of the gaze is merely the marker that indicates some event or experience which previously happened at that spot.⁴⁸¹

Only certain sorts of location and image were attractive to the artists producing the posters. That location and image, as has been noted above, showed there was a clear partiality towards the south-east of England. Travel and guidebooks of the period have a similar bias towards the south east. This north-south divide has been associated with national identity and writers, including Donald Horne, have suggested that, during this period, there were two competing metaphors for the self-image of the nation:

In the *Northern Metaphor* Britain is pragmatic, adventurous, scientific, serious, and believes in struggle. Its sinful excess is a ruthless avarice, rationalised in the belief that the prime impulse in all human beings is a rational calculating, economic self-interest. In the *Southern Metaphor*, Britain is romantic, illogical, muddled, divinely lucky, Anglican aristocratic, traditional, frivolous and believes in order and tradition.⁴⁸²

The adjectives he uses for the southern metaphor could be successfully applied to many of Shell's posters.

As described earlier, advertising was a by-product of the nineteenth century's rapid industrialisation, particularly as a response to over-production. The literature of the period also responded to this industrialisation by pointing out that a north/south divide had developed. This divide has been represented as a class determined 'space-myth' which had an economic impact, for example through the marketing of tourist

⁴⁸⁰ Ringer, 1998, p.21.

⁴⁸¹ Urry, 2002, p.9.

⁴⁸² Donald Horne, *God is an Englishman* (London, Penguin, 1970) p.22.

destinations.⁴⁸³ By the 1930s, the novelist, journalist and critic, George Orwell, was able to describe an imaginary line north of Birmingham to demarcate the beginnings of the real ugliness of industrialisation. He implied that there was an inherited perception of this partition and asserted that he was, he writes,

conscious, quite apart from the unfamiliar scenery, of entering a strange country. This is partly because of certain real differences which do exist, but still more because of the north-south antithesis which has been rubbed into us for such a long time past.⁴⁸⁴

The industrialisation of Britain and its modernisation has been described as a struggle between the northern and southern metaphors with the former being seen as inferior.⁴⁸⁵ Donald Horne also pointed out how the industrial towns are excluded from being central to Englishness:

Things that are rural or ancient are at the very heart of southern English snobberies, even if they occur in the north. Provincialism is to live in or near an industrial town to which the industrial revolution gave its significant modern form.⁴⁸⁶

The two factors influencing the choice of locations for the posters appear to be a rejection of the working class sites of tourism, in effect the artificially created seaside resorts and an assumption that the middle class motorist would find the 'real' Britain in the 'rural and ancient' images of south-east England rather than the lower-class industrial north. The following section will explore three images used by Shell and whether they illustrate social and cultural themes of the 1930s.

⁴⁸³ Rob Shields. *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁴⁸⁴ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970) p.106.

⁴⁸⁵ Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁴⁸⁶ Horne, 1970, p.38.

Ancient Images -

Case study 1

The Shell poster by Edward McKnight Kauffer of Stonehenge (Fig.22) was published in 1931, having almost certainly been created in the previous year, making it contemporary with the photograph, from 1930, of the approach to Stonehenge (Fig.23). This photograph preserves an important transitional moment in the protection and conservation of the prehistoric monument.⁴⁸⁷ The photograph and the poster are images which illuminate issues and concerns about the place of prehistory within the social and cultural environment of the 1930s. This section of chapter 3 will focus on why Shell chose to depict British prehistoric and ancient sites. Along with McKnight-Kauffer's *Stonehenge*, two other posters on this theme were produced: *The Cerne Abbas Giant* by Frank Dobson (Fig.24), also in 1931, and Denis Constanduros' *Long Man of Wilmington* (Fig.25) of 1932. The interest in preserving a site that was associated with British national identity is evident in the poster but I would argue that McKnight Kauffer's image also reveals concerns for the economic and political problems of the decade.

The 1930 photograph appears to have been taken with the purpose of highlighting the growing commercialisation of the site. It shows the cafe on the left and gives prominence to the car and the Automobile Association (AA) shelter.⁴⁸⁸ The viewpoint of the photograph, looking westward, is from the side of the A303 with the A344 dividing off to the right. These two roads border the Stonehenge site and the monument can be seen on the horizon. In the Shell poster the monument fills the composition and contains very little indication of the surroundings of Stonehenge. The foreground of the photograph illustrates those elements that made the preservation of the site problematic in the inter-war years. It contains a motor car, a sign for touring motorists and the second element of support for the motorist: the AA mechanic's shelter. Williams-Ellis had written, two years earlier, of his disapproval of the AA's effect on the countryside, especially Stonehenge, 'it covers

⁴⁸⁷ The photograph is reproduced in Timothy Darvill, *Stonehenge: The Biography of a Landscape* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006).

⁴⁸⁸ The photograph is owned by English Heritage and is part of their archive.

the land with useful signs in ugly lettering and unpleasing colours, erects tactless wayside telephone boxes at Stonehenge and other places where it should not'.⁴⁸⁹

The poster's role, in relationship to this scene, was to encourage motoring trips to the site. In the photograph's middle ground, there are two buildings which also owe their existence to the tourist. On the left is the custodian's cottage, occupied by the only person on site able to regulate and attempt to control access to Stonehenge. On the right is the Stonehenge Cafe, supplying refreshments to the visitor.⁴⁹⁰ The poster's representation of Stonehenge is intended to attract motoring visitors, whilst the photograph illustrates the relationship and impact of motoring on the prehistoric site. This chapter section will explore why this place was considered as suitably significant by Shell, in the 1930s, to commission its representation. The poster of Stonehenge, when interrogated from different perspectives, is a starting point: a way into the issues and debates current in the 1930s. It is useful to scrutinize why Kauffer chose it as an important place and examine the contemporary debates concerning the site.

In his image of Stonehenge, the designer visualises the scene at twilight as the sun has disappeared below the horizon. There is a strong light source coming from the left of the composition. This theatrical lighting could be the moon but could also be a more local source, possibly and appropriately, car headlights. The symbolism of twilight, although a cliché, evokes a concern for the durability of human society, a sense of going into the darkness. There was an apprehension, during the 1920s and 1930s that western culture could be in danger of collapsing. The monuments of Stonehenge represented an anxiety that civilisations could pass away, leaving only a trace on the landscape.⁴⁹¹ Stonehenge could be viewed as standing for the cyclical nature of all civilisations. Kauffer's poster could also be seen as, paradoxically, representing both the fragility and longevity of British society. The society that created the monument had disappeared. An interpretation of this image of Stonehenge in the 1930s, is that British society could also disappear

⁴⁸⁹ Clough Williams-Ellis, 1928, p.136.

⁴⁹⁰ As well as Darvill's book background to the history of Stonehenge in the 1930s can be found in, Barbara Bender, *Stonehenge: Making Space* (Oxford, England; New York, NY: Berg, 1999), Andy Worthington, *Stonehenge: Celebration and Subversion* (Loughborough: Alternative Albion, 2004) and Simon Thurley, *Men from the Ministry: How Britain Saved its Heritage* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁴⁹¹ This area has been explored in Richard Overy, 2009.

and fade like the setting sun and leave only ruins. The Great War had damaged the Victorian assumption that progress and improvement were continuous and that history would always be a gradual progression. Richard Overy has described this as no longer appearing to be ‘an unbroken chain from primitive to modern but a story capable of violent interruption or termination’.⁴⁹² In Germany, Oswald Spengler had proposed the fragility of civilisation by comparing it with the same pattern as everything organic, that it should follow the same cycle of birth, growth, decay and death.⁴⁹³ In Britain, H.G. Wells, amongst others, was predicting another European war and the possible end of western civilisation.⁴⁹⁴ Stonehenge could both represent the ancient origins of British society but at the same time depict how societies could appear and disappear.

Within the format of a travel poster Kauffer was expressing one of the underlying concerns of 1930s’ Britain. In contradiction to the pessimistic concerns for western society, Stonehenge had often been used as a symbol of the longevity of British society.⁴⁹⁵ As explored earlier, place locations often possess a certain resonance as repositories of social, cultural or personal significance. They can be seen as an embodiment of a collective memory and a historical index mark and reference point for a society. Place is not only a topographical-geographical designation but also one that embodies meaning. Stonehenge is an example of the British reverence for custom and the old artefact described by Patrick Wright as ‘The object or traditional practice which has “come through” the trials of centuries’.⁴⁹⁶ The image was so familiar it was often used in advertising in the 1930s as a symbol of endurance (Fig.26).

In the poster, there are no clues as to the size of the stones. Kauffer uses the familiarity of the image to assume there is no need to provide a human scale. However, some sense of scale is given through the use of a low eye level, with the

⁴⁹² Ibid., p.28.

⁴⁹³ Oswald Spengler and Charles Francis Atkinson, *The Decline of the West* (London: printed in U.S.A., G. Allen & Unwin, 1926).

⁴⁹⁴ H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come: The Ultimate Revolution* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933). Also, Joseph Kenworthy, *Will Civilisation Crash ... With an Introduction by H. G. Wells* (London: Ernest Benn, 1927).

⁴⁹⁵ See Sam Smiles, ‘Equivalents of the Megaliths’ in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt, Fiona Russell, *Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past, 1880-1940* (London: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁴⁹⁶ Patrick Wright, 1985, p.78.

main group of stones looming above the viewer. This low viewpoint is the only indication of the mass of Stonehenge. The composition has a triangular format, giving it a sense of stillness and stability, as well as pointing towards the vast night sky. This format implies the constancy of the ruins. The foreground contains a group of six stones, two pairs of which have been topped with horizontal stones. The eye is led into the composition by a large fallen stone in the immediate foreground. The middle ground is occupied by a set of shapes that look more like buildings than standing stones. Their look resembles the fortified walls of a castle, although no such structure existed near the site. In the 1920s there was a pig farm, which was removed before the 1930 photograph was taken, close to the site but these shapes look more like an implied defensive structure. In 1929, 1500 acres of the surrounding downland had been purchased by the Government and vested in the National Trust.⁴⁹⁷

The setting is melodramatic, without any sense of the elements of the twentieth century, represented in the 1930 photograph, intruding into the simplified, flattened space. There is no infringement of the quotidian tourist clutter of the 1930s. This flatness and lack of aerial perspective gives a superficial modernity to the image. Kauffer has been described as an ‘arch-modernist’ by Mark Haworth-Booth and he certainly used elements of Cubism and Surrealism in his posters. He was influenced by Vorticism as a young designer⁴⁹⁸ Rather than being criticised for this eclectic borrowing of styles, contemporary critics saw it as popularising modern art and the way in which McKnight Kauffer’s poster could familiarize the public with new work was pointed out, in 1934, by Kenneth Clark in his review of a Shell poster exhibition:

It is surprising how rapidly the popular eye accustoms itself to a new style, so that a way of painting, which at first sight gives great offence can be assimilated by a skilful poster artist and reproduced, a few years, or even months later, to the delight of the public which really enjoys the sensation of being in the movement.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ Thurley, 2013, p.129.

⁴⁹⁸ Mark Haworth-Booth. 2005, p.52.

⁴⁹⁹ A discussion on the commissioning of artists for advertising, by Kenneth Clark, in, ‘Painters Turn to Posters’ *Commercial Art*, Vol. 17, July-December 1934, pp. 65-72:

This appreciation of the presumed educational aspect of the Shell posters, often referring to Kauffer specifically, reoccurs frequently in the 1930s. It points towards concerns over the elitism of modernism, as well as an urge, reflected in the manifesto of the Artists' International Association, to democratise the consumption of art. The AIA had also addressed this democratisation through its touring exhibitions. As a young Marxist art critic, Anthony Blunt reviewed an exhibition by Kauffer from a similar perspective:

By using the methods of the more advanced schools and by putting them before the men in the streets in such a way as to catch them off guard, so that they are lured into liking the poster before they realize that it is just the kind of thing which they loath in the exhibition gallery, by this means he (Kauffer) has familiarised a very wide public with the conventions of modern painting.⁵⁰⁰

By excluding the everyday in the image of Stonehenge, Kauffer attempted to make it a timeless or out-of-time scene. The background is reminiscent of a theatrical backdrop showing a black/blue sky with stars picked out in white. The main set of stones is shown at a slight angle, which helps to give them some sense of depth. The two taller pairs of stones are also the strongest vertical axis in the image and drama has been given to the scene through the simplification of tone. Stonehenge is depicted in three tones: the lightest a cream colour, the middle tone a brown and finally black for the shadows. The outline of light on the middle ground shapes appears to be from a different light source, probably the twilight on the horizon. The overall effect is very like a stage set and the value contrasts between the cream and the blue/black set up a disparity between the cold sky and landscape and the warmth of the stones. This could be read as a reference to the timelessness of British society with the stones as warm embodiments of British people existing in an austere cold environment or representing the country's survival within the harsh political and economic situation created after the stock market crash of 1929. The overall pattern of values in the image is dark, with the sides of the stones creating a vertical row of blocks of light of varying heights. The colour scheme is repeated in the lettering with

⁵⁰⁰ Anthony Blunt. 'Review of an Exhibition at the Lund Humphries Gallery by E McKnight Kauffer', *Spectator*, 5th April 1935:

the single light source carried on to 'See Britain First on Shell!' and 'Stonehenge' graduated in the blue to white of the sky.

It has been suggested that representing the Neolithic, as Kauffer does, made particular sense within the English art of the 1930s that was paradoxically trying to articulate the possibility of a modern British culture. Sam Smiles has argued that prehistoric forms, 'had values as repositories of humane or spiritual meaning as well as seeming to hold out the possibility of art's social engagement when using abstract means.'⁵⁰¹ Shell was presenting itself as a modern, forward-looking company by doing what Smiles suggests: using the recognisable forms of the ancient site and associating them with modern abstraction. Kauffer's image can be seen to be familiarizing the public, as Clark and Blunt had suggested, to the flat, non-local colours and lack of aerial perspective of modern art but Smiles also suggests that the subject itself was a way of explaining abstract sculptural forms through their association with the prehistoric. Shell is appearing to be modern but also rooted in the past. The combining of the past with a particularly British modernism had become useful and attractive to a number of British artists.⁵⁰² Paul Nash had become interested in the ancient stone circle at Avebury at the same time that he was collecting research for a Shell Guide. He explored, in the 1930s, whether it was possible to achieve a middle ground between modernism and an evocation of the British past through using the Neolithic as subject matter. Even before he used Avebury as a starting point for compositions he had expressed his interest in this middle ground:

Whether it is possible to 'go modern' and still be British is a question vexing quite a few people today....The battle lines have been drawn up: Internationalism versus an indigenous culture; renovation versus conservatism; the industrial versus the pastoral; the functional versus the futile.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Sam Smiles, 2002, p.203.

⁵⁰² See Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010).

⁵⁰³ Paul Nash, 'Going Modern and Being British.' *The Weekend Review*, 12th March, 1932, pp. 322-23.

Smiles has suggested that the tension between the articulation of a new culture amid the heritage of the past was of crucial interest in the interwar years.⁵⁰⁴ Nash conveys this when describing the work he based on Avebury. He explained how he was trying to evoke the monument's form and symbolic association rather than create a topographical image:

These groups (at Avebury) are impressive as forms opposed to their surroundings....they are dramatic also, however, as symbols of their antiquity, as hallowed remnants of an almost unknown civilisation. I wished to avoid the very powerful influence of the antiquarian suggestion, and to insist only upon the dramatic qualities of composition.⁵⁰⁵

Nash's interest in these prehistoric circles led him to produce a number of compositions based upon megaliths. Kauffer's poster is not as subtle as Nash's image in suggesting the past. Nash was trying to evoke the *genius loci*, the spirit of the land, whilst avoiding the topographical but Kauffer's poster predates Nash's interest in ancient monuments and attempts to invoke modernity whilst portraying the historical. Kauffer uses a simplified colour scheme, strange lighting, possibly influenced by De Chirico, and flattened perspective, whilst choosing a subject that evokes the nostalgic, preservationist concerns of the period. Kauffer was certainly interested in Surrealism and was part of the organising committee, along with Nash, for the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition in London.⁵⁰⁶ Nash had been writing about De Chirico as early as 1931 and he would certainly have been familiar to Kauffer.⁵⁰⁷

Clough Williams-Ellis, in his 1937 collection of essays on the increasing suburbanisation of the countryside, *Britain and the Beast*, chose to use an image of Stonehenge at twilight on the book jacket (Fig.27). The preservationists, like Williams-Ellis, have been described, by David Matless, as not anti-modernity but trying, like Kauffer, to fuse together the modern and the traditional. They 'sought to ally preservation and progress, tradition and modernity, city and country in order to

⁵⁰⁴ Smiles, 2002, p.210.

⁵⁰⁵ Paul Nash, Letter to Lance Sieveking, 4th May 1937, quoted in *Paul Nash; Paintings and Watercolours* (London, Tate Gallery, 1975) p.86.

⁵⁰⁶ Michel Remy, *Surrealism in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).

⁵⁰⁷ Paul Nash, *The Listener*, 120, 29th April 1931, pp.720-21.

define Englishness as orderly and modern'.⁵⁰⁸ The image of Stonehenge was immediately recognisable as standing as a touchstone for issues of planning, rural preservation and the survival of civilisation. The Kauffer poster imagines a modern, orderly, if rather gloomy, interpretation of the monument. The pessimism can be seen in the twilight illuminated low shapes in the background. They have the appearance of shabby debris, whilst the monument appears to be both solid and sturdy.

The growing interest in the remote past in the interwar years was exemplified by John Piper's work on the Shell Guides and the foundation of O. G. S. Crawford's journal, *Antiquity* in 1927. Archaeology was also in the news between the wars. The discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen, the excavations at Ur and of the Minoan civilisation in Crete had all been widely reported. There was a feeling that historic sites needed to be preserved from the threat of modernisation and also an impression that looking to the distant past was a way of starting again before the effects of Christianity, industrialisation, and modernity had taken hold. This interest in the archaeology of the remote past is evident in the guidebooks produced by Shell in the 1930s. Twelve were published between 1934 and 1938.⁵⁰⁹ In the guide to Wiltshire, Robert Byron dedicated much of the introduction to the prehistoric and the next section was devoted to 'Antiquities of Wiltshire'.⁵¹⁰ Concern about the fragility of civilisation and Stonehenge's relationship to that fragility is also demonstrated in Byron's guidebook, which was aimed at the weekend motoring tourist. When he described Salisbury Plain, Byron contrasted the sophistication of the army's weapons evident on Salisbury Plain with the simple tools that built Stonehenge:

If we encounter on Salisbury Plain, the last resources of modern science preparing to annihilate civilisation, let us think, ere that event renders such reflection too ironical, of the stone tools and antler picks which built Stonehenge a few miles off and initiated our civilisation.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁸David Matless, 1998, p.14.

⁵⁰⁹ Heathcote, 2011.

⁵¹⁰ Robert Byron, *Shell Guide to Wiltshire: A Series of Views of Castles, Seats of the Nobility, Mines, Picturesque Scenery, Towns, Public Buildings, Churches, Antiquities, &C* (Shell Guides: London: The Architectural Press, 1935).

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p.12.

Byron also echoed Kauffer's preference for trying to exclude the clutter surrounding the monument when he suggested the best time to view without, however, acknowledging that promoting the site with a guidebook was increasing the pressure on it from tourists.

Late on a winter's afternoon is the time to see it at its best, when the huge weathered monoliths loom out of the murk while their modern accessories are swallowed up.⁵¹²

The generally dark appearance of Kauffer's poster implies a brooding dark scene. Stonehenge, during the time of the poster's production, was a place 'where a mood of gloomy despair prevailed'.⁵¹³ This gloomy despair, reflected in Kauffer's melancholy poster, arose in the inter-war years because of the perceived shabbiness of the site. It was definitely not from a lack of interest in the monument demonstrated by the posters and guidebooks, which increased its desirability as a destination. Visitors were being attracted to it in the early 1930s at the rate of 15000 in a single summer month. Their cars and charabancs blocked the road.⁵¹⁴ During the inter-war years, Stonehenge was used as a symbol of the neglect of the countryside and its unrestricted development by the preservationist movement.⁵¹⁵ O.G.S. Crawford, after founding the magazine *Antiquity* in 1927, had immediately begun to campaign to save the landscape around Stonehenge. The Stonehenge site had been described, in the late 1920s, as 'a mess' by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, 'right up near the stones there was a gaudy cafe of the sort routinely derided by preservationists, and nearby a decommissioned aerodrome being used as a pig farm'.⁵¹⁶ The Design and Industries Association deplored the indiscriminate development around Stonehenge in its 1930 yearbook one year before McKnight Kauffer's poster. It describes the derelict air sheds near Stonehenge as proof that 'nations have the governments they deserve'.⁵¹⁷ These air sheds could explain the odd shapes in the middle ground of the poster. The proposal in the 1920s to build a

⁵¹² Ibid., p.15.

⁵¹³ Christopher Chippendale, *Stonehenge Complete* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983) p.185.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., p.195.

⁵¹⁵ Matless, 1998.

⁵¹⁶ Kitty Hauser, *Bloody Old Britain: O.G.S. Crawford and the Archaeology of Modern Life* (London: Granta Books, 2008) p.102.

⁵¹⁷ Design and Industries Association, *The Face of the Land: The Year Book of the Design and Industries Association, 1929-30* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930) p.40.

Stonehenge bungalow colony near the site may have been one of the schemes that increased pressure from the preservationists and that led to the government eventually acquiring the site.⁵¹⁸

Kauffer's poster can be analysed on several levels. His 'modern' graphic style superficially used the formal elements developed in art at the beginning of the twentieth century. His subject matter echoed the work of English artists such as Paul Nash, John Piper and Graham Sutherland, who attempted to fuse modernism with the English landscape tradition. Kauffer's poster was a visual representation of the political and economic instability of the 1930s as well as an attempt to combine the ancient with the modern. The concerns of the preservationists focussed on sites such as Stonehenge but were symptomatic of wider concerns about Britain being under threat from change. If Stonehenge could be preserved, perhaps the society of the 1930s could also be preserved. The irony of Shell's poster was that the image was used to encourage tourism, the biggest threat to preservation. Stonehenge illustrates both the fragility of civilisations and the possibility and importance of trying to preserve its monuments.

Betjeman, Berners and Follies -

Case Study 2

Oh fair be the tower that Lord Berners is rearing
And fair be the light that illuminates its walls
But fairer to me are the trees in the clearing
And the firs on the hill top are fairest of all.⁵¹⁹

This verse is from a poem written by John Betjeman to celebrate the building of a folly tower, near his home at Uffington, by his friend Lord Berners. The poster (Fig. 28) of Faringdon Folly, showing the folly above the village of Faringdon, Oxfordshire was created because Jack Beddington, as Head of Publicity at Shell,

⁵¹⁸ Bender, 1999, p.16 and Thurley, 2013, p.129.

⁵¹⁹ Quoted in Bevis Hillier, *John Betjeman: New Fame, New Love, 1934-1958* (London: John Murray, 2002) p.19.

employed John Betjeman as part of his design team. The poster also reveals the friendship which developed between Betjeman and Berners and the benefit each gained through that friendship: Berners through a validation of his artistic ability and legitimizing his place in the Oxfordshire countryside and Betjeman through his association with aristocracy and enjoyment of their social circle. This chapter section will explore the way in which Berners' friendship with Betjeman led to a campaign that took follies as its theme. The building of the folly tower inspired the subject matter of the last of three landscape poster campaigns created for Shell in the 1930s and this campaign used the copy line *To Visit Britain's Landmarks* and ran from 1936 to 1937, producing twenty seven posters. Follies had appeared on Shell posters before this campaign including, in the second major campaign of the 1930s, *Everywhere You Go*, Graham Sutherland's view of the Great Globe at Swanage which was published in 1932, and, a year later, Cathleen Mann's illustration of the Mausoleum at West Wycombe. A poster campaign based largely on follies was the idea of Betjeman, who had been employed as a copywriter by Jack Beddington from 1935, following his initial work for Shell on the company's county guide books.⁵²⁰ The relationship between Shell, Betjeman and Berners is the subject of this chapter section, through an analysis of one of the posters in the *To Visit Britain's Landmarks* series, *Faringdon Folly* by Lord Berners. The poster demonstrated themes that link all the landscape posters produced by Shell in the 1930s. It was commissioned through the personal relationships built by Jack Beddington and these relationships were further extended, after John Betjeman began working regularly for Shell, to Betjeman's social circle. Like the other posters it shows a commodification of the countryside by Shell as a site for tourism whilst continuing the paradox of Shell promoting itself as a company careful not to spoil the landscape with its advertising whilst, at the same time, encouraging tourists to change its appearance by visiting it in their motor cars. The idyllic, quiet village of Faringdon was shown as tranquil but the danger of Shell's advertising was that it would surely end that tranquillity.

The event that brings together Shell posters, Berners and Betjeman was the celebration of the completion of the folly tower on Guy Fawkes' Day, 1935 with a

⁵²⁰ As well as in Hillier, Betjeman's relationship with Shell is explored in Karen Lynch, "Visit Britain's Landmarks: Follies on Shell Advertising Posters in the 1930s", *The Follies Journal*, Winter 2005, no. 5, 2005, pp. 5-37, which gives a short history of the campaign as well as a gazetteer of the poster sites.

firework display and a party. Photographs of the guests, including Betjeman, appeared in the *Tatler* and the poster of the folly was published by Shell in the following year. The folly was a new construction and it will be seen how Berners uses the poster to make it appear that it could fit into the existing Oxfordshire countryside and seem to be as timeless as the village below it. Social connections, aristocratic whimsy and a resurfacing of interest in the picturesque combined with a commodification of the countryside for tourism to produce the Faringdon Folly poster in 1936. The poster showed how the sociability of John Betjeman and his enjoyment of having wealthy and often eccentric friends initiated a campaign of folly posters for Shell. The final say on images and artists would still be for Jack Beddington but Betjeman's influence on the series is clear through the establishment of a list which was prompted by Berners' folly.⁵²¹ John Betjeman, Tom Gentleman and William Scudamore Mitchell worked as a small team creating the poster series under the supervision of Beddington, in an office at Shell House.

The images used adopted a mixture of sites; some would be familiar to the intended Shell customers but others were more obscure. The majority were follies but the series also included a monument, a natural curiosity and an abbey. The twenty-seven posters were produced lithographically at four fine art printers. J. Weiner & Co, (15 posters) The Baynard Press, (7) Chorley and Pickersgill (4) and Johnson, Riddle and Co. (1). Betjeman's choice of follies, as a subject for Shell, illuminates a direction taken by British art in the 1930s. It indicated a romantic revival and a return to the picturesque in British art, although it was also a reflection of Betjeman's interest in the eccentric and quirky. *Faringdon Folly* is unique amongst the Shell posters in that it was painted by an artist of a building he had created himself and the only poster where the folly is in the far distance rather than filling the majority of the poster's picture space.

It is not surprising that the twenty-seven images used by Shell on the theme of follies are an assorted mixture of structures. Follies, as a discrete subject, have not been considered to be of interest for academic study and there is little consensus as to what is a folly. Buildings referred to as follies can include: 'eye-catchers, gazebos

⁵²¹ This list is referred to by Barbara Jones, the author of the first post war survey of British follies in an interview with Eric Kellerman, 'Follies Bizarre: Barbara Jones interviewed by Eric Kellerman', *Follies* 4, no. 4, 1993, pp.7-9. When researching her book she contacted Shell about the follies poster series and obtained Betjeman's list.

and belvederes, temples and pagodas, bath houses, menageries, aviaries, sham castles and artificial ruins.⁵²² A dictionary definition describes them as ‘any costly structure considered to have shown folly in the builder’.⁵²³ There were earlier examples of follies but the majority were built in the eighteenth century when aristocrats and their sons returned from the Grand Tour. They returned home determined to embellish the landscapes of their estates with reminders of classical Greece and Rome. Landowners were also intent on romanticizing their estates and found the building of sham ruins and other ‘Gothick’ buildings gave their ownership of estates legitimacy through the impression that their ancestry could be traced back to a medieval tenure.⁵²⁴ These pointless buildings could only be built by those rich enough to indulge their romantic fantasies. A folly might, therefore, be defined as a useless building erected as an ornament on a landowner’s estate.

Berners’ folly was certainly intended to have no purpose: as he said, ‘The great point of the Tower is that it will be useless’.⁵²⁵ There is a sense that Berners was evoking an eighteenth-century precedent by enhancing his estate with a picturesque folly. He had succeeded to both his title and his wealth through a combination of the death of his grandmother, who held the title, and a year later the death of an unmarried uncle who was for that short time, Lord Berners.⁵²⁶ Walking around an estate that included a sham, ruined castle would not only provide a picturesque scene but also provide his many friends and visitors with further evidence of his personality-defining eccentricity. The portrayal of Berners’ folly added another paradox to Shell’s portrayal of an unspoilt countryside that would be despoiled by motorists, Shell was now a modern company portraying the most anti-modern of buildings - follies.

⁵²² Introduction by Gervase Jackson-Stops to George Mott, Sally Sample Aall, *Follies and Pleasure Pavilions* (London: Pavilion, 1989) p.8.

⁵²³ William Little, Jessie Coulson, Henry Watson Fowler, Charles Talbut Onions, and George Washington Salisbury Friedrichsen, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, 3rd ed. completely reset[and] rev. by G.W.S. Friedrichsen, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). Despite the lack of academic analysis of follies as a category of architecture, the Folly Fellowship produces a journal that endeavours to develop investigation into the field. Barbara Jones, *Follies & Grottoes* (London: Constable, 1953). It has some interesting analysis and research on Follies. Other books include, Jeffery W. Whitelaw, *Follies*, 4th ed. ed. (Princes Risborough: Shire, 2005) and Gwyn Headley and Wim Meulenkamp, *Follies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990) are concerned with describing existing Follies.

⁵²⁴ See Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001).

⁵²⁵ Quoted in Mark Amory, *Lord Berners: The Last Eccentric* (London: Pimlico, 1998) p.149.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.61.

Follies may be a reflection of the mentality of their architects. Barbara Jones has suggested, '[A folly} is at once jolly and morbid, technically either the best or the worst in English architecture, both an ornament for a gentleman's grounds and a *mirror for his mind*' (my italics).⁵²⁷ The choice of follies as a theme reflects the direction of Betjeman's interest in architecture, particularly in the eccentric and quirky, as well as his enjoyment in having aristocratic friends. The decision to build a folly in the 1930s must have seemed particularly out of step with the times. If they were pointless and extravagant in the eighteenth century, how much more pointless must one have seemed in the 1930s? Betjeman seems to have been intent on getting Shell to encourage pointless journeys to pointless buildings. If follies were built from 'money and security and peace',⁵²⁸ then the way to demonstrate Berners' arrogant eccentricity was to build one in 1935, when all three of those categories were under threat. Berners' painting of his folly illustrates it high on top of a hill amongst a clump of pines and beeches. The folly sits in the landscape as though it has been there for some time, although only built the year before the poster was produced. The site, on the top of the hill, was already called Faringdon Folly and appears as such on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps,⁵²⁹ although there was no existing building; the word was probably a corruption of the French *feuillee*, meaning foliage.⁵³⁰

Gerald Tyrewhit-Wilson, the fourteenth Baron Berners, had been a diplomat in Constantinople and Rome, and after inheriting the title Baron Berners, the eighteenth-century house at Faringdon became his home. The way in which the tower, in the poster, overlooks but is part of the landscape gives a focal point for the painting. The folly sits above the village and, like Berners, is a newcomer establishing itself in the countryside. Berners enjoyed the role of local eccentric with 'a strong flavour of camp'.⁵³¹ His whippets wore diamond collars and he dyed the fantail pigeons at Faringdon yellow, pink or blue. Nancy Mitford used him as the model for the fictional Lord Merlin in her novel *The Pursuit of Love*, where she describes him as enjoying annoying his neighbours, 'not for nothing was his

⁵²⁷ Jones, 1953, p.1.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p.1.

⁵²⁹ Headley and Meulenkamp, 1990, p.xxii.

⁵³⁰ This is the opinion of Mark Amory but Headley and Meulenkamp suggest that another ancestor of the word is the old French *folie*, *fol* meaning foolish.

⁵³¹ Hillier, 2002, p.17.

telegraphic address Neighbourtease'.⁵³² She also described him as a practical joker but 'it was sometimes difficult to know where jokes ended and culture began. I think he was not always perfectly certain himself'.⁵³³ Berners was certainly eccentric and enjoyed entertaining the members of the post-war social circle at Faringdon, including Mitford and Betjeman who, as already noted, formed part of the social set known as the Bright Young People.⁵³⁴

Berners had bought the site in 1919 and the idea of building a folly tower seems to have come about partly as one of Berners' practical jokes. He had been discussing building a folly with his companion and the eventual inheritor of Faringdon House, Robert Heber Percy, and this conversation had been overheard and reported locally.⁵³⁵ Berners' idea may have been less than serious but the critical reaction from local people seems to have encouraged him to put it into action, again in contrast to the conservatism of the poster, as an example of his 'neighbourtease' to promote controversy in the area. In Nancy Mitford's fictional version of Berners, who also built a folly tower that was hated by the locals, there is a hint of how the building could be accepted as an example of English eccentricity: 'the very folly itself, while considered hideous, was welcomed as a landmark by those lost on their way home from hunting.'⁵³⁶

Berners' wealth, aristocracy and eccentricity gave the impression that he was a dilettante, more interested in himself than being a serious artist. The building of the folly reinforces this view of an eccentric lacking any real interest in modern architecture. It was also in contrast to the growing interest in rural preservation and the idea that a building should be allowed on the whim of an aristocrat seems out of step with the movement for maintaining the appearance of the countryside in the 1930s, but the Council for the Preservation of Rural England was more concerned with ribbon development than the anachronistic building of a folly. Initially planning permission was refused by the local council, but the Ministry of Health held an enquiry at Faringdon and the tower was approved. The architects were Lord Gerald Wellesley and Trenwith Wills.

⁵³² Nancy Mitford, *The Pursuit of Love* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949) p.43.

⁵³³ Ibid., p.40.

⁵³⁴ The hedonistic post war generation that included Berners is explored in D.J. Taylor, *Bright Young People : The Rise and Fall of a Generation, 1918-1939* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007).

⁵³⁵ Amory, 1999, p.149.

⁵³⁶ Mitford, 1949, p.46.

Despite his eccentricity and love of whimsy, Berners did have a reasonable reputation as a composer and to a lesser extent, painter. He had associated with the Futurists (and become a patron of Giacomo Balla) in Italy before the First World War and he had worked with Stravinsky, who described him as the most interesting British composer of the twentieth century.⁵³⁷ The poster he painted of Faringdon is surprisingly conventional, considering his association with the Futurists and his increasing interest in Surrealism during the 1930s. Dali was a friend who stayed with him at Faringdon and described Berners' book *The Camel*,⁵³⁸ which has the surreal theme of a camel arriving in an English village, as his favourite novel.⁵³⁹ Berners had provided the diving suit worn by Dali at the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition in London and his friendship with Dali had, in turn, led to Dali being asked to design a Shell poster by John Betjeman. Unfortunately, the poster never seems to have been produced.⁵⁴⁰ There is a Surrealist portrait of Berners by Gregorio Prieto where the sitter is holding a fish (Fig 29) but despite this and his enjoyment of whimsy and practical jokes, it did not result in him becoming an English Surrealist. The interest shown by Berners in Surrealism is not translated into his painting, although other posters in the Shell series, such as Tristram Hillier's *Jezreel's Temple*, do show the influence of Surrealism. In fact, Berners' painting was inspired by Corot and his appreciation of Italian landscape. Christopher Wood, in a statement that may or may not have been intentionally ironic, noted that he found Berners' work 'just too perfect'.⁵⁴¹ His reputation as a painter may have been higher if he had not moved from one art form to another, been a rich peer and had such an extensive social life. His first exhibition at the Lefevre Gallery in 1931 was praised by the *Times* but there

⁵³⁷ Amory, 1999, p.52.

⁵³⁸ Lord Berners, *The Camel* (London: Constable, 1936).

⁵³⁹ Amory, 1999, p.159.

⁵⁴⁰ [The letter referenced above \(239\) links](#) Berners, Betjeman and Shell by showing that Betjeman was trying to use the friendship with Dali to get him to produce a poster. The reason the poster was never produced may have been the slightly patronising phrase 'if we use the poster'.

Dear Monsieur Dali,

How is the poster to illustrate the phrase 'You can be sure of Shell' getting on? This is to confirm the arrangement whereby we pay you thirty guineas for the experiment and £75 if we use the poster. Pray remember me to Madame Dali.

Yours sincerely,

John Betjeman

⁵⁴¹ Amory, 1999, p.108.

was an impression that he was playing at being a painter, so his reputation was that of an able amateur.⁵⁴²

The painting of Faringdon Folly shows a view looking towards the north-west with the folly on the hilltop above the village. The sunlight is coming from the left-hand side of the painting, suggesting it is late afternoon, with long shadows thrown by the trees on the hilltop as well as shadows created by the clouds. The scene could be set in the summer, although there is an indication of autumn browns in the trees behind the village. Sunlight highlights part of the village and the folly but the village to the right and the two houses in the foreground are in shade. In that shaded part of the village there appears to be the just one evidence of industry, indicated by a factory chimney. This sole image of industry is in shadow and the use of sunlight and shade gives an impression of concern for the decline of the countryside and, by implication, the country. The sun is setting over this rural scene, whilst the brightly lit part of the village includes the church spire, possibly more of an indication of Berners' interest in the village's tradition than in religion.

The composition has been created using the golden section, with the horizon dividing the scene in two with the sky being the larger horizontal form. The shapes of the fields, the hill and the woods are reflected in the shapes of the clouds. A diamond shape is formed by the hill, the road in to the village and the line of a hill in the foreground and the strong horizon and lines of hedges give a feeling of stillness and stability, literally overshadowed with a sense of unease, represented by the shade cast by the clouds. The painter is looking from a high viewpoint and towards the village of Faringdon. The village is shown as an idyllic English village, timeless and serene but its emptiness is also an echo of an article John Betjeman wrote in September 1933 about the village of Wield.⁵⁴³ In the article he describes finding the village deserted when he arrived: everybody had gone off to Basingstoke. Like Faringdon, the Wield in Betjeman's article is a place of contrast to the hectic pace of city and town life. The sun picks out part of the village, highlighting England's privileged place in the universe and, interestingly for a Shell poster, the road leading into the village invitingly has no sign of any cars, so that the viewer is encouraged to

⁵⁴² Ibid., p.107.

⁵⁴³ This article is referred to in Tim Mowl, *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betjeman Versus Pevsner* (London: John Murray, 2000) pp.43-4.

be the only visitor. The implication is that the free road awaits the tourist. The road brings the tourist into the scene, providing the continuity between foreground and middle-ground, whilst the countryside takes shape around the imagination of the motorist and appears to exist solely for his benefit. Any motorist seeing this image of the Oxfordshire countryside would be encouraged to visit the scene and become part of this romanticised, picturesque England.

As well as giving an insight into Berners' personality, the poster also provides information about John Betjeman. Betjeman's choice of follies for the Shell campaign shows a development of his ideas on architecture through the 1930s. At the same time that his views on architecture were changing, he had also moved from being an assistant editor of the *Architectural Review* to working for Shell, although he still contributed to the journal. He seems to have regarded modernist architecture as a novelty and he eventually moved away from following the *Architectural Review* in promoting Modernism towards an interest in Victorian Gothic. He had maintained his positive approach to Modernism throughout his time at the journal but explained why he was not initially interested in Victorian architecture. In his 1970 introduction to *Ghastly Good Taste*, the book he wrote on English Architecture in 1933 when he was working at the *Architectural Review*, he described his views on Victorian architecture at the time. He said, 'Their architecture I thought then was not to be taken seriously, as it was purely imitative and rather vulgar.'⁵⁴⁴

By the early 1940s, Betjeman was being praised by Kenneth Clark for his love of the Gothic. In Clark's 1942 introduction to his reprint of *The Gothic Revival*, first published in 1928, he was described as 'the most important name of all that does not appear in the footnotes,' and 'one of the few original minds of his generation'.⁵⁴⁵ Betjeman was also a founder member of the Victorian Society in 1958 but his appreciation of the Gothic, as well as the whimsical, seems to have developed through the 1930s and could be associated with his break from the *Architectural Review* and his work on the Shell guides. In the poster of Faringdon, the folly is too far away to show its Gothic detail but all the other posters in the campaign contain images of the eccentric, the Gothic and the strange. He was

⁵⁴⁴ John Betjeman, *Ghastly Good Taste: Or a Depressing Story of the Rise and Fall of English Architecture* (London: Blond, 1970) p.xxi.

⁵⁴⁵ Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste* (London: John Murray, 1962) p.5.

influenced by John Piper when they worked together on the Oxfordshire guide for Shell. His last article for the *Architectural Review* published during the early part of the war, 'The Seeing Eye', was subtitled 'How to like everything' and revealed Piper's influence on Betjeman. Betjeman knew Piper's wife, Myfanwy Evans from university and Myfanwy knew Beddington through their work for the Group Theatre.⁵⁴⁶ The article describes Betjeman and Piper's enjoyment of railway architecture and reveals how far the former had come to appreciate the variety of vernacular styles in England:

By following Mr. Piper....Perhaps at the end of it (the war) those of us still alive will emerge with a deep sense of jazz modern and a genuine desire to preserve the bogus Tudor of the new industrialism. I hope so. In any other direction madness lies.⁵⁴⁷

Piper became a war artist during the Second World War, famously recording the result of the bombing of Coventry Cathedral.⁵⁴⁸

The friendship with Berners had begun some years before when Betjeman moved to Uffington in the Vale of the White Horse in 1934. Berners lived four miles away at Faringdon House and the two became friends, visiting each other's homes frequently and introducing each other to their own circle of friends. By the time Betjeman had moved to Uffington and began his friendship with Berners, he was working for Shell on the first of the Shell Guides. He asked Berners to create the cover for *Wiltshire*, published in 1935 and the aristocrat produced a collage of traction engines, merry-go-rounds and labourers. The relationship with, and enjoyment of, Berners' company developed throughout the 1930s, as did Betjeman's love of the eccentric and quirky. Berners' surreal novel *The Camel* was dedicated to John and Penelope Betjeman, who appeared as the fictional characters of the vicar and his wife. Betjeman repaid the compliment by dedicating his collection of poems *Continual Dew*, published in 1937, to Lord Berners. The importance of social connections to Betjeman's creative ideas for Shell can be seen in the Faringdon poster as well as through his friendship with John Piper. The friendship and

⁵⁴⁶ Hillier, 2002, p.97.

⁵⁴⁷ John Betjeman, 'The Seeing Eye: How to Like Everything', *Architectural Review* 86, November 1939 pp. 201-04 p.202.

⁵⁴⁸ Frances Spalding, *John Piper, Myfanwy Evans: Lives in Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p.179.

collaboration between Betjeman and Piper is hinted at in the subject matter of the ‘follies’ posters, for although Piper did not contribute to this series, the influence of the Gothic and Romantic can be seen in several posters, including *Llanthony Abbey* by Denis Constanduros and *John Knox Monument* by Pamela Drew.

Faringdon Folly showed a landscape familiar to Berners, Betjeman and their social set. It was a view of the Oxfordshire countryside well known to young, wealthy weekend visitors from Oxford and London. But did they conceive what effect the advertising of this idyllic rural scene would have when the targets of the poster began to visit? Neither Betjeman nor Berners seems have understood the consequence of encouraging visitors to Faringdon. It is as though the poster exists as a vanity project for Berners, encouraged by Betjeman, outside Shell’s aim of encouraging motorists to visit particular sites. It also contradicts the ‘Landmarks’ in the copy line by being difficult to identify any ‘landmark’ within the scene. The painting was more about Betjeman and Berners’ motives than those of Shell. They were either unaware or uncaring about the commodification of the landscape by Shell in order to sell petrol to motorists. Betjeman’s motives were partly financial. He needed paid work from Shell to make a living but he also enjoyed being part of the social set that included Berners. Berners’ motives appear to be a validation of his artistic ability and to celebrate his eccentricity by the construction of a folly in the twentieth-century. Because the folly was initially considered out of character with the countryside, planning permission was difficult to achieve. The poster shows an attempt by Berners to assimilate it into that countryside.

Sutherland’s Oast Houses -

Case Study 3

This chapter section is about how Graham Sutherland’s Shell poster from 1932, *Nr. Leeds, Kent* (Fig.30) brought about a change of direction in Sutherland’s art and how the poster reveals issues around and attitudes towards the countryside which were used by Shell to encourage the 1930s’ middle class motorist to visit the rural landscape. Why was a working building, one that is a part of the production of beer,

considered by Sutherland a suitable subject for a travel poster and why did Jack Beddington, as Publicity Manager at Shell, see it as scene that would encourage motor car tourism? The poster is also a rare example of Sutherland's early development as a painter. The image is of a rural scene, but the building is also part of a commercial process that he presents as part of the agricultural industry that was picturesque and that the motorist would find interesting enough to seek out.

An obvious response as to why the viewer of the poster would respond to it, is that there was an urge in the 1930s, as there has been since, for the motorist to visit the countryside as an escape from the modernism of the city and the suburb. Alex Potts has pointed out that when the outside world seemed threatening to the English, as it did in the 1930s because of the political instability in Europe, rural images evoked something safe: a home and a haven for the English.⁵⁴⁹ The countryside became a construction by the middle-classes of an idealised England and its exploration by car their way of becoming immersed in it. Shell was catering for this exploration by supplying petrol and helping to create this obsession with the rural. The proliferation of guidebooks, including the Shell Guides, was a symptom of this. As well as books that described journeys through Britain, and H.V. Morton's was one of the most successful, there were many others that urged tourists to spend their holidays looking for the rural England that had come to symbolise the national character.⁵⁵⁰ The anti-urban position of these guides is exemplified in John Prioleau's *Car and Country* of 1929, where even the title implies the only destination for the touring motorist is the rural. After suggesting touring routes in the south of England for two thirds of the book he makes a brief diversion to the north but he warns his readers that, 'places like the Potteries, Sheffield, Manchester, Bolton and Bradford are places to which a very wide berth should be given by the roadfarer'⁵⁵¹ This again reflects the sense, reflected in the posters, that southern England is the 'real' England.

⁵⁴⁹ Alex Potts, 'Constable Country' between the wars', in Raphael Samuel, *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, History Workshop Series (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁵⁵⁰ H. V. Morton, *In Search of England*, 1931 was reprinted frequently. Other examples include; Blunden, Edmund, *The Face of England, Occasional Sketches* (London: English Heritage Series, 1932), John Prioleau, *Car and Country* (London: J M Dent & Sons Limited, 1929) and the Batsford illustrated series including; Charles Bradley Ford, *The Legacy of England: An Illustrated Survey of the Works of Man in the English Country, Etc.* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1935).

⁵⁵¹ Prioleau, 1929, p.155.

It was amongst the middle classes that car ownership was increasing and it was the middle classes who thought seeking out the rural was a meaningful activity. The class-based nature of this pursuit before the First World War had been pointed out by Ford Madox Ford as early as 1906, 'For the poor and the working-classes of the town never really go back' (to the country).⁵⁵² However the charabanc tours and popularity of hiking were bringing more working class visitors into the countryside in the 1930s.⁵⁵³ The paradox of Shell advertising how tranquil the countryside was, and therefore encouraging motorists to destroy that tranquillity, was evident to travel writers of the period. They complained about the destruction of the countryside by ribbon development but at the same time idealised the rural and made it desirable. Philip Gibbs, writing in 1935, makes it clear who he thinks the English fundamentally are and where they are to be found. Rural England is, for him, the 'real' England:

It is astonishing really how beyond the reach of the cities so much of this rural England remains untouched, outwardly, by the horrible paws of the Beast who delights in the destruction of beauty and calls it progress.⁵⁵⁴

For the suburban or city dwelling middle-class, who could afford a car but not a second home, the desire to visit the countryside was a substitute for living there. The motor car was essential for the weekend or holiday exodus from the city and Shell both reflected and encouraged this urge with its series of landscape posters. There was what Malcolm Bradbury has called 'a deep vein of rural nostalgia running through art and literature in the first half of the twentieth century'.⁵⁵⁵ Sutherland's pre-1930s' work reflected this with its idealised rural scenes, uniformly based on Samuel Palmer. The countryside appeared to offer an escape from the stress of city movement and the restricting daily structure of timetables and office hours. Shell was presenting images of stability and tranquillity as an antidote to the noise and commotion of city life. The countryside was seen as a solution to the perceived problems of urban life and country life had come to represent order, stability and

⁵⁵² Ford Madox Ford, *The Heart of the Country: A Survey of a Modern Land* (London: Rivers, 1906) p.58.

⁵⁵³ Juliet Gardiner, 2010.

⁵⁵⁴ Sir Philip Hamilton Gibbs, *England Speaks ... Being Talks With ... All Manner of Folk of Humble and Exalted Rank* (London; Toronto: William Heinemann, 1935) p.209.

⁵⁵⁵ Malcolm Bradbury, *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) p.46.

naturalness. Krishan Kumar has pointed out this desire for tranquillity after the Great War:

For the English at least, that sense of longing seems to have been satisfied by turning their backs on the urban and industrialism, and contemplating the 'timeless' life of the English countryside.⁵⁵⁶

However, even in the 1930s the proliferation of rural literature and art was becoming too much for one writer. Ivor Brown writing in one of the illustrated Batsford guides to Britain commented:

In praise of the English village so much has been said, and with such lavishness of sentiment, that further ecstatic essays on rose-clad porches and ivied cottages are certainly not wanted.⁵⁵⁷

The Shell poster copy lines used for the landscape posters of the 1930s, 'See Britain First', 'Everywhere You Go' and 'To See Britain's Landmarks' all imply an exploration of the country but, like Shell's and the majority of other guidebooks published in this period, this is an exploration to discover the rural not the centres of industry and commerce. Shell was determined to sell an image of a non-industrial Britain. The economic problems of the industrial towns and images portraying their predicament are the antithesis of idealised and idyllic portrayal in the posters of the countryside.

One aspect of this visualising of the rural that can be seen in Sutherland's poster is the lack of any portrayal of agricultural workers. There are virtually no farm workers in the Shell landscape posters and Sutherland's oast houses are no exception. The run down appearance of the building hints at the depressed state of agriculture and specifically reduced beer production in the inter-war years. The appearance of farm workers would too easily remind the urban dwelling tourist of the economic problems associated with agriculture.⁵⁵⁸ British agriculture in this period was dominated by protectionism and subsidy and, by 1936, subsidies were costing £40 million and governmental policy was the opposite of the free trade

⁵⁵⁶ Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge Cultural Social Studies (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.230.

⁵⁵⁷ Ivor John Carnegie Brown, *The Heart of England, Etc.* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1935) p.39.

⁵⁵⁸ This interpretation has been put forward by Ysanne Holt in *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape: British Art and Visual Culture since 1750* (Aldershot: Burlington, Vt: Ashgate, 2003).

policies towards manufacturing industry. Instead of drawing food from the rest of the world at a time when food was relatively cheap and plentiful, home production was protected and inefficient.⁵⁵⁹ The motive for this protectionism may have been a concern going back to the Great War when there was an overreliance on overseas food supplies. Malcolm Bradbury's 'deep vein of rural nostalgia' that suggested the superiority of country life encouraged politicians to give economic support to the agricultural industry. In fact results of this support for agriculture were disappointing. Agricultural production in the 1930s did not even reach pre-war levels and rural communities were not being preserved. Farming employment fell by 250,000 between 1920 and 1938. Workers were leaving the industry at a rate of ten thousand a year.⁵⁶⁰ Sutherland's painting catches a time when oast houses were moving from being semi-industrial rural buildings to becoming picturesque tourist attractions or potential holiday homes.

The deterioration of agriculture as an industry, changing from a working landscape to a site for tourism, is reflected in the subject of Sutherland's poster. Oast houses were becoming unnecessary. One reason for this was the falling levels of beer production and consumption in the inter-war years. This trend had started in the Great War when restrictions on beer drinking in particular had been imposed including the opening hours of pubs being restricted, higher taxes imposed and the alcohol strength reduced in beer. Beer consumption never reached pre-war levels during the 1930s. The average consumption of beer in Britain, was twenty-six to twenty-seven gallons per annum in 1900 but had fallen to thirteen to fourteen gallons in the 1930s. Spending on alcohol dropped from £426 million in 1920 to £306 million in 1938. As well as the continuation of wartime restrictions, the 1930s showed a growth in alternatives to a night in the pub such as the dance hall and the cinema.⁵⁶¹ The painting can be seen as a record of a failing industry rather than an idyllic country scene. If an element of the picturesque is that of the enjoyment of decay, then Sutherland clearly portrays the scene as picturesque.

⁵⁵⁹ See A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, reprinted with revised bibliography (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, Penguin, 1975) and Derek H. Aldcroft, *The British Economy between the Wars* (Oxford: Philip Allan, 1983).

⁵⁶⁰ A.J.P. Taylor, p.424.

⁵⁶¹ Martin Pugh, 2008 p.226.

The three landscape posters which Sutherland produced for Shell appeared at times that prefigured or highlighted a new direction for his art. The first, *Nr. Leeds, Kent*, in 1932, was part of Sutherland's early experiments with painting but also shows how he moved from etching into painting whilst at the same time becoming much more involved in commercial work. The 1932 poster is based upon an etching Sutherland produced in the same year (Fig.31). He had been based in Kent since his marriage in 1927, moving to Faringham whilst he taught etching and engraving at Chelsea School of Art. His own etchings were influenced by Samuel Palmer, so it is not surprising that he chose local rural scenes for his printmaking. What is interesting about the oast house etching is that only trial proofs were produced and it marks the end of a point in Sutherland's printmaking career when he was concentrating exclusively on the medium. The resulting gouache painting is representative of his first experiments in becoming a painter.⁵⁶² In 1929 the Wall Street Crash in America led to the collapse of the market for prints and, in order to supplement his teaching salary, Sutherland needed to find other sources of income when sales of prints in America dried up, so he became more involved with commercial commissions, particularly poster design. In 1932 he switched to teaching composition and book illustration at Chelsea and, in a time of professional crisis, he turned to painting. Although he destroyed many of his early experiments, the gouache original of the Shell poster was retained by Shell and remains a rare example of Sutherland's attempt to develop his painting style between 1931 and 1934

The other two landscape posters produced for Shell also marked particular stages in Sutherland's career. *The Great Globe, Swanage* (Fig.32) also produced in 1932, shows a much more confident design with the influence of Surrealism and Paul Nash evident in the strange chiselled, forty ton globe of the world. As well as being a much more striking image than the oast houses, it was also the start of his friendship and professional relationship with Kenneth Clark. Clark had opened an exhibition of Shell posters at the New Burlington Galleries in 1934 and he was particularly impressed with this design, the first work of Sutherland's to catch his

⁵⁶² Sutherland's career is explored in Roberto Tassi, Edward Quinn, and Kenneth Lyons, *Graham Sutherland: Complete Graphic Work* (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 1988), Roger Berthoud, *Graham Sutherland: A Biography* (London: Faber, 1982), John Hayes, and Graham Sutherland, *The Art of Graham Sutherland* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1980) and Ronald Alley, *Graham Sutherland* (Darmstadt: Mathildenhöhe, 1982).

attention.⁵⁶³ Clark's opening speech for the 1934 exhibition praised Sutherland in particular for standing out against the other 'beautiful' landscapes. 'But they fade from my mind, when such an image as the Great Globe Swanage remains, and so I cannot help feeling it is the better poster'.⁵⁶⁴ In his exhibition notes for a later 1938 Shell poster exhibition, Clark recalled how the introduction to Sutherland's work began their professional relationship. 'Two of the best posters in the last exhibition, The Great Globe at Swanage and the Wolves at Whipsnade, introduced me to painters whose work I have since come to value very highly'.⁵⁶⁵ The third of Sutherland's Shell posters, *Brimham Rock*, from 1937, is the most successful of the three and anticipated the strange, standing forms of Sutherland's post-war work (Fig.33).⁵⁶⁶

The first of these, *Nr. Kent, Leeds*, portrays the image in predominately yellow, orange and red with areas of complementary green to give the painting some vibrancy. The composition uses a flattened space with the buildings at a right angle to the viewer and virtually no use of receding perspective lines. The road leading around the oast houses gives some sense of depth but even this is flattened and compressed. The dashes of colour on the building and the foliage are reminiscent of pointillism but are probably related more to the textures Sutherland used in his etchings and can be seen in the Oast House print. The composition is static and barren and gives a sense of rural ennui. In the poster he has added the cowl of another conical roof to the building portrayed in the earlier etching. These conical roofs were necessary to create a good draught for the kiln that was used to dry the hops used in beer brewing. Hop picking in Kent had been a summer activity for hundreds of Londoners but just two years after Sutherland's painting for the poster, in 1934, hop picking machines were introduced and this effectively killed off this labour intensive industry. The importation of hops also increased, which led to the abandonment of many oast houses.⁵⁶⁷ The poster shows a time when these oast houses moved from being the site of working holidays for the London labouring classes to being a tourist attraction for the middle class motorist.

⁵⁶³ Alley, 1982, p.65.

⁵⁶⁴ Kenneth Clark, p.69.

⁵⁶⁵ Kenneth Clark, 1938, pp.3-4.

⁵⁶⁶ This view is expressed by Berthoud, 1982, p.82.

⁵⁶⁷ The history of brewing is covered in Ian S.Hornsey, *A History of Beer and Brewing [Electronic Book]*, RSC Paperbacks (Cambridge: Royal Society of Chemistry, 2003).

Another addition to the etching design is the wooden fence that encloses a section of garden where the soil has been turned. This imposing of order on nature is reminiscent of Paul Nash's painting, particularly 1929's *Landscape at Iden* (Fig.34). The solid looking clouds in Sutherland's gouache also evoke Nash's treatment of the same features. The pair of conical roofed oast houses are the most dominant feature in the poster. One of the cylindrical buildings looks run down and in need of support. A large crack has appeared in the wall and a wooden prop keeps the wall from collapsing and further deterioration. The light in the painting is coming from the left but the modelling of forms is very even and lacks any strong shadows. As an opaque watercolour, gouache is not any easy medium with which to create texture and this adds to the flat simplicity of the design. The space feels shut off from the viewer. The viewer is not invited into the scene, whilst the lack of tonal variation and aerial perspective all reduce any sense of depth. The dots of colour disintegrate the forms rather than model them. The gouache original was produced at the beginning of a period between 1931 and 1934 when Sutherland was developing his painting style. His intention was to master an unfamiliar medium and he was dismissive of the work he did at this time. This led him to destroy virtually all his painting in that three year period. The original of the two early 1930s paintings only survive because they are owned by Shell. To Sutherland they were exercises and he said in a letter to John Hayes that they were, 'an attempt to train myself to register as accurately as I could "values" of tone and colour.'⁵⁶⁸ The patterns of value are much more successful in Sutherland's later posters but *Nr. Leeds, Kent* is a fascinating record both of the development of an artist influenced by economic circumstances and trying to develop in a different medium. It also captures a rural scene as it changed from a working farm to a tourist attraction as the countryside became a commodity sold to city dwellers as a destination for their motoring journeys.

The three posters: *Stonehenge*, *Faringdon Folly* and *Nr. Leeds, Kent* - all reveal issues concerning and occupying British society in the 1930s but they are also examples of images that have an effect on that society by creating a desire for exploring Britain by motor car. The purpose of advertising is to create a desire and for its time Shell was using a subtle approach by not promoting the advantages of its oil and petrol but by idealizing and commodifying the countryside as a destination

⁵⁶⁸ Quoted in Hayes and Sutherland, 1980, p.13.

for tourism. Beddington was specific in the sort of 'place' he thought suitable for the images and these places were to have enough associations for the motorist to want to visit them. Why these sites were thought worthy of commodification by Shell reveals the values or attributes they symbolised for society. They are anti-urban images that the city or suburban dweller was encouraged to think were more 'real' than the environment in which they spend most of their lives. They represent concerns about national identity and the fragility of 1930s' society, as in the *Stonehenge* poster but they also reveal something of the nature of artists' careers in this period and the social relationships of the artists with those who commissioned the images. Each image, therefore, is a guide to the experience of living in British society in the decade before the Second World War.

Chapter 4

‘Tourists Prefer Shell’

The English have the ugliest towns and most beautiful countryside of any nation in the world. It was inevitable that sooner or later they would discover the fact.⁵⁶⁹

C.E.M. Joad neatly points out, in the quotation above, the business duality facing Shell-Mex Ltd. when, in its landscape posters, it presented the countryside as a peaceful, unchanging place that would encourage motorists, in large numbers, to explore it and thus destroy the tranquillity that was being portrayed. Although Joad was addressing the ramblers and hikers, who were proliferating during the 1930s, he could have, alternatively, been writing about the increasing number of motorists of the same period who were taking up the leisure activity of motor car touring.⁵⁷⁰ The number of private cars rose from just over 100,000 in 1918 to slightly over 2 million in 1939.⁵⁷¹ This chapter will examine how the landscape, as portrayed by Shell’s series of 1930s’ posters, is represented, for tourists, and also the posters’ function within tourism. I shall argue that there is a triadic relationship between Shell’s advertising, the landscape and tourism. Each part of the relationship is reliant on the other two elements in order to operate. The landscape is selected and portrayed by Shell’s artists, creating a tourist attraction which helps to encourage economic activity. It is fixed as a representation of Britain and sold as a destination for the motorist whilst Shell promotes its products and associates itself with fine art. The tourists can visit the site portrayed by Shell in their cars powered by Shell’s petrol and through their presence validate the view depicted by the poster artists.

This chapter will explore the posters as tourist images, exploring how they interact with Shell’s customers, the motorists. It is possible to uncover issues of class, social status, patriotism and nationalism through examining these posters. The chapter will include an examination of the nature of tourism and discuss whether the

⁵⁶⁹ C. E. M. Joad, *A Charter for Ramblers; or, the Future of the Countryside, Etc.* (Hutchinson & Co.: London, 1934), p.13.

⁵⁷⁰ Joad was scathing about townspeople who were motorists, describing them as ‘Above all and most hated of all’. C. E. Joad, ‘The People’s Claim’ in Clough Williams-Ellis, 1937 p.73.

⁵⁷¹ Sean O’Connell, *The Car in British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring 1896-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) p.19.

posters highlight a range of subtle distinctions which indicate the social hierarchies of the 1930s. These posters are advertising images that mediate the broad social, political, economic and cultural changes taking place during the period. They are important both in terms of the destinations depicted, and in relation to the destinations as chosen sites representing Britain. The use of rural imagery to encourage the middle-class motorist to explore non-industrial Britain demonstrates how a romantic approach to landscape co-existed with the influence of modernism in 1930s' British art. Shell's posters also reveal the creation of the consumer-citizen and the importance of patriotism and nationalism to tourism. The dual identity of the consumer and citizen is created from a more intense nationalism that arises when the country appeared to be under threat, as it was in the 1930s. Consumers also appear to be willing to embrace an ethnocentric pattern of consumption in times of financial difficulties.⁵⁷² During the economic problems of the interbellum, for instance, there was a government campaign that appealed to consumer's patriotism and encouraged them to 'Buy British'.⁵⁷³ By suggesting motorists should travel within Britain, Shell used patriotism in its advertising to encourage them to buy its products. Two of the three landscape campaigns, 'See Britain First' and 'To See Britain's Landmarks' explicitly appealed, in their headlines, to the motorists' pride and loyalty to their country and by implication suggested that foreign travel was inappropriate, even unpatriotic.

Dean MacCannell, in his semiotic analysis of tourism, describes the poster as an 'off-site marker'.⁵⁷⁴ The marker represents the site to the tourist and, without markers such as Shell's images, the sites would not exist for the tourist. But what is it about the site and its execution by Shell's artists that appeals to the tourist? Why were particular sites chosen by the artists and why do they look the way they do? In order to answer these questions, four posters will be examined which will uncover the mediation between the British landscape and tourism. Firstly, Tristram Hillier's

⁵⁷² Explored in Anne M. Cronin, *Advertising and Consumer Citizenship: Gender, Images, and Rights* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Joel Spring, *Educating the Consumer-Citizen: A History of the Marriage of Schools, Advertising and Media* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003). I see the term as referring to an association of consumerism with patriotism.

⁵⁷³ The 'Buy British' campaign was formally launched in 1931 and ran into the New Year of 1932. Its aim was to persuade British consumers to buy products made in Britain or in the British Empire overseas at the expense of foreign suppliers. See Stephen Constantine, 'The Buy British Campaign of 1931', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 21 Iss: 4, 1987, pp.44 - 59.

⁵⁷⁴ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (London: Macmillan, 1976) p.124.

Tourists Prefer Shell, of 1936, will reveal some of the assumptions of the travel poster and the dreamlike quality of tourist imagery. Hillier's poster also represents the solitary, romantic, male viewpoint of the tourist. Next, Maurice A. Miles' 1935 poster, *Polperro*, reveals the importance of the 'authentic' in tourist illustrations of a destination. It also shows the dichotomy between the representation of an unspoilt landscape and the effect of tourism on that landscape. In *Alfriston* (1931), by Vanessa Bell, Shell is calling out to the middle-classes with her modern image, in order that they can enjoy their ability to appreciate its sophistication. Finally, the style of Rex Whistler's *Vale of Aylesbury*, from 1933, refers back to an idyllic English landscape which exists for the city dweller as a myth. It represents for them 'real' England, away from the industrial towns and 1930s' suburbs.

In 1936, Tristram Hillier was commissioned by Shell to produce a 'lorry bill' as part of a series of posters whose subject was the preference that a variety of professional and working people had for Shell's products.⁵⁷⁵ Hillier's poster was entitled 'Tourists Prefer Shell' (Fig.35). Apart from the three landscape campaigns; *Everywhere You Go, See Britain First* and *To Visit Britain's Landmarks*, this series was the largest group of designs produced by Jack Beddington's publicity department. The subjects of the campaign, which ran from 1930 to 1939, ranged from charwomen to judges and was whimsically referred to, by Shell, as the 'Conchophilous Trades' series. Artists who contributed included: Graham Sutherland (Doctors Prefer Shell), Paul Nash (Footballers Prefer Shell), Ben Nicholson (Guardsmen Prefer Shell), as well as Edward McKnight Kauffer contributing three posters and Hillier producing two, including '*Tourists Prefer Shell*'. This chapter will explore these posters which were created for Jack Beddington, focussing on them as advertising images to encourage tourism. How is Shell hailing the tourist and what is it about these images that would attract the middle-class 1930s' motorist? As was seen in Chapter 2, the association of fine art with advertising was not new. It was always a tactic, throughout advertising's history, to use artists' work to link products with the high status association of fine

⁵⁷⁵ Tourism is obviously not a career, nor are 'Sightseeing', 'Smokers' and 'Blondes and Brunettes', three of the other posters but thirty of the forty-one posters were occupations.

art.⁵⁷⁶ Using fine art in this way was assumed to link the product being promoted to high culture and therefore to take on the same qualities of: taste, skill and value.

Shell chose to use landscape images that are ‘destination images’.⁵⁷⁷ They represent the site the motorist should search for, rather than representing the journey itself and the enjoyment that might be derived from the speed and changing views experienced by car travellers. It is interesting that the car never features in the landscape posters and that absence encourages a romantic nostalgia for the rural past. The selection of the destination illuminates and helps clarify the association the traveller brings to the individually viewed landscapes, and the choice of landscape reveals a wealth of social information regarding the associations connected to the destination.⁵⁷⁸ The chosen visible landscape suggests the human values and ideologies of the tourist, and the landscape artists employed by Shell were able to play an important role in creating visual representations that engaged with these values. The landscapes, images and tourists act together symbiotically to create inscribed landscapes.

Hillier’s poster introduces the key themes of this chapter. This poster is a seaside scene painted from the viewpoint of an unseen tourist with the emphasis on the four objects in the foreground: a trilby, camera, map and pipe putting us, the viewers, in the place of the tourist. In photographic terms, advertisers would refer to this as the ‘subjective shot’ and in many destination images tourists are shown admiring the scene portrayed with their backs turned towards the viewer of the poster. This gives the viewer the visual experience of seeing the world through someone else’s point of view and participating in their subjectivity.⁵⁷⁹ The designer of the ‘orient line cruises’ advertisement, from 1938 (Fig. 36) has used a collage of images to create the ‘subjective shot’ design. This plays with an advertising cliché, to give the impression of the figures seeing several views at the same time. Hillier, though, has been more subtle by implying the tourist’s presence rather than showing him observing the scene. This gives us the visual experience of seeing the scene

⁵⁷⁶ See Paul Messaris, *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (London: Sage Publications, 1997) and John Albert Walker, *Art in the Age of Mass Media*. 3rd ed. (London: Sterling, Va: Pluto Press, 2001).

⁵⁷⁷ Destination images are described as ‘The technique used to create a favourable image of a destination and promote its attributes for tourism’ in Ray Youell, *Tourism: An Introduction* (Harlow: Longman, 1998) p.20.

⁵⁷⁸ See Greg Ringer, *Destinations: Cultural Landscapes of Tourism* (London: Routledge, 1998)

⁵⁷⁹ Messaris, 1997, p.32.

from Hillier's point of view and participating in his subjectivity, associating us again with the artist/traveller and, by implication, with his status.

The composition is an example of Hillier's Surrealism and is similar in subject matter to the marine-based paintings he produced in the 1930s, using beach objects such as boats, anchors and driftwood to create unsettling foreground arrangements.⁵⁸⁰ He claimed, 'My aim is to build up a composition in a representative manner, assembling objects which have a mutual plastic component and a similar evocative nature irrespective of their individual function'.⁵⁸¹ Hillier makes it clear that the composition will be in a 'representative manner', which from a surrealist-influenced artist is unsurprising. There is no sense of abstraction being applied to the elements, and they are recorded in Hillier's realistic manner but the section of the quotation describing the 'mutual plastic component' and the 'similar evocative nature' is much more noteworthy. He created matching formal elements throughout the painting with the curves of the hat, shutter release and bottom of the map flowing across the image like a wave. The top fold of the map echoes the peak of the cliff and could even be confusingly read as a mountain in the distance. The patterns on the beach huts echo the striped concertina sides of the camera, the grain of the table boards and even the stripes on the lighthouse, whilst the objects on the table evoke the tourist despite his absence from the image. There is a De Chirico-like theatricality and foreboding achieved through the lack of people in the image and by showing the beach as apparently deserted. If there are any bathers, they are hidden by the brightly patterned beach huts and perhaps these stand in for tourists with their vividly coloured holiday clothes. There is a certain amount of dislocation and separation between foreground and background that is emphasised by the shadows from the beach huts and the foreground objects being cast in different directions, as well as the exaggerated scenery-like perspective of the foreground. The articles define the tourist as male and probably alone in his observation of the scene because the beach is empty and there is no evidence of a female or male companion. The tourist has the view to himself, giving him and us the viewers control over the scene. This deserted scene highlights the paradox of any tourist image, especially those of

⁵⁸⁰ Hillier's work is explored in Jenny Pery, *Painter Pilgrim: The Art and Life of Tristram Hillier* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008).

⁵⁸¹ Tristram Hillier, statement in *Unit One: The Modern Movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture*, ed. Herbert Read (London: Cassell & Co., 1934) p.69.

Shell's landscape campaigns: the romance of the scene unspoilt by other tourists, against the image of the site being used to encourage more tourism. The objects imply that there is only one unseen viewer of the scene and this shows him to have had the good taste to find a place that has been missed by the masses. It indicates the romantic personal relationship of the viewer and scene. He is the lone traveller contemplating the emptiness of the beach, sea and sky.⁵⁸²

The characteristically surreal dramatic space between the objects and the beach in the middle ground adds to this feeling of dislocation and isolation of the tourist from the scene. Most of the space in the painting is taken up by the apparatus of tourism, whilst the scene itself is relegated to a small part of the surface of the composition. The prominence of the camera in the painting is significant, with the shutter release appearing to lasso the ship and the beach huts. The photographer/artist, the unseen tourist and we, the viewers, are seen apart from, and dominant over, an empty and subordinate landscape, which Hillier distances us from and invites us to inspect. He frames the scene with the equipment of tourism and creates multiple layers of observation. The text, by Shell, frames the image and contextualises it as advertising, as well as commodifying the scene and framing it with the unseen tourist/artist/viewer. There is also the observation implied by the beach huts, structures for the watching of the seaside, that are turned away from us, implying our presence and participation in the watching. The scene demonstrates the variety of ways landscape can be viewed and dominated by people and is subject to their mastery. Hillier's male tourist can be seen as an example of the masculine 'mastery' of the, presumed to be, female landscape.⁵⁸³ The unseen male tourist, of the painting, is taking in the scene in a disengaged way, demonstrated by the exaggerated distance between the table and beach. The tourist gazes upon the seaside view, as the 1930s' motorist would gaze on the poster, with a masculine eye that implies ownership and control of the scene.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸² John Urry has described this romantic aspect of tourism in, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990) p.43.

⁵⁸³ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: New York: Routledge, 1993), landscape and masculinity between the wars has been explored in David Peters Corbett, 'Landscape, masculinity and interior space between the wars' in Steven Adams and Anna Gruetzner Robins *Gendering Landscape Art* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

⁵⁸⁴ John Taylor has described this masculine gaze as, 'The disengaged look of the universal man was (and remains) the look of mastery; gazing was (and is) a masculine attribute' in, *A Dream of England*;

The camera takes up much of the foreground, highlighting how the relationship between photography and tourism is extremely close and is important in the construction of tourist memories. Photography had become more affordable and accessible as the twentieth century progressed and by the inter-war years was an essential part of the tourist's paraphernalia. The manufacture of cheap portable cameras, daylight loading film and organised systems of development, all coincided with the democratization of travel and the expansion of tourism. Cunningham has described the 'obsession of many 1930s writers with the camera and that it too was widely seen as democratic'.⁵⁸⁵ Photography is the way in which the tourist's gaze is made permanent. It freezes time although, ironically, those frozen moments become signs of the past for the tourist and reminders of their mortality. When the motorist went searching for the scenes portrayed in Shell's posters they would hope to find the scene as portrayed and photograph it. The tourist could take advantage of the scene that Shell had turned into a commodity and produce a version of it to construct a memory of his visit. The quantity and range of Shell's landscape posters suggests that tourism can, as Crawshaw and Urry have noted, 'seem to be understood as little more than the collection of disparate and unconnected sights' and the photograph is important in the construction of tourist memories.⁵⁸⁶ Motorists in the 1930s who had seen the Shell posters and had registered them as sites to be visited could then photograph them and validate their trip. The photograph provides evidence of the visit: 'Photography has significantly given us the terms in which we recollect, explain, justify how and why we have visited various sights'.⁵⁸⁷ Photography can be, for some tourists, a way of capturing the scene and becoming the main purpose of their travel. To photograph is in some way to appropriate the sight being photographed.

The act of taking a photograph can, of course, interfere with the passive enjoyment of the scene. Hillier's tourist and, by implication, the viewer, has put aside his camera and is enjoying observing the scene. There is a suggestion of a

Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) p.10.

⁵⁸⁵ Valentine Cunningham, 1989, p.327. Cunningham also quotes the poet W.H. Auden in 'Letters from Iceland' as saying any 'ordinary person could learn all the technique of photography in a week.'

⁵⁸⁶ Carol Crawshaw and John Urry, 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye' in *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, edited by Chris Rojek and John Urry (London: Routledge, 1997) p.178.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.183.

relaxed appreciation of landscape which avoids any association with the stressful nature of touring by car. Susan Sontag has noted that taking a picture can also be reassuring, enabling the tourist to: 'take possession of a space in which they feel insecure'.⁵⁸⁸

But there is no sense of Hillier's tourist being insecure in the Shell poster. The image, at first glance, appears still and motionless but despite this apparent stillness there seems to be a stiff breeze affecting objects in the painting. The seagulls float on an air current, the map is flapping in the breeze and the ship on the horizon is in full sail; even the camera shutter release looks as though it has been caught by the wind. If the viewer could step into the image he might feel as if part of a film that has stopped. This dreamlike quality of Hillier's painting seems to resonate with the tourist wishing to find a destination that contrasts with the problems of the real world. Although, as will be seen, Hillier's poster probably refers to the Normandy coast, the company's landscape posters all depict Britain. Shell is promoting a dream of Britain as a rural utopia. Ning Wang has noted that 'every society needs not only a realistic image of itself but also a dream image that acts as a reference point'.⁵⁸⁹ It is in the nature of tourism to create a myth of the English countryside that re-enforces its role as a symbol for national identity. Tourism works through dream and myth.⁵⁹⁰ Shell is commodifying the British countryside and selling it to the tourist a representation of the British character.

The scene is fixed in time, just as the camera on the table would fix the scene at a particular moment. Like the camera, Hillier has included another important piece of the tourist's equipment; the map. It is another object that signifies the tourist as a middle-class motorist as the coach or railway tripper has no need for a road map. The map would seem to be of France, although it is indefinite enough to be almost anywhere. The source of the map and the image may be the coast of Normandy, Hillier has made the painting a generic scene of a tourist destination.⁵⁹¹

The development of road maps is an interesting by-product of tourism. Shell's US affiliate began to issue road maps in the 1920s, so it is perhaps surprising

⁵⁸⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977) p.9.

⁵⁸⁹ Ning Wang, *Tourism and Modernity: A Sociological Analysis* (New York: Pergamon, 1999) p.164.

⁵⁹⁰ See Ringer, 1998, p.21.

⁵⁹¹ The cliff and lighthouse in the poster also appear in the background of a Hillier painting of the Normandy coast from 1939, *The Beach at Yport*.

that none were produced in Britain until the late 1930s, when Shell followed the lead of its French company and began to market Foldex maps.⁵⁹² There were radical changes in the presentation of maps after the First World War and they played a significant part in the expansion of motoring and tourism in the 1930s. Based originally on pre-war cycling maps, publishers began increasingly to cater to the motoring public.⁵⁹³ Cyclists became less and less a feature of map covers and the car, usually open topped, became the subject of the cover illustrations. Ordnance Survey started to publish maps on the quarter inch scale so that motorists would not have to use several of their larger scale maps on a journey. Detail was not so important to the motorist and the longer journeys meant carrying fewer maps was more convenient. The numbering of roads had been completed in Britain by 1932 and it became more and more desirable to produce maps that showed roads not to scale but drawn thickly and clearly on the maps.⁵⁹⁴ Roads were also now coloured on the Ordnance Survey maps and the evolution of the motorists' road map in the 1930s was another part of the expansion of car tourism encouraged by Shell and subtly referred to by Hillier in his painting/poster.

David Matless has also noted the social importance of maps in the inter-war period to the formation of the 'geographer-citizen' who was encouraged to pursue a healthy outdoor lifestyle and the key document for the open air educationalist was the map.⁵⁹⁵ Although these maps were predominantly aimed at the hiker, the car was seen as complementing the walk. 'The car can be most useful....in a first general survey of the area enabling us to visualise the lie of the land.'⁵⁹⁶ The importance of this visualisation tool to 1930s' society, has also been noted by Valentine Cunningham, who places the map at the heart of 1930s' literature. 'Watching and mapping and traversing landscapes couldn't be more fundamental to 30s' literature's sense of itself, to the writers typically envisaging their art and politics as being on the road.'⁵⁹⁷ Later Cunningham also refers to '30s literature's obsessive map-making and

⁵⁹² A survey of early Shell road maps can be found at www.ianbyrne.freeonline.co.uk/shellgb.htm Accessed 12.9.13.

⁵⁹³ See T.R. Nicholson. *Wheels on the Road: Maps of Britain for the Cyclist and Motorist 1870-1940* (Norwich: Geo Books,1983).

⁵⁹⁴ This area has been explored by Joe Moran, *On Roads: A Hidden History* (London: Profile, 2009).

⁵⁹⁵ David Matless, 1998, p.75.

⁵⁹⁶ Tom Stephenson, *The Countryside Companion* (London: Odham's Press,1939) p.29.

⁵⁹⁷ Cunningham, 1989, p.226.

reading.⁵⁹⁸ I would suggest that the inclusion of the road map in Hillier's poster is an indication of its development as an essential aid to Shell's promotion of tourism but also as a piece of developing visual technology that was used as a metaphor in 1930s' society for trying to understand social changes through a spatial image. This also surfaced in books such as Morton's *In Search of England* (1927), Priestley's *English Journey* (1934) and Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), where the writers were trying to understand 1930s society through the mapped space of England. The importance Hillier gives to the map, (it takes up almost a quarter of the poster), reveals the 'obsessive' interest the tourist has for understanding his environment through the visual representation of space. Hillier has already indicated the tourist's control of the scene through the absence of other people who would be competitors for power over the view. The map in the poster expresses knowledge, mastery and command over the environment. Unfamiliar places can be presented in the familiar form of the map and guide book (such as those of the Shell series) mediate the encounter with these unfamiliar places. Hillier's map in the poster says the scene may be unfamiliar but the tourist can control it through the knowledge that a map provides.⁵⁹⁹

Hillier's poster highlights aspects of the relationship between the tourist and the site as well as creating a visual representation of the paradox of tourism, which is the effect it has upon the 'unspoilt' landscape. Images are so important to tourism that the industry is largely based on their production and re-production and it is the existence of these reproductions that makes a site, as Jonathan Culler has said, 'original, authentic, the real thing.'⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p.431.

⁵⁹⁹ There are some excellent insights into our relationship to maps in, James R. Akerman and Robert W. Karrow. *Maps: Finding Our Place in the World* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, Bristol: University Presses Marketing, 2007).

⁶⁰⁰ Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: criticism and its institutions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) p.160.

‘The most picturesque village in England’⁶⁰¹

The quotation that follows is taken from one of the many guidebooks produced in Britain during the interwar years and refers to the small Cornish fishing village of Polperro:

The topsy-turvy houses, the colours of the blue sea, and the darker blue slate rocks, the movement of the boats and the fishermen and the birds, the unexpectedness of each fresh angle, the outside staircases, the arched rooms and the tiny windows, the Italian packing-house for the salted pilchards, all these and a thousand other strange sights give the artist pause, and result in more pictures of Polperro being painted than any other English village.⁶⁰²

Cornwall had become one of the most popular holiday destinations and John Betjeman and Jack Beddington at Shell astutely chose the county for the first Shell Guide.⁶⁰³ The 1936 guide to Looe and the surrounding area, quoted above, describes the Cornish village of Polperro in romantic terms and, in this section, the image created by Maurice A. Miles for his 1933 Shell poster of *Polperro* (Fig. 37), will reveal how an advertisement functions within the tourist industry and demonstrate the relationship between images and tourism, specifically for Cornwall. Shell’s posters sought to exploit a new area of British tourism in the 1930s, that of middle-class car travel. Although Miles had produced two earlier posters for London Underground before creating *Polperro* for Shell, they were in the Expressionist style and, in order to encourage visitors to London Zoo, animals were illustrated in a similar manner to the paintings of Franz Marc. *Polperro*, on the other hand, appears to adopt Cézanne’s simple solid forms and use of brushstrokes to create an ordered composition that is calm and tranquil in appearance. There is a sense of permanence and monumentality that is clearly influenced by Cézanne, and Miles also uses the French artist’s diagonal brushstrokes, particularly on the right hand side of the composition, to create a structural stability. The brushstrokes also enable the viewer

⁶⁰¹ Unattributed guide book, *Looe: A Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to Looe, Polperro, Fowey, Falmouth and South Cornwall*, Tenth Edition (London: Ward Lock, 1936) p.143.

⁶⁰² S.P.B Mais, *The Cornish Riviera* (London: Great Western Railway Company, 1928) p.27.

⁶⁰³ Beddington had asked Betjeman to prepare a dummy guide, for which he was paid £20. Betjeman later canvassed Beddington to give him a full time job supervising the Shell Guides. David Heathcote, 2011 p.14.

to recreate the artist's touch and connect with the construction of the painting. Portraying Polperro as calm and stable were qualities that Shell wanted to promote as suitable for a travel poster.

Cornwall had been a romanticised tourist location since the mid-nineteenth century. Its wild coastline, exotic history, pleasant climate and remote Celtic culture had appealed to artists and writers who, in turn, attracted the rail-travelling tourist.⁶⁰⁴ The ease of rail travel to seaside resorts made them popular with industrial workers, who liked to enjoy the seaside collectively, giving these resorts lower social status and driving out those visitors with a higher social status.⁶⁰⁵ The middle class, on the other hand, sought out a very personal and specific ideal of England, avoiding what they saw as the vulgar destination resorts frequented by the working classes from the industrial cities.⁶⁰⁶ Miles' poster of Polperro was aimed at the motor car tourist, who was not interested in the destinations patronised by those limited to rail travel.

Travel posters, writing and guide books were not a 1930s' invention but what was new about travel advertising and writing in this decade was that much of it was based on the increasingly popular method of touring the country by motor car.⁶⁰⁷

Along with guide books, travel writing had become both popular and a way for novelists and poets to supplement their income. As Valentine Cunningham has noted, there was money in travel books.⁶⁰⁸ Cornwall had been created as a tourist destination by the railways in the nineteenth century and, by the 1920s, Cornish beaches had been discovered by the English holiday-maker but it was in the 1930s that less well-known villages, away from the railway lines, became the destination for the middle-class car owners.⁶⁰⁹ The subject of Maurice A Miles' 1933 poster for Shell, *Polperro*, was only accessible by motor car, the nearest railway station being four and a half miles away. This had not prevented the picturesque qualities of

⁶⁰⁴ Writers who have contributed to the myths attached to Cornwall's history, landscape and culture have included: Daphne du Maurier, R.M. Ballantyne and Wilkie Collins.

⁶⁰⁵ John Urry, 2001.

⁶⁰⁶ See Alex Potts, "Constable Country' between the wars', in Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Volume III, National Fictions* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁶⁰⁷ Cornwall was a popular destination for travel writers. H.V. Morton's car journey, which he described in 1927's *In Search of England*, including a chapter on Cornwall, was so well-liked that it was reprinted several times during the 1930s. Surprisingly one of the most admired; J.B. Priestley's *English Journey* (1934), was unusual in that it did not get as far as Cornwall. From London he made his way along the south coast to Bristol then headed north.

⁶⁰⁸ Valentine Cunningham, 1989, p.350.

⁶⁰⁹ F. E. Halliday, *A History of Cornwall*. 2nd ed. (London: House of Stratus, 2001).

Polperro being noted in the century before Miles' poster for Shell. In the 1870s, just before the extension of the Great Western Railway to Cornwall in 1877, Jonathan Couch had recorded that, 'The streets are narrow, tortuous, and badly paved, but picturesque from their want of plan'.⁶¹⁰ This picturesque appearance had attracted artists, during the 1920s, to such an extent that the prolific travel writer, S. P. B. Mais noted in 1929 that: 'It is difficult to move through its crowded alleys without knocking against one or more artists' easels'.⁶¹¹

Artists had been drawn to Cornwall long before the 1930s. Whistler and Sickert, for instance, were in St. Ives in 1883 and Stanhope Forbes had founded a colony in Newlyn when he went there in 1884, to find Walter Langley, E. A. Waterlow and several other painters already in residence.⁶¹² As Mais noted, the inter-war period was one of extensive artistic interest in the county. Bernard Leach had set up his pottery in St Ives in 1920, whilst Christopher Wood and Ben Nicholson had worked together in the summer and autumn of 1928 and it was in St. Ives that they first saw the pictures of Alfred Wallis.⁶¹³ Although Polperro is over fifty miles from St. Ives and Newlyn, the quotation from the Ward Lock guide book, at the beginning of this chapter section, indicates it was another Cornish site of interest to painters. All this artistic activity gave the county a bohemian aura that would attract the middle classes and with Cornwall's artistic reputation established, the motoring tourist would follow.

It is ironic that the writer, John Betjeman, who was closely associated with encouraging tourism by car through his work on Shell's guide books and advertising should look back nostalgically, in the 1960s' reprint of his Shell guide to Cornwall, on this growth in car travel. He saw it as the most drastic change to affect Cornwall's character and picked out the effect on Polperro in particular. He wrote that, 'under the veneer the motor car has brought, the old Polperro is still there' but he also wished to get away from the 'inevitable hooting of motor cars'.⁶¹⁴ Betjeman's guide book on Cornwall in 1934 and his work in the Shell publicity department under Jack Beddington had contributed to the successful expansion and encouragement of

⁶¹⁰ Jonathan Couch, *History of Polperro: A Fishing Village on the South Coast of Cornwall* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co.1871) p.40.

⁶¹¹ Mais, 1928, p.27.

⁶¹² Kenneth McConkey, *British Impressionism* (New York: Abrams, 1989) p.48.

⁶¹³ Noted in, Charles Harrison, 1994, p.188.

⁶¹⁴ John Betjeman, *Cornwall: A Shell Guide* (London, Faber and Faber, 1964) p.100.

touring by car.⁶¹⁵ Despite this, thirty years later, he distanced himself from his own contribution to this expansion and did this, apparently without self-awareness, through a reprint of his Shell guide:

The motor car has made the biggest change (to Cornwall). Roads have been widened, blocks of houses have been taken down in picturesque ports to make way for car parks; petrol stations proliferate; huge hoardings to attract motorists, line the entrances to towns.⁶¹⁶

Betjeman's concern about the effects of cars on a tourist destination was not unusual. In the 1930s, fears concerning modernization can be seen in the relationship between Shell, the motor car and the landscape. H.V. Morton, whilst encouraging car travel through his books, still managed like Betjeman to express his concerns: 'The danger of this increase in road traffic, as every lover of England knows is the vulgarisation of the countryside'.⁶¹⁷ The car brought trunk roads, ribbon development, gaudy illuminated garages, light industry and, crucially, tourism. As the 1930s progressed, the population of Britain became more mobile.

Miles' poster takes as its subject a fishing village at a time when tourism was becoming more important economically than fishing. In the 1930s, the county of Cornwall was in economic decline. Juliet Gardiner has noted that 'Cornwall's mild climate appeared to offer its only hope of salvation'.⁶¹⁸ Its two main industries, fishing and mining had been waning throughout the twentieth century. The number of fishing boats dropped from 953 in 1924 to 704 in 1936, with the number of fishermen dropping by 40% in the same period.⁶¹⁹ As Halliday observed, 'without the new tourist industry, the plight of Cornwall would have been desperate'.⁶²⁰ Contemporary travel writer, Cicely Hamilton was already observing the change in the Cornish economy:

⁶¹⁵ John Betjeman, *Cornwall Illustrated, in a Series of Views ... Edited by J. Betjeman* (Architectural Press: London, 1934).

⁶¹⁶ Betjeman, 1964, p.9.

⁶¹⁷ H. V. Morton, 1931, p.vii.

⁶¹⁸ Juliet Gardiner, 2010, p.54.

⁶¹⁹ F.E. Halliday, 2001, p.307.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., p.309.

Outside the Duchy the legend still holds that the fisher is the typical Cornishman, but in sober fact, that race of Cornish fishers is a race that is dwindling fast.⁶²¹

The character of Cornwall's villages was created by fishing but, by the 1930s, that industry had become a picturesque decoration for tourism.

Miles painted *Polperro* in the sombre earth colours of browns, ochre, reds and yellows. The use of this range of colours seems to imply the age and the timeless nature of the village. It also points to a natural relationship with the landscape in the way in which the buildings echo the colours of the terrain into which they merge. The hills behind the village are painted with the same range of colours and brushstrokes as the buildings, giving the composition unity but also tying the buildings to the landscape. The only hint of blue comes from the grey-blue sky in the top left-hand corner, whilst the narrow range of colours binds the forms together and these forms are created by a use of strongly contrasting light and dark. Despite the use of almost monochromatic, mournful browns and the glimpse of a gloomy sky, the light on the village appears to be a strong, direct sunlight. Shadows are cast by the buildings and the two cottages that are the main focus of the composition have strong sunlight catching the edges of the window frames, whilst the interiors of the buildings are dark, almost giving the impression of dereliction. The harbour contains only two boats and even these appear almost abandoned with the ropes of the nearer boat hanging limply from its mast. The light appears to emphasize and draw attention to the remoteness and isolation of the village, which is surrounded by gloomy hills and stormy skies.

Miles created, for one of the Shell's campaigns aimed at car owning tourists, what has been described, by MacCannell as a 'marker'. These markers stand in for the tourist sight. He uses the term to mean information about a specific site.⁶²² The poster of *Polperro* is a marker which creates a site that, before Miles created it, was undistinguished. It only becomes a site through the attachment of its marker. The image frames and represents the surface appearance of *Polperro* whilst, in turn, the tourist seeks out that site because it has been represented. The tourist does not

⁶²¹ Cicely Hamilton, *Modern England as Seen by an Englishwoman* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1938) p.50.

⁶²² Dean MacCannell, 1976, p.110.

necessarily need to understand anything about the site other than that it is picturesque. Lucy R. Lippard has commented that the ‘underlying contradiction of tourism is the need to see beneath the surface, when only the surface is available’.⁶²³ MacCannell also refers to the attachment of markers as the ‘sacralisation’ of the site.⁶²⁴ They become places of pilgrimage where the tourist can find the authentic. Polperro becomes one of these sites of pilgrimage through Shell’s framing of it as a picturesque destination, where the tourist will find an authentic England. In the relationship between site, marker and tourist, the marker is the most interesting component, without which the tourist would not be able to recognise the site and the site as a destination for tourism would not exist.

One of the most interesting aspects of the marker is its relationship to ‘authenticity’. Miles’ poster frames the village as something that is a site for tourists and the style of the painting reinforces, through its simple monumentality, that authenticity. It confirms the village as being original, authentic: the real England. As Jonathan Culler has stated, in relation to authenticity, ‘To be truly satisfying, the sight needs to be certified’.⁶²⁵ One of the characteristics of modernity is the belief that authenticity has been lost and only exists in the past, so the tourist is searching for the authentic in contrast to the inauthenticity of modernity.⁶²⁶ Because life in the present seems complicated then, by contrast, the life of a Cornish fishing village should appear simple. There is a connection between what became an urban aesthetic view of the countryside and how during the interwar years a ‘nationalist ideology of pure landscape came into its own’.⁶²⁷ The rural was the ‘authentic’ England and landscape, such as Polperro, could be created in the minds of the traveller as a destination that fulfils a function. This function was the pleasure in its authentic appearance and a reinforcement of the tourists’ self-esteem in being able to appreciate the landscape for its association with a sense of national identity. In the England of the 1930s, the motoring tourist was escaping from a perceived degradation of the environment, fleeing, what a contemporary writer called ‘those

⁶²³ Lucy R. Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place* (New York: New Press, 1999) p.37.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁶²⁵ Jonathan Culler, 1988, p.164.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.160.

⁶²⁷ Alex Potts, 1989, p.166.

repellent, jerry-built, sham-Tudor houses that disfigure England'.⁶²⁸ The viewers of the posters, I would suggest, are projecting authenticity onto the image. Jack Beddington had given the artists the freedom to choose the sites for their posters and Maurice Miles was presenting Polperro as an authentic site. Shell was creating markers, some of which were sites that had not been tourist destinations until the posters visualised them for the motorist. Like the Shell Guides of the 1930s, the intention was to establish some of the less obvious British sites, particularly those only accessible easily by car. Anything is potentially an attraction and it just took an artist, like Miles, to point it out as something noteworthy or worth seeing.

In order to do this, Miles, divided the composition vertically in two, with the larger shapes of the four or five cottages which are closer to the viewer, on the left. The cottages climb up the hillside away from the harbour and this is highlighted, in the poster, by the steps in the bottom left-hand corner and by what appears to be a wall that curves upwards as a boundary to a walkway leading away from the sea. The artist draws attention to the 'general air of rustic simplicity and architectural eccentricity' which gives Polperro its individuality and authenticity.⁶²⁹ There is no evidence of the motor car, even though the Ward Lock Guidebooks says 'the motor car makes Polperro easily accessible from all parts'.⁶³⁰ Although the steps on the left lead the viewer into the scene and the perspective of the larger cottages directs us to the centre of the painting, the image's space is closed down by the way in which the rest of the village is painted at a right-angle to the viewer. The observer is drawn into the village but then stopped from looking any further. There is a sensation that the space in the village is shallow and claustrophobic and this gives an impression of being surrounded and contained within the environment and the sense of 'being there'. Miles' painting appears to be influenced by the way in which Cézanne flattened space in his painting and linked the foreground to the background. The diagonal of the mast also recalls how Cézanne added energy to flattened blocks of colour by breaking them up with the diagonal of a tree. On the right-hand side of the vertical split in the composition, a group of cottages are portrayed on what appears to be the other side of the village's harbour. Their simplified geometric forms are executed in loose, diagonal brushstrokes, which manage not to break up the solidity

⁶²⁸ John Gloag, 'The Suburban Scene' in Clough Williams-Ellis, 1937, p.199.

⁶²⁹ Ward Lock, 1936, p.145.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., p.143.

of the forms by eliminating any accidents of colour. They also draw attention to the surface of the painting, emphasising its fine art origins, despite being a poster. The simplicity of the forms works metaphorically for the simplicity of the lives lived by the villagers and in stark contrast to the complicated life of the urban middle-class.

Although most forms in the composition are geometric blocks, any effect is softened by the curves of the walkways on the left and the hills on the right. The rhythm of light and dark mixes vertical and horizontal slabs of light in the village whilst the dark areas make inroads from the edge of the composition. The fishing boats, the reason for the village's existence, are relegated to the edge of the painting whilst the fishermen and their families do not appear in the poster at all. There is no sign of the village's inhabitants, which adds to the sense of timelessness and the picturesque. As will be seen in Rex Whistler's poster of the Vale of Aylesbury, Miles is also creating a 'dream image' where the occupants of the village, an unnecessary reminder of reality, are excluded from the image. Any portrayal of the occupants of Shell's chosen sites are rare in the posters, although people appear frequently in other tourist posters of the period, particularly those of the railway companies. In them, communal travel is linked to communal enjoyment but the Shell posters speak to the individual's enjoyment of the picturesque.

The four industries described in the 1936 guide book to Polperro - those of fishing, painting pictures, making handicrafts and, in the twentieth century, entertaining visitors - are virtually absent from the painting.⁶³¹ There is a sense that there was once a thriving community. S.P.B. Mais, in his travel book, *See England First*, (1927) drew attention to the activity in the village. 'If I were to settle in Cornwall, I would make a bee line this village, for it bears the stamp of vitality as well as picturesqueness.'⁶³² This may be because Mais' book is aimed at the car-less walkers, who used public transport, and he therefore does not have the motorist's apprehension of mixing with the working classes.

In *Polperro*, Maurice A Miles creates a site for the potential Shell motorist to visit. This 'marker' is chosen for its authenticity and by visiting the site, the tourist establishes a destination that can be remembered and visualised through further

⁶³¹ Ward Lock, 1936, p.146.

⁶³² S. P. B. Mais, *See England First* (London: Richards Press, 1927), p.61. Mais used this title two years after Shell's poster campaign, *See Britain First*, appeared.

reproducing it by photography, collecting postcards or even painting it. However, Miles' *Polperro* does more than act as a marker for a tourist site: it also points towards how tourist destinations were distinguished by class and how those distinctions were portrayed and encouraged through advertising.

Shell and Bloomsbury

During the 1930s the life of the Bloomsbury artist, Vanessa Bell had been considerably affected by the motor car.

The social possibilities of the motor car were such that Vanessa (Bell) much to Virginia's (Woolf) amusement placed a large notice on the gate leading to Charleston's drive, bearing the word OUT.⁶³³

The motor car made her home, at Charleston in East Sussex far less remote, and although she tried to discourage the casual visiting motorist to her home, she was encouraging motorcar tourists to the area by completing a painting commission, for Shell, of the nearby village of Alfriston (Fig. 38). The painting used in the poster was created by Bell in 1930 and published as a lorry bill in 1931. It was amongst the first group of posters commissioned by Jack Beddington when he became Publicity Manager for Shell at the start of the decade. The contracting of Bell to produce a poster image draws attention to issues and contradictions in Shell's advertising, including: the early stages of brand building by the company; the use of a famous but declining artist; a presentation of the landscape as familiar yet strange; and an apprehension of the effect of touring motorists upon that landscape. The poster's position as one of Beddington's first commissions also established a template for his strategy throughout the 1930s.

The choice of Bell as one of Beddington's first commissioned artists and her choice of Alfriston as a suitable subject for her poster along with the technique she used to portray it, will be explored in this chapter section. The selection of a small

⁶³³ Quoted in Quentin Bell's biography of Virginia Woolf: Quentin Bell, *Charleston: Past and Present* (London: Hogarth, 1987), p.141.

village in the Home Counties as a tourist destination appears to lack the appeal, for the tourist, of Beddington's brief that the posters should be out of the ordinary. Shell was attempting to create a desire in the 1930s' motorist to seek out Alfriston as a destination. How the poster does this encompasses the reputation of the artist, the painting technique used for the poster, the relationship of the middle class motorist to the English countryside and the role of landscape images to tourism. Tourism has been described as a quest for meaning that is lacking in the tourists' home environment and existing only in other places.⁶³⁴ The Home Counties as a destination was not a new one. The railways had taken walkers and seaside holiday makers to Sussex throughout the nineteenth century, but car ownership gave the middle class more freedom to explore.⁶³⁵

The village of Alfriston seems to lack the exotic difference that the tourist is expected to be searching for, so how did Vanessa Bell attempt to give it that sense of the uncommon? *Alfriston*, I would suggest, appealed to the middle-class newly car-owning tourist and therefore also to Beddington, for a number of reasons. Bell provided an image of the Sussex countryside, which was both everyday and at the same time out of the ordinary.⁶³⁶ She did this by using a post-impressionist style that was, by the 1930s, already over thirty years old but it would appear to the average tourist to be 'modern art'. She used this anachronistic style to give Alfriston an appearance that made it look like a shimmering, French village transposed to East Sussex. By giving this Home Counties village a slightly unusual appearance, she was taking an approach of making the ordinary both quirky and extraordinary. The approach was appreciated by Beddington and he encouraged it again four years later when John Betjeman began the Shell Guidebooks. These guidebooks also went for the different and quirky, with Betjeman developing design techniques which included using photographs of objects such as shells and repeating them to form semi-abstract patterns. The first guidebook, *Cornwall*, was 63 pages long and printed on glossy paper with half the book taken up with reproductions of old prints and black-and-white photographs that avoided the well-known sites and focused on

⁶³⁴ Dean MacCannell, 1976.

⁶³⁵ S. P. B. Mais, along with *See England First* had written several books on walks for the Southern Railway Company, including, *Hills of the South ...* Paintings by Audrey Weber. Maps by Helen Ray Marshall (London: Southern Railway Co., 1939) in which he described his test of a good hill walk as 'that I should never see or hear a motor car'. p.6.

⁶³⁶ Domestic tourism has been described as resting in the gap between the familiar and the strange: Lucy R. Lippard, 1999, p.2.

the quotidian, and like Bell making the ordinary seem extraordinary. They were clearly aimed at a smart metropolitan audience and were another way that Shell could select and target the middle class motorist.⁶³⁷

The most striking and unusual aspect of Bell's poster is not the subject matter but the painting technique that was used to create it. It is made up almost entirely of dabs of colour, predominately of yellow with only the church spire painted in flat areas of colour. Although the technique creates a decorative, mosaic-like composition, Bell manages to give the scene a sense of depth and space. The horizon is low, giving the observer a viewpoint which feels natural, as though one is standing looking at the village from the fields. The position of the horizon also adds emphasis to the sky, which is painted in swirling dots of green and yellow on a white background. The eye is led into the painting by the meandering river and, despite the lack of tonal modelling, a sense of space and distance are achieved. This lack of modelling includes the first line of trees but Bell contrasts the dark brown of these trees with the yellow and light brown of the trees around the church to indicate space and depth. The church has minimal modelling, with even the spire being painted in two colours which are tonally identical. The impression is given of a hazy summer's day, without resorting to a realistic portrayal but rather by the intense use of yellow and green. The river is portrayed successfully by only using a few dabs of paint in horizontal lines; the sky is effective despite its unnatural use of greens and yellow.

What makes Bell's technique even more interesting is that it is not one she uses in other paintings of the period. The painting, (Fig. 39) upon which the poster is based, does not use dabs of paint in such a consistently flamboyant way. *Still Life with Eggs* (Fig. 40), painted in the same year as *Alfriston*, 1930, is painted in the loose brushstrokes of post-impressionism but is completely different in technique from the Shell poster. *Alfriston* has been described as 'Pointillist' but it is a much looser, less precise application of paint than pointillism and could better be described as pointillist-influenced.⁶³⁸ The pre- First World War exhibitions of Post-Impressionist art organised by Roger Fry must have influenced Bell as it did her co-

⁶³⁷ John Betjeman, 1934.

⁶³⁸ The poster was described as 'pointillist' in, Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* (London: Macmillan, 1983) p.259.

designer and the painter she lived with, Duncan Grant.⁶³⁹ At the time he was better known as a painter than Bell, and he was also commissioned by Beddington to create a poster which appeared a year later.⁶⁴⁰ Grant had, during a brief period before the First World War, used a loose, spotted style reminiscent of the work of Andre Derain, who had known Bell and Grant in Paris and visited them in London.⁶⁴¹ *Alfriston* has some resemblance to Bell's other commissioned decorative work of the 1920s and 1930s and it may be that Bell was using the technique in to order distinguish it from her easel painting.

Vanessa Bell created an image of Alfriston that made it seem an attractive destination for the 1930s' motorist. The village appears to shimmer in bright sunlight and the potential tourist can imagine using the weekend to find this idealised English village. The poster was encouraging a leisure activity through which the young, urban middle classes could express their social position. They had the economic ability to own a car and the free time to use it for pleasure. Even in the early 1930s, when Bell created her painting, the majority of cars were bought for leisure and Beddington's posters were aimed at this motoring tourist for whom car ownership was fundamental to their aspirations and desires. The car not only offered the middle classes the freedom to tour but also gave them a chance, through the choice of model, to express their good taste.⁶⁴² Leisure pursuits such as the day trip to Alfriston were social practices by which individuals announced and established their position in the social world. The choice of preferred activity, such as visiting a small village in Sussex, was a practice that was highly structured by distinctions of taste. As John Urry has said, 'Such practices lead people to want to be in certain places gazing at particular objects, in the company of specific other types of people.'⁶⁴³ The largely working class enjoyment of being part of a convivial crowd at a seaside resort would be looked down upon by the middle class tourist seeking the privilege of gazing at the landscape in the much more select company of those with enough wealth to own a car. The places they chose to visit in their cars was being catered for

⁶³⁹ Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell and her husband Clive as well as Duncan Grant were all members of the Bloomsbury group.

⁶⁴⁰ *St Ives-Huntingdon*, part of the 'Everywhere You Go' series, 1932.

⁶⁴¹ Spalding, 1983, p.187.

⁶⁴² This has been explored in O'Connell, 1998.

⁶⁴³ John Urry, 2001, p.66.

by Shell who presented the countryside as empty of other tourists, even other middle class motorists, but especially the working class.

Choice of car and tourist destination contributes to an individual's social position but did the viewing and appreciation of Alfriston village by a Vanessa Bell in the post-impressionist style also make a contribution to a person's social identity? Pierre Bourdieu has said that one way of determining social position is through the appreciation of art. Bell's poster helps to determine this position through both its subject and its technique.⁶⁴⁴ Alfriston is an authentic English village unlike the artificiality of the seaside resort, constructed solely for tourism. Bell's image would be modern to the average viewer but not so modern as to be incomprehensible. Its use of a style, that at the time was at least thirty years old, made it appear progressive but understandable to the urban viewer. Pierre Bourdieu has proposed that taste functions as a marker of class. 'Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier'.⁶⁴⁵ The way in which Bell's image, consciously or not, as Bourdieu says, was consumed, fulfils a social function of legitimising social differences. By using Bell's modern, post-impressionist image Shell was avoiding the working class and calling to the middle class, setting them apart socially from those who did not own cars and were unappreciative of modern art. There was cultural capital to be gained by the motorists' appreciation of Vanessa Bell's image. Bourdieu has also stated that each class displays a particular pattern of taste. Aesthetic taste, he said:

distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is all that one has - people and things - and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others.⁶⁴⁶

It seems that Beddington was aware how his choice of artists would appeal to his intended audience. Beddington was part of the class Bourdieu refers to as being rich in economic capital: the employer class. This class, according to Bourdieu prefers the less demanding forms of avant-garde art than intellectuals and the art producers. These less demanding forms, those that conform to more traditional concepts of beauty, are an appropriate description of the landscapes produced for Shell. Beddington would, as the 1930s progressed, emphasise the youth of his artists and

⁶⁴⁴ Bourdieu, 1984.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.1-2.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p.56.

the 'modern' in their images and be supported in doing so by commentators such as Kenneth Clark and Cyril Connolly. By appreciating an image such as *Alfriston*, the motorist could align himself with the middle-brow taste of the employer class and think of themselves as aesthetically aware.

Alfriston was an early example of Beddington's method of using lorry bills to advertise Shell but Shell's press advertising took a different approach. An advertisement used frequently by Shell and in a multiplicity of ways, even before Beddington took charge of publicity, was the Janus-headed figure reacting to the passing of a speeding vehicle (Fig. 41). This image can also be seen as a visual metaphor for the commissioning of Bell's poster. Beddington looked forward towards building a 'brand' for Shell, an approach that would become a standard strategy in post-Second World War advertising. Rather than emphasising the quality of Shell's products and their functionality, he created an association with Shell and aesthetics, as well as with modern art and the English countryside. It was not the quality of Shell products that was being sold but a way of life that included travel, freedom and authenticity. In the inter-war years this was a distinct approach that separated Shell from its rivals.⁶⁴⁷ Outside Britain, a similar approach to advertising was being taken by Michelin in France. An equivalent to the way in which Shell was associating itself with British identity through using the countryside in its advertising was being developed by Michelin. Instead of advertising the qualities of its product, tyres, Michelin associated itself with French identity through its guidebooks and its star system for restaurants. It linked gastronomy as an essential part of French identity and the appreciation of good food and wine could be discovered as the tourist used Michelin's guidebooks to explore the French countryside.⁶⁴⁸ Both companies exploited aspects of national identity. Shell using the English appreciation of the countryside and Michelin with the French enjoyment of and expertise with wine and food.

⁶⁴⁷ Michael Heller, *Corporate Brand Building at Shell-Mex Ltd. in the Interwar Period*, CGR Working Paper 23 (September 2008), Centre for Globalization Research, School of Business and Management, Queen Mary University of London. <http://ideas.repec.org/p/cgs/wpaper/23.html> [accessed 7th September 2011].

⁶⁴⁸ In France, Michelin approach to marketing travel rather than tyres has been described in Stephen L. Harp, *Marketing Michelin: Advertising and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century France* (Baltimore, Md., London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

At the beginning of his commissions, Beddington, in contrast to his innovative approach of creating a brand for Shell, was looking back, like the two-headed figure, to the past by choosing the two Bloomsbury artists, Vanessa Bell and her partner, Duncan Grant. The reputation of Bell and Grant, as painters, was high during the 1920s and into the 1930s, although the Bloomsbury group they were associated with was becoming passé. Beddington may have been attracted to using Bell by her one-artist show, at the Cooling Galleries in 1930, the same year that *Alfriston* was painted. This exhibition was her most successful to date.⁶⁴⁹ She wrote to Duncan Grant to tell him that she had sold more paintings than ever before.⁶⁵⁰

Vanessa Bell, as one of the women artists employed to create the Shell posters, is an example of their ‘uneasy handling’ in art history that ‘oscillates between neglect and special treatment’.⁶⁵¹ Grace Brockington’s reassessment of Bell is a rare example of a woman artist from the first half of the twentieth-century being given the same amount of attention of her male contemporaries. Katy Deepwell has agreed that this reassessment is taking place but Bell remains an exception. The majority of women artists, including those who worked for Shell, such as Edna Clarke Hall and Cathleen Mann, had careers and reputations which are now largely forgotten.⁶⁵² Women artists were, and still are to a great extent, associated with the feminine and domestic. Lisa Tickner’s exploration of Vanessa Bell’s *Studland Beach* is an exceptional example of a British female artist’s work being given a comprehensive examination, where its ‘domesticity’ is seen as contextually important rather than as ‘feminine and hence deficient’.⁶⁵³ Despite this attention being given to Bell, British women artists from the post-Victorian to pre-Second World War period are generally disregarded and undervalued within accounts of art history even though they had achieved equality of education before the First World War. Vanessa Bell, Edna Clarke-Hall and Cathleen Mann, for example, all attended the Slade and made a career in art. They exhibited and were also commissioned for

⁶⁴⁹ Francis Spalding describes it as ‘her major triumph’: Frances Spalding, 1983, p.211.

⁶⁵⁰ Letter to Duncan Grant, February 7th, 1930: Regina Marler, Ed., *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993) p.351.

⁶⁵¹ Grace Brockington, “A Lavender Talent’ or ‘The Most Important Woman Painter in Europe’? Reassessing Vanessa Bell”, *Art History*, vol. 36, issue 1, February 2013.

⁶⁵² Katy Deepwell, *Women Artists Between the Wars: A Fair Field and no Favour* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁶⁵³ Lisa Tickner, *Modern life & modern subjects: British art in the early twentieth century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000) p.199.

commercial work. Vanessa Bell was described in 1923 by R. R. Tatlock in the *Burlington* magazine as, 'the most important woman painter in Europe' although, as Tickner has also pointed out, 'woman was the limiting term'.⁶⁵⁴ Their neglect appears to stem from the perceived double disadvantages of being British and women but the Shell posters demonstrate that the images produced by women artists in the interwar period were more than pallid reflections of their male counterparts.

Bell's painting of Alfriston is accessible and in no sense avant-garde and there is nothing in it that refers to the Bohemian lifestyle associated with the Bloomsbury group.⁶⁵⁵ "Bloomsbury", during the interwar years, had become a term, according to one writer, of abuse and was used to identify anything morally suspect.⁶⁵⁶ Many people thought them to be 'rude busybodies in painting, politics, economics and the novel.'⁶⁵⁷ Even Bell herself thought the best days of Bloomsbury had passed. 'I really think it is time someone pointed out that Bloomsbury was killed by the (First World) War'.⁶⁵⁸ Beddington's choices of Bell and Grant along with Cedric Morris, Frank Dobson and Edward McKnight Kauffer for some of his first landscape posters were not examples of the 'young and little-known artists' described by Kenneth Clark seven years later, in another exhibition of Shell's posters.⁶⁵⁹ Interestingly, only McKnight Kauffer was included in this later show, by which time he was 49. This first group of artists, chosen by Beddington, was certainly not young and little-known. Frank Dobson was 44, Edward McKnight Kauffer 41, Cedric Morris 41 and Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant were 51 and 52 respectively. Of Beddington's first ten landscape posters, which were published in 1931, only one of the artists was under 35 and the oldest, Dacres Adams, was 67.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁴ R.R. Tatlock, 'The London Group', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 43: 248, November 1923, p.250. Quoted in Tickner, 2000, p.143.

⁶⁵⁵ See Virginia Nicholson. *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939* (London: Viking, 2002).

⁶⁵⁶ Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits: Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and their Circle* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976) p.254.

⁶⁵⁷ Leon Edel, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions* (London, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) p.255.

⁶⁵⁸ Bell was reacting to a 'sniping' review of a Duncan Grant exhibition: Letter to Clive Bell, June 14th, 1931: Regina Marler, *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993) p.364.

⁶⁵⁹ Although this phrase was used several years later in Sir Kenneth Clark, *Exhibition of Pictures by Shell-Mex and B.P. Limited*, (Introduction), Exhibition Catalogue, 1938, Clark was describing the output of Shell during the decade. He had been an admirer of the work Beddington was doing at Shell throughout the 1930s.

⁶⁶⁰ Beddington encouraged this idea and even authored a book, years later, entitled, *Young Artists of Promise* (London: Studio Publications, 1957). The suggestion has also been repeated more recently in David Heathcote, 2011, p.14.

Bell's original painting of Alfriston was shown alongside the poster in 'An Exhibition of Pictorial Advertising by Shell' at the New Burlington Galleries in 1931. Although Bell's poster was praised at the time, her decorative work may have contributed to the idea that she was, along with Grant, trivialising Post-Impressionism. Her son, Quentin, said they 'allowed Post Impressionism to degenerate into something wholly frivolous and fashionable'.⁶⁶¹ Bell and Grant may have been at the height of their popularity when Beddington commissioned them in 1930 but their contribution to English art declined during the decade as they were superseded by a new generation of artists that Beddington began to use. Their contribution to art in this country has since been questioned with the first decade of the century being seen as their most successful.⁶⁶²

Bell lived the rest of her life at Charleston and in the same way that tourists were attracted to Cornwall through its reputation as an artists' colony, so Bell's image of Alfriston provided a version of East Sussex as a destination for the culturally aware. Bell's home at Charleston, only a few miles from Alfriston, was Bloomsbury in the country. Until the 1920s, the East Sussex Downs had been remote from towns and railway stations but as the popularity of the motor car, speculative building and tourism increased, the Sussex coast and the landscape of the Downs was threatened.⁶⁶³ The quotation at the beginning of this section about Vanessa Bell, who herself enjoyed using a motor car to tour France, could be said to illustrate the dichotomy between apprehension and appreciation of the motor car, as does the Janus-headed figure.⁶⁶⁴ This figure could be seen to represent the way in which Shell looked forward to the freedom to roam the countryside by car but at the same time looked back nostalgically to an uncluttered landscape that was free of tourists. Even in the 1920s, an observer had complained of the effect of tourism on Alfriston:

⁶⁶¹ Quoted in Leon Edel, 1981, p.255. Watney has also described the tendency to 'appropriate modernist formal experimentation for commercial or popular design and to deprecate its use in painting accordingly', Simon Watney, *English Post-Impressionism* (London: Studio Vista, 1980) p. 83.

⁶⁶² Charles Harrison has said that, 'In so far as either (Grant or Bell) made a significant contribution to the development of modern English art, it was made before 1920': Charles Harrison, 1994, p.150

⁶⁶³ See Peter Brandon, *The Sussex Landscape* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974).

⁶⁶⁴ This image was even included in the first exhibition of Shell's advertising at the New Burlington Gallery, in June 1931: G.F. Hawkins, 'The Peak in Advertising', *The Pipe Line*, June 24th, 1931, pp.248-49.

The village is usually spoilt by crowds of excursionists from Eastbourne and it is better not to stay for tea if you are in a hurry.....we did not feel really at peace again until we had crossed the river and climbed the hill to the tiny church of Lullington.’⁶⁶⁵

The motorists’ freedom was affecting negatively the appearance of the landscape. *Alfriston* embodies the contradiction between the freedom to travel and the preservation of an unspoilt landscape but it also illustrates the direction Jack Beddington would take in using artists to create Shell as a brand and the way in which those artists could create images that visualised the landscape as modern yet traditional, familiar yet out of the ordinary.

Shell’s Dream of England

The parents of the artist, Rex Whistler, had moved from their suburban home in London to the Buckinghamshire village of Whitchurch in 1932. It was a decision Whistler approved of, for he had always wanted his family home to be in the countryside and the garden of this new home, Bolebec House, faced, as his brother described, across the Vale of Aylesbury to the Chiltern Hills in the distance:

The garden ended in a crest of rook-racked elms, overlooking two fields of ours, and beyond them the wide Vale of Aylesbury, enclosed by the Chilterns. That is what he painted, to celebrate our arrival in the country, when Shell asked him for a poster, and in it, seated under a beech, he painted me.⁶⁶⁶

A commission, to create a poster for Shell, from Jack Beddington, was not the first work Whistler had done for Shell. He had already produced numerous press advertisements for them, including inventing his reversible faces (Fig. 42) for the company’s publicity.⁶⁶⁷ Whistler had originally been recommended to Beddington

⁶⁶⁵ S. P. B. Mais, 1927, p.246.

⁶⁶⁶ Laurence Whistler, *The Laughter and the Urn: The Life of Rex Whistler* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd.,1986) p.169.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.129.

by Henry Tonks, Professor of Fine Art at the Slade, who told Beddington that, ‘This young man has the greatest facility for draughtsmanship since the cinquecento’.⁶⁶⁸ The resulting painting and the subsequent poster, *Vale of Aylesbury*, (Fig. 43) was created in 1932 and published, as a poster, a year later. It could be argued that it was the most idealised landscape produced for Shell and created, to adapt Nin Wang’s phrase, a ‘tourist dream image’.⁶⁶⁹ Wang describes this as a particular way of seeing for the tourist. It is one that decontextualises the scene being viewed by ignoring the social context of the location. The ownership and labour used to create and maintain the landscape the tourist finds attractive are ignored. Importantly, before the tourists arrive at a destination such as the Vale of Aylesbury, they had already imagined the place based upon the poster image. The tourist image is, therefore, not realistic but a dream image which acts as a reference point for how a society wishes to see itself.

In creating this ‘dream image’ of the Vale of Aylesbury, Shell was achieving a number of objectives including associating itself with fine art and with an unspoilt countryside but, in addition, it created an image of how an urban-dwelling motorist wanted England to appear. In fact, Whistler’s painting had more in common with the eighteenth-century English landscape paintings of an artist such as Richard Wilson. John Barrell has argued that Wilson also portrayed an idyllic rural life dreamt about by the city dweller.⁶⁷⁰ The countryside of Wilson’s paintings was not portrayed as a place of tension. That tension had shifted to the industrial workers of the city, and just as in the 1930s, the countryside was seen as a place of recreation and refreshment, where city dwellers could rediscover their potential as sensitive individuals. The eighteenth-century English painters that Whistler looked back to idealised the rural workers, whilst in *Vale of Aylesbury* they had disappeared altogether. David H. Solkin argued that Wilson was selling a patrician notion of rural life to the bourgeoisie.⁶⁷¹ Just as in a painting by Wilson the only person to have the leisure and education to contemplate the beauty of the scene in Whistler’s image is a surrogate patrician, in this case Whistler’s brother, who stands in for the tourist as a man of leisure: the cultured admirer of the landscape. The poster is rare for Shell because it included a figure as a surrogate for the tourist.

⁶⁶⁸ Henry Tonks quoted in *Ibid.*, p.61.

⁶⁶⁹ Ning Wang, 2000, p.164.

⁶⁷⁰ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Paintings, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁶⁷¹ David H. Solkin, *Richard Wilson: The Landscape of Reaction* (London: Tate Gallery, 1982).

By expecting to see a pre-modern landscape which contrasted with their working life, the tourist saw this landscape as a dream image. Whistler was one of the British artists of the 1930s who also saw the countryside as dream image and painted it from the perspective of the city-dweller. Ysanne Holt has said that there is a 'circuitous relationship' between the way in which painters and tourists perceive the countryside.⁶⁷² The tourist seeks out the sites portrayed by the artist and the artist produces scenes that will, through Shell's posters, draw the tourist to them but, at the same time, both artist and tourist will avoid any interest in the rural conditions that produced the landscape. Shell and tourists engaged in this circular activity and Whistler created a dream image to encourage the motorist to seek out this idyllic scene.

The composition of the *Vale of Aylesbury* is an arrangement of vertical and horizontal forms. The mass of dark trees on the right divides the composition vertically from the left-hand side of the composition, whilst the horizontal division in the painting recalls the Golden Section with its distribution of land and sky within the picture frame. The horizon line is implied by the furthest line of trees, with the Chiltern Hills rising above this line and the building, which may or may not be a church spire, acts as a focus point for the diminishing outlines of the fields. The three large beech trees on the right-hand side give the composition its vertical axis and the linear space is created through the contrast in size of these beeches and the rapidly diminishing size of the trees in the Vale. Space is also created through aerial perspective, with the dark shadow on the grass and trees in the foreground and the lighter greens of the Vale's fields. The Chilterns, in the distance, are a brighter green than might be expected on an English summer's day when moisture in the air would give a softer, more blue-tinted hue. This brighter, sunnier rendering gives the landscape a slightly unreal Arcadian appearance. By skill at aerial perspective, Whistler implied that this countryside has clean, unpolluted air in contrast to the smoky foul air of the city. The view could be that of a country house overlooking its own parkland. The open space of the scene would also contrast, for the motorist, with the confined, claustrophobic spaces of the city and the stable unchanging view would differ from the fractured observations and dislocation of car travel.

⁶⁷² Ysanne Holt, *British Artists and the Modernist Landscape, British Art and Visual Culture since 1750* (Aldershot: New Readings, 2003) p.2.

Unlike Vanessa Bell's image of *Alfriston* and Miles' *Polperro*, which seemed to take their inspiration from nineteenth century French painting, Whistler's *Vale of Aylesbury* looked back even further to the eighteenth or early nineteenth-century English art, possibly even to the seventeenth-century paintings of Poussin and Claude Lorrain. Whistler had, like Richard Wilson in the eighteenth-century, spent time studying in Rome and had been influenced by the rococo before painting in the style of the English landscape artists such as Wilson and Gainsborough, whose work as Barrell says, 'evades the extremes of French pastoral painting and tediously minute Dutch painting'.⁶⁷³ Despite his time in Rome, there is no sense of the Italianate in 'Vale of Aylesbury' but rather a very strong sense of the influence of Wilson and Gainsborough. The influence of any contemporary painters, on the other hand, is completely absent from Whistler's work and contradicts the claim, often made for Shell, that they were introducing modern art to the public. His brother appeared to confirm this in saying that Whistler 'formulated no theories of art and was not interested in those that were current in his lifetime'.⁶⁷⁴ Whistler echoes the images produced for eighteenth-century landowners in which the property owner could literally shape the landscape of his estate to exclude the elements that would remind him of the labour that went into producing it. The artificial landscape could then be portrayed in painting as though it were a natural rather than a man-made creation.⁶⁷⁵

Whistler's painting created a tourist image even more successfully than Bell's *Alfriston* or Miles' *Polperro* by referring even further back than Bell and Miles to a pre-industrial England. To enhance this dream image he edited his field of vision to exclude all signs of Whitchurch village or even Bolbec House, the site from where he viewed the Vale. Whistler echoes the practice of tourism, that is to view the scene but at the same time to exclude the roads, petrol stations, cafes, working people, other tourists and any other element which would contaminate the dream image. The link with eighteenth-century landscapes is reinforced by excluding any evidence of the twentieth-century.

⁶⁷³ Barrell, 1980, p.36.

⁶⁷⁴ Laurence Whistler and Rex Whistler, *Rex Whistler ... His Life and His Drawings* (London: Art & Technics, 1948), p.28.

⁶⁷⁵ Explored in Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

The figure in Whistler's landscape admires it in the way the eighteenth-century landowners would pose in paintings in front of their estates but Whistler's figure is more contemplative than proprietorial. This solitary figure sits in the junction of the dark vertical and horizontal areas, created by the shadow on the grass and the large beech tree and is surrounded by a halo of light drawing attention to his presence. He appears to be in a state of grace with the light surrounding and radiating from him. He is young, relaxed and apparently free of the anxiety of modern life and therefore an ideal model for a young male tourist to aspire to. His age and gender are important because he is the inheritor of the scene, rather than the owner, and represents perfectly the ideals of the preservationists who wish to protect the countryside for future generations. Again, just as in the paintings of Richard Wilson, having the freedom and understanding to appreciate and contemplate the landscape is seen as morally worthwhile.⁶⁷⁶

The dark verticals and horizontals in the foreground of the painting, together with the dark clouds in the top right, created a frame for the Vale and gave a repoussoir effect, allowing the lighter background to recede and the viewer to look through to an idealised English landscape. The combination of the use of dark areas - trees, shadowed grass and darker clouds through to the middle tones of the green of the hills and fields to the lighter sky - give the composition a sense of balance and harmony. Whistler avoided the arrangement becoming too rigid by using irregular splashes of dark and light in the streak of lighter grass in the foreground and the light on the side of the large tree.

The aerial perspective combined with the elevated view of the patrician creates the illusion of a realistic if idealised scene. Any element which might have interrupted the illusion has been eliminated. There are no buildings other than the hinted church spire, no roads or traffic, no other figures (even farm workers) who would have created the landscape and none of their machinery. There is almost no evidence of human activity apart from the surrogate tourist who sits and takes in the view and gives scale to the landscape. Whistler used the romantic trope of the figure observing the scene drawing us into the work and this figure has the advantage of the romantic solitary gaze which, by implication, we as viewers and prospective tourists

⁶⁷⁶ Solkin, 1982, p.28.

can also appreciate. As tourist-spectators it feels as though, just like Hillier's image, we could step into the scene and share the luxury of the unpopulated countryside with the seated figure.

It is an image that is simplified and presupposes an urban audience. As well as being a biased and distorted reality - that is - an ideological representation - it is charged with an emotional representation of the English countryside. What is culturally desired, an unspoilt rural paradise, is amplified, whilst what is culturally disliked, farm workers, cafes, train lines, roads, cars, any sign of suburbia or industry, is hidden or erased from view. Shell was drawing on images from the culture of the 1930s and assembling a vision to feed back into that culture.⁶⁷⁷ The painting serves as a way of 'knowing' the Vale of Aylesbury for the potential tourist. Viewing the poster gives the city-dweller a sense of how the scene should or would appear if he could view it from the same point. The painting allowed the tourist to feel as though they have been there and possessed the scene, even though their own experience would include the roads, workers, garages, cafes and other elements of 1930s' rural life. Shell was creating what 'ought' to be seen, the 'authentic' countryside. Searching for authenticity or a quest for the simple or exotic is an essential ingredient of tourists' practice.

In order that the tourist could imagine the scene as a pre-modern landscape, posters such as the *Vale of Aylesbury* intentionally excluded Shell's own role, to provide fuel for the motorist, in the tourist industry. This very modern industry, tourism, relied on visualizing a landscape that eliminated signs of the modern world, so that Shell not only guided the motorists to what they should see but how they should see it. Like the figure in the painting, they could make the view their own by the solitary contemplation of the scene. Whistler was not unaware of the contradiction between an uncluttered rural scene and the effect tourism had upon it. His brother recalled:

Exploring landscapes, he (Rex Whistler) spoke wistfully of remembered unspoiltness, but then, out of his common-sense, allowed that you could not

⁶⁷⁷ Explored comprehensively in an exhibition at The Lowry, Salford Quays 29 April-25th June 2006 and in the accompanying book, Timothy Wilcox, *Day in the Sun: Outdoor Pursuits in Art in the 1930s* (London: Philip Wilson, 2006).

have clattered across the cowslips of Salisbury Plain in his father's Gobron-Brillié, or found petrol on the other side, had you succeeded.⁶⁷⁸

Whistler was conscious, according to his brother, of the dichotomy between on the one side being able to enjoy a landscape untouched by the twentieth-century and on the other that the twentieth-century provided the means, in this case his father's car, by which that landscape could be seen.

Unlike Vanessa Bell and the first group of artists used by Beddington, Rex Whistler fitted the description of being a 'young artist' when Beddington chose him to create a poster. At the time he was 27 and had been part of the social group known as the 'Bright Young People' during the 1920s and the early 30s.⁶⁷⁹ The group was a favourite subject of newspaper gossip columns in the interwar years and included figures such as Beverley Nichols, Evelyn Waugh, William Walton, the Sitwells and Cecil Beaton. Their reputation was based on boisterous behaviour, party-giving and sexual freedom. Whistler appeared in a group photograph in 1927, where the subjects were described as 'the most dandified exquisites ever placed before a camera' (Fig. 44).⁶⁸⁰ It included William Walton, Cecil Beaton, Georgia Sitwell and Stephen Tennant, who he knew from the Slade and who became one of his best friends and an occasional model. So Whistler may have been young when he was commissioned by Beddington but he was not unknown as an artist or in the gossip columns. The interconnected nature of the social circle from which Beddington chose some of his artists can be seen from how often the same names appeared in different accounts. Whistler, for instance, had known Lord Berners, who produced his poster for Shell three years after Whistler, in Rome in the 1920s and often visited Faringdon. Berners' visitors' book contained many of the Bright Young People and Cecil Beaton moved to a house not far from Faringdon, as did John Betjeman.⁶⁸¹

Betjeman seemed to be very much a mediator between many of the figures used by Shell and the English high society of the period. The year that *Vale of Aylesbury* appeared, 1933, was the same year that Jack Beddington paid John

⁶⁷⁸ Whistler, 1986, p.151.

⁶⁷⁹ D. J. Taylor, 2008.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p.7.

⁶⁸¹ Mark Amory, 1998.

Betjeman twenty pounds to produce a dummy for a trial *Shell Guide*.⁶⁸² Betjeman had access to the worlds of journalism, architecture, literature, film and through his wife, the daughter of a former Commander-in-Chief in India, the English aristocracy. His humour made him welcome at most functions and many of the 'Bright Young People' turn up in his letters from the 1920s and 30s. He appeared in an amateur film directed by Cecil Beaton in 1935, he knew Evelyn Waugh, Kenneth Clark and Cyril Connolly from Oxford and he arranged for T. S. Elliot to open an exhibition of Shell's advertising work in 1938.⁶⁸³ He must have known Rex Whistler from Whistler's press advertising work with Shell and through Lord Berners.

Whistler acquired his reputation as an artist at a very young age. Whilst still a 20 year old student he had been recommended by Henry Tonks at the Slade, as a suitable artist to carry out a commission to decorate the Tate refreshment room. Whistler devised the subject of the mural in collaboration with the novelist Edith Olivier, who had met Whistler in 1925 and, although a generation older, became a close friend. The story of the mural was as whimsical as the exploits of the Bright Young People, recounting the expedition of a group of seven people who set out in search of exotic meats. They leave on bicycles, carts and horses from the 'Duchy of Epicurania', and travel through strange and wonderful lands encountering unicorns, truffle dogs and two giant gluttons guarding the entrance to a cave. The story ends with the travellers returning to a joyful homecoming. Whistler's Shell poster was just as much a fantasy as his Tate mural.

As well as the recommendation from Tonks, Jack Beddington would have been impressed that such a young artist had been given the responsibility of the restaurant's mural. The result was exactly the sort of humorous approach that Beddington looked for in his press advertisements. This approach would also influence his career as he became best known for commercial work: advertisements: book illustrations, stage sets and murals, the prestigious of which was at Plas Newydd on Anglesey. His brother, the figure in the Shell poster, complained that Whistler's reputation was 'less a serious artist than he deserves', because of this

⁶⁸² John Betjeman and Candida Lycett Green, 1995, p.137.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., p.211.

range of work.⁶⁸⁴ His reputation as one of the Bright Young People would also have been a factor in his lack of a ‘serious’ reputation.

Vale of Aylesbury, although still a fantasy, was a more thoughtful painting and excluded the whimsy of his murals in preference for a particular, identifiable landscape. In contrast to Shell’s press advertising none of the landscape posters of the 1930s are humorous in approach and Whistler may have welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate an ability to portray a specific, if idealised, landscape. In the 1930s the Vale was a rural area not quite accessible from the local railway. Whistler’s family home was close to the end of the Metropolitan Railway, which had a station at Quainton, only four miles from Whitchurch. ‘Metro-land’, as the area served by this line was known, after the company’s magazine, was infamous in the 1930s for the way in which the farmland close to the line was being bought and used for house building. Where the railway company promoted a life in these new suburbs through its advertising, Shell used the countryside just beyond the reach of Metro-land’s suburbs to create a dream destination for the residents of the mock Tudor houses and bungalows to visit as day trippers. During the 1930s most of the extension of suburban building along the Metropolitan line went from London as far as Great Missenden, which was still only about half way to the end of the line and fifteen miles from Whitchurch.⁶⁸⁵ In 1933, the same year that *Vale of Aylesbury* was produced, the Metropolitan Railway was absorbed into London Transport and part of the line around Aylesbury was closed in 1935. The area visualised in the poster never did get the house building that happened nearer to London. Whistler’s painting exemplified the shift from railway transport to roads in the 1930s. This was a further example of how Shell aligned itself with the countryside preservationists who believed that nineteenth century *laissez faire* had destroyed the towns, and in the twentieth century was destroying the country.⁶⁸⁶ Shell’s policy of limiting its advertising in rural areas and promoting countryside scenes won the approval of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁴ Laurence Whistler and Rex Whistler, 1948, p.28.

⁶⁸⁵ Alan A. Jackson, *London’s Metro-land: A Unique British Railway Enterprise* (Harrow: Capitol History, 2006).

⁶⁸⁶ David Matless, 1998 p.28.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.47.

It was not just the preservationists who were concerned for the future of the countryside close to London. In the same year in which Whistler painted *Vale of Aylesbury*, G.S. Sandilands was advising artists, in a special edition of *The Studio*, that suitable sites were available to the artist if they looked carefully enough:

Even in Metroland all is not suburbia, for the wheatstacks and farm buildingslook remote enough from London. Actually if you study the map of London you will see there are many unbuilt spaces between the terminus of Central London Railway at Ealing and the more northerly stations on the Metropolitan.⁶⁸⁸

Sandiland goes on to say that artists can find places along the line that are ‘well worth exploring before the builder ousts the last of the farmers’.⁶⁸⁹ The relationship between tourism and art can be seen in the way that artists were advised by the magazine to look for those spaces away from the modern world of suburban housing, just as the tourist was encouraged by an artist such as Whistler to seek out those same places as a contrast to their working lives: lives which the potential tourist spent between their mock-Tudor houses and the office. There was no attempt in *Artists’ Country* to suggest sites for the artist that would portray the modern 1930s’ world of the city, new or old industry, communication or transport. Artists, it was implied, should, like the tourist, be interested and seek out only the pre-modern landscape.

Whistler’s painting may have echoed the eighteenth-century landowners’ recording of their property but it had a different purpose. Rather than reflecting pride in ownership for the landowner, it had the exaggerated promise of the pastoral arcadia for the urban or suburban car owner. During the 1930s the middle class who had their roots in the towns were increasingly attracted by an idealised version of the countryside. By opening country houses to the middle-class visitor, the National Trust gave them a sense of vicarious ownership and artists such as John Piper at Renishaw Hall continued the tradition of the painting of country houses. Shell, amongst others, marketed products by creating an identifiable, idyllic image of the countryside’s beauty and persuading motorists to visit it. As farmland, the fields in

⁶⁸⁸ C. Geoffrey Holme, Ed. with a commentary by G.S. Sandilands, *Artists’ Country: Special Autumn Edition of The Studio* (London: The Studio, 1932) p.36.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.37.

Whistler's painting would not be available for the tourist to ramble over. The land in the painting was not meant to be used by the tourist. At best, it would be viewed from a car window, or at least from close to a parked car. The motorist's observation of the scene would be temporary and separate, either by using the roads or finding parking space, neither of which are represented in the painting.

Vale of Aylesbury reveals Shell's careful presentation of itself as being aligned with the preservationists of the 1930s, who were resisting the effects of both suburbanisation and tourism, whilst at the same time identifying the company as a connoisseur of fine art. Not only was Shell connecting itself to the preservationists but it was also associating itself, and tourism, with fine art and giving tourists the opportunity to identify themselves as connoisseurs of painting. Owning an oil painting was possible only for a few privileged people but the motorist who observed the poster could enjoy the painting by simply seeing it on the side of a Shell lorry or in the even more art-associated surroundings of a gallery at one of Shell's exhibitions. Appreciating Whistler's image was a way for the tourist to establish his cultural individuality. In his own solitary observation of the scene, the tourist could identify with Whistler's figure. This private observation of the scene is an illusion created by Whistler which makes it appear that the tourist, who lived in the city or suburb, could find an alternative to modern industrial life just beyond the suburbs. The Vale of Aylesbury was presented as a mythical place that could compensate for the fragmented crowded urban life. In one way the figure in the painting does resemble the eighteenth-century landowner by appearing to control the view, eliminating the hard work that created the landscape. However, rather than looking out at the viewer with pride in ownership, he contemplates the scene and invites the viewer to join him in admiring it. The painting, like tourism, was a compensation for modern work and urban existence and, like the tourist gaze, it was superficial in seeking out the picturesque and eliminating or ignoring anything that intrudes into the idealised landscape.

Shell played a part in defining the way in which the British countryside was perceived as a tourist destination in the 1930s but at the same time created a definition of what Britain was and how it was visualised by its population.

These campaigns also paved the way for another development: that of brand building. The association of Shell's name with fine art and the preservation of the countryside rather than any promotion of the qualities of its products would become a common strategy in post-war advertising. Beddington's commissions not only reflected issues of national identity and rural preservation but played a part in creating those issues.

In this chapter I have shown the three-way relationship between the countryside, Shell's posters, and tourism during the 1930s. The intention was to show what has been described as a circuitous connection between these three participants as actually a symbiotic process. Each member in the relationship relied upon the other two as part of the relatively new leisure activity of motorcar touring. Shell visualised and commodified the British landscape to create 'dream' images that would attract the car-owning tourist and, in that way, sell its products, whilst at the same time establishing the company's name as a patron of fine art and young artists while aligning itself with those who were concerned for the preservation of the countryside. The fact that Shell achieved this, without attracting criticism highlighting the dichotomy between an unspoilt landscape and the effects of tourism, was one accomplishment of its 1930s' advertising. Rural landscapes and the villages which occupied those landscapes benefited from Shell's portrayal of them as the 'authentic' Britain in contrast to the industrialised urban towns and cities. They were portrayed as free of the effects of industrialisation and the perceived blight of 1930s' suburbanisation. At a time of the decline of agriculture and fishing, rural economies began to rely on the economic benefits of tourism. Villages such as Polperro had more people involved in catering for tourists than in the fishing industry. The 1930s' tourist found, in Shell's images, a contrast to their everyday working lives and the bustle of the cities and towns. The claustrophobic conurbations could be exchanged for the fresh air, freedom of movement and pre-industrial landscapes of the countryside. This chapter has explored how Shell's posters, the British countryside and tourism functioned and interacted with each other in a way which revealed many of the social and economic issues of the 1930s.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to discover why the Shell Oil Company used a wide variety of landscape images and artists to create three poster campaigns in the 1930s. It also asked whether these posters could reveal many of the social, economic and cultural issues that concerned Britain during the decade before the Second World War. The posters did not commend the qualities of Shell's petroleum products but instead created destination images for the increasing number of motorists taking to the roads in the inter-war period. Rather than the two copy lines at the top and bottom of the posters referring to the qualities of Shell's products, they encouraged motorists to visit the British countryside and assured them that 'You Can be Sure of Shell'. The obvious answer as to why Shell used this strategy was that the company wanted motorists to buy its products to reach the illustrated destinations. This thesis has proposed the reasons for Shell's non-product based posters are more complex and revealing than this explanation, as well as illuminating issues that included associating the company with fine art, promoting tourism and, through the posters' positioning on delivery lorries, avoiding contemporary criticism of rural advertising.

Studying the posters required a dual approach. On the one hand they are advertisements, the function of which was to promote Shell's products by associating the company with sophistication, travel and the countryside. All these elements were intended to promote Shell and build its brand as a responsible and cultured company. On the other hand, they are based upon landscape paintings produced by over fifty artists and designers and reflect the ideas, interests and approaches of these creative practitioners in the 1930s. This thesis has adopted this dual approach by investigating the posters as material objects and analysing their success as advertisements but also by looking at the images as reflecting the style, approach and interests of the practitioners who created them before the Second World War.

Shell's approach to advertising was unusually sophisticated for the period but had been influenced by the posters created for the railway companies, especially London Underground. Although superficially similar in wishing to encourage travel, a revealing difference was the way in which the railway posters frequently portrayed

tourists enjoying themselves either in small groups, couples or even large crowds. There were no portrayals of motorists in Shell posters. Figures of any kind, such as the young man who appeared in Rex Whistler's poster, were rare. The absence of people, motor cars, garages and even roads is significant. It reveals the class-based approach of the advertising. The middle-class motorist was being encouraged to seek out tourist sites away from the destinations the working-class reached by mass public transport. The landscapes were selected and portrayed by Shell's artists, creating a tourist attraction which, in its turn, helped to encourage economic activity. The landscapes became fixed as a representation of Britain, the 'real' Britain of the countryside. Issues of class, social status, patriotism and nationalism can be drawn out from this triadic relationship between Shell's posters, landscape and tourism.

Although Beddington was portrayed, and portrayed himself, as a patron of young artists, a careful examination of the range of artists he used reveals a wide range of ages, abilities and approaches. Whilst the breadth of images produced was a unique sample of British landscape art, Beddington was, I suggested, less an altruistic patron of art but rather a subtle and sophisticated promoter of the Shell name. The model that suggests Beddington was solely responsible for the direction of Shell's advertising through his discernment, purpose and good taste is one that has continued to the present day. A similar explanation persists about Frank Pick at London Underground and draws on a paradigm of artistic production in which the discerning patron recognises the quality of the artistic producer and gives him encouragement and support. This thesis has shown that Beddington made decisions that were rooted in the economic structure of oil and petrol marketing, as well as the wider social and cultural environment in which he operated.

The uncompetitive structure of the British petroleum market was an important factor in the approach to advertising taken by Shell's publicity manager, Jack Beddington. Although the existence of the cartel in petroleum product supply is still a sensitive subject for the companies, histories of the oil industry revealed that there was a successful attempt in 1930s' Britain to control the market. The Achnacarry Agreement enabled Beddington to move away from product based advertising towards brand building. The qualities Beddington wanted the public to associate with Shell were the cultural status of fine art, idealisation of the British

landscape and the appreciation of little-known tourist destinations away from the working-class seaside resorts.

The Shell posters offer a resource which enables a revised interpretation of modernism between the wars. The posters appear, on first viewing, to be anti-modernist in their representational interpretations of landscape. However, rather than anti-modernist, this is better understood through the lens that David Peters Corbett has proposed as a replacement for the belief that the dominant concerns of modernist art were the pursuit of pure painting and the denigration of the importance of subject matter. This, he suggests, has been superseded by an approach that defines modernism as that mode in painting which engages with society and the consequences of modernity and modernization.⁶⁹⁰ He has also suggested that, if modernism is the necessary expression of, or response to, the experience of modernity, 'then surely England has more than enough of the commodity to justify a prolonged and rigorous modernist life'.⁶⁹¹ Shell's posters speak about the modern experiences of travel, tourism, the contrasts of the city and the countryside and of work and leisure. Similarly, Grace Brockington has suggested that a model of art in Britain that sees it as inferior to European art should be replaced by a model of plural modernisms that emphasises local differences of context and meaning.⁶⁹² While Charles Harrison described British landscape painting as unremarkable 'by virtue of the artists' choice of subject', a model of plural modernism, on the other hand, allows for an exploration of the Shell posters as saying something meaningful in response to the modernity of 1930s' Britain.⁶⁹³ This thesis has explored how Shell was part of a debate concerning the repositioning of the modern artist in relation to the forms of mass culture. Shell allowed artists to engage with advertising without giving up his or her identity as an artist. Moreover, the strategy of the posters was to emphasise and celebrate their identity. The posters were a hybrid that gave the artists an opportunity to move to a position between an expressive and inward-looking approach to art and pure commercial art. Shell's posters were seen by artists like Paul Nash and commentators like Kenneth Clark as a democratic space for the production of art that allowed fine art to participate in the mass culture of the 1930s.

⁶⁹⁰ David Peters Corbett, 'Seeing in Modernity: Walter Sickert's Music Hall Scenes, c. 1887-1907, and English Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity*, vol.7, no.2, April 2000.

⁶⁹¹ David Peters Corbett, 1997, p.4.

⁶⁹² Grace Brockington, 2013, p.143.

⁶⁹³ Charles Harrison, 1994, p.168.

The dual approach the thesis takes to exploring the Shell posters as both advertisements and paintings echoed the debate taking place in the 1930s about the relationship between fine and commercial art. The debate was driven principally by an economic concern for the standard of British manufacturing design but there was also an important aesthetic argument occurring involving the status, purpose and relationship between the two fields. Shell was frequently cited, in the interwar period, as an exemplar of the integration of art and design because of its successful use of artists and designers. Their use by the company helped Beddington present Shell as a discerning and culturally aware company but it also provided a model for those writers, commentators and practitioners who saw no difference between the two fields. The importance of the debate can be seen from the calibre of writers involved, as well as the government committees set up to enquire into the relationship between art and industry.

The ‘connective mechanisms’ of education, art, advertising, commerce and social life call attention to the central role social connections played in producing the posters.⁶⁹⁴ Personal relations developed in such sites as art schools, nightclubs, art societies, exhibitions, country house weekends and the work places of advertising, book illustration and studios. Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘fields’ and ‘cultural capital’ have helped to examine these personal relationships. As was seen, Beddington was an employer who mixed socially with his artists and John Betjeman was a key figure in the network of personal relations connected to Shell. These networks illuminate the complex social relations that existed in the interwar period.

An example of these complex social relations can be seen in the parallel careers of Beddington and Frank Pick. Both were involved as important operators in the cultural societies and institutions of the interbellum art world. Pick and Beddington were, for example, signatories to a letter to *The Times* in 1939 proposing that a Central Institute of Art and Design should be created to support artists and designers during the war.⁶⁹⁵ Pick had founded the DIA before the First World War and was an executive member of the CPRE who had praised Shell’s advertising.

⁶⁹⁴ ‘Connective mechanisms’ is a helpful and descriptive phrase used by Pietsch, 2013, p.6.

⁶⁹⁵ Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 21st October 1939. There were fifteen other signatories besides Pick and Beddington. They included: Kenneth Clark, P.H. Jowett, Principal of the RCA, five artists: Augustus John, Dame Laura Knight and Henry Moore, as well as Shell artists, Paul Nash and Duncan Grant.

Beddington was a fellow of the Society of Industrial Artists and was on the council of the RCA where many of the artists and designers used by both men were trained. Rather than being an outsider in 1930s Britain, he was ‘embedded and located within very specific social and cultural milieux’.⁶⁹⁶ As well as being embedded in the social and cultural networks that were important to the visual culture of Britain, Beddington had been born into a ‘family tradition of sophisticated culture’.⁶⁹⁷ This family background firmly established Beddington in an aesthetic ‘field’ from an early age and brought all the network advantages of his class to the creation of Shell’s posters. Similarly, one of Shell’s artists, Paul Nash, has been described, by Cheryl Buckley, as part of a matrix linking social, artistic and educational networks. The examination of the network of social interaction, informed by Bourdieu’s concept of social space, gives an insight into the social, educational, commercial and artistic ‘connective mechanisms’ that created Shell’s posters.

As was seen in Chapter 2, there was a strong desire amongst many artists, writers and industrialists to improve the standard of British design. Institutions that were founded in the first three decades of the twentieth-century, such as the DIA, SIA, and the British Institute of Industrial Artists (BIIA) were influenced by the success of the Deutsche Werkbund in Germany in stimulating better quality industrial design.⁶⁹⁸ Shell’s designs were used as exemplars of good design by those, including Beddington, who created and controlled the network of institutions committed to improving visual culture in Britain. They admired German design and attributed its success to the close relationship between design and industry. There was, however, a more ambivalent attitude towards America. J. B. Priestley had complained, in 1934, about the Americanisation of England with its ‘cheap’ filling stations, dance halls, cinemas and cocktail bars.⁶⁹⁹ The literary critic F. R. Leavis deplored the Americanisation of the English language and wrote a guide to help teachers maintain English culture.⁷⁰⁰ Despite this, there was no anti-Americanism amongst British advertisers. Jack Beddington visited the United States to absorb and

⁶⁹⁶ Buckley, 2007, p.84.

⁶⁹⁷ ‘Jack Beddington’, *Design*, no 31, July 1951, p.15. Beddington had three uncles and four aunts. One aunt was a friend of Oscar Wilde, another, Violet Schiff, was a literary hostess. A cousin, Edward Beddington-Behrens, was a financial advisor to United Artists and a sponsor of Stanley Spencer. See Artmonsky, 2006, p.14.

⁶⁹⁸ Buckley, 2007, p.49.

⁶⁹⁹ Priestley, 1934.

⁷⁰⁰ F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933).

learn from American advertising and articles on the country's publicity appeared regularly in *Commercial Art*.⁷⁰¹

There is further opportunity to develop comparative research into how American and European companies developed 'branding' in an equivalent way to Shell and whether these companies used fine art as part of this strategy, particularly in travel posters. The concept of branding, where the focus of advertising is on producing a recognisable company name and associating that name with imputed characteristics has its origins in the interwar period.⁷⁰² This dissertation has explored how Shell marketed its products by associating the company with fine art, the countryside and the freedom to travel. Naomi Klein has described branding as a 'necessity of the machine age – within a context of sameness, image based difference had to be manufactured'.⁷⁰³ In the 1920s, the American car manufacturer, General Motors, created an association for the company with middle-class, dependable service professionals. It created stories in the company's advertising about the local doctor, preacher or pharmacist, using GM cars to carry out their community tasks.⁷⁰⁴ As previously discussed, the French tyre manufacturer, Michelin, rather than promoting the quality of its products associated itself with travel, destinations and a way of life.⁷⁰⁵ As well as research along these lines, looking at the emergence of branding and using comparative material with related commercial concerns beyond Britain, further research is also possible on the involvement of American and European artists in poster design. Picasso, Matisse and Magritte all produced posters at this time and the poster designers, Adolph Mouron (known as Cassandra), Paul Colin in France and Federico Seneca in Italy were all producing work of the highest standard. Another fruitful area of comparative research, beyond Britain, would be the posters produced by the American oil companies, such as Texaco, Amoco and Chevron. A preliminary viewing of these 1930s posters reveals an emphasis, like General Motors, on the reliability and trustworthiness of the companies' products rather than potential destinations. It may be possible that this reflects a more central role of car travel in the America way of life in comparison with Britain. The Shell posters were promoting travel for pleasure whilst American companies were aiming

⁷⁰¹ Artmonsky, 2006, p.53.

⁷⁰² Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London: Flamingo, 2001).

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁷⁰⁴ Heller, 2008, p.7.

⁷⁰⁵ Harp, 2001.

to reassure their customers that their products would enable them to maintain and enjoy a lifestyle heavily dependent on car travel.

If the debate on the relationship between fine and commercial art was driven by economic concerns about the standard of British design, economics was also forcing many artists to diversify into commercial work. The slump of the early 1930s was a difficult time for many artists to make a living from easel painting and many diversified into journalism, commercial design, photography or film making. This economic necessity for diversification has led to commercial work, such as the Shell posters, to be seen as less important and the design work of their creators has since been largely ignored by the histories of art that focus on the 1930s. This, I would suggest, underestimates the importance of commercial production to their body of work and the development of their style, approach and techniques. Graham Sutherland was one example of an artist whose artistic direction benefited from his work for Shell but the importance of his commercial work is largely forgotten by his biographers.

Another important debate that helped to shape Shell's advertising concerned the preservation of the countryside. Shell was being disingenuous in promoting itself as a preserver of the countryside, first of all by removing its billboards from country areas and encouraging rural garage owners to simplify and reduce advertising on their premises. Shell also promoted itself through its idealised images of the countryside that extolled the beauty of the landscape. This encouraged tourism that in turn was one of the main threats to the appearance of the landscape. This idealisation also reflected the importance of the countryside to the British national identity. As this thesis suggested, the countryside was often considered to be the 'real' Britain. However, this 'real' Britain was usually portrayed as the south-east of England and this was reflected in the majority of the posters portraying this region.

Although seven posters, including one of the 'Conchophilous' series, were analysed in detail, the remaining fifty-five are a potentially remarkable source of further research. It was not possible to include some of the most talented artists and designers who worked for Shell in the 1930s. Work that would welcome further investigation includes posters by Barnett Freeman, Edward Bawden, Richard Guyatt and Clifford and Rosemary Ellis. Another area that was constrained from further

investigation by lack of space was the way in which Beddington provided opportunities for women to produce art for commercial use. Women artists were given very little press attention in the 1930s and, although artists such as Barbara Hepworth were active exhibitors, critics rarely reviewed their shows. Apart from Vanessa Bell, six other women artists produced posters for Shell, including Pamela Drew, Eve Kirk, Cathleen Mann and Margaret Brynhild Parker. The reason for the prominence of women in poster design is a potentially interesting area of research that could illuminate issues of female participation in the arts, gender prejudice, and education in the 1930s.

The posters were, first and foremost, tourist images and the way in which tourist destinations are created was one of the principal aspects of the research. With a small number of exceptions, research into the history of the poster is limited despite them being collectable and ubiquitous. This thesis charts how and why a unique group of posters from the 1930s was produced, used and encountered. It aimed to demonstrate how the analysis of an ephemeral art form can reveal the social, economic and cultural concerns of a specific period in time.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Photograph of a Shell billboard being removed from the countryside. From Harry Peach and Noel Carrington, Ed., *The Face of the Land: The Year Book of the Design & Industries Association 1929-1930*.



Fig. 2. A Shell delivery lorry from the 1930s showing the position of the posters.

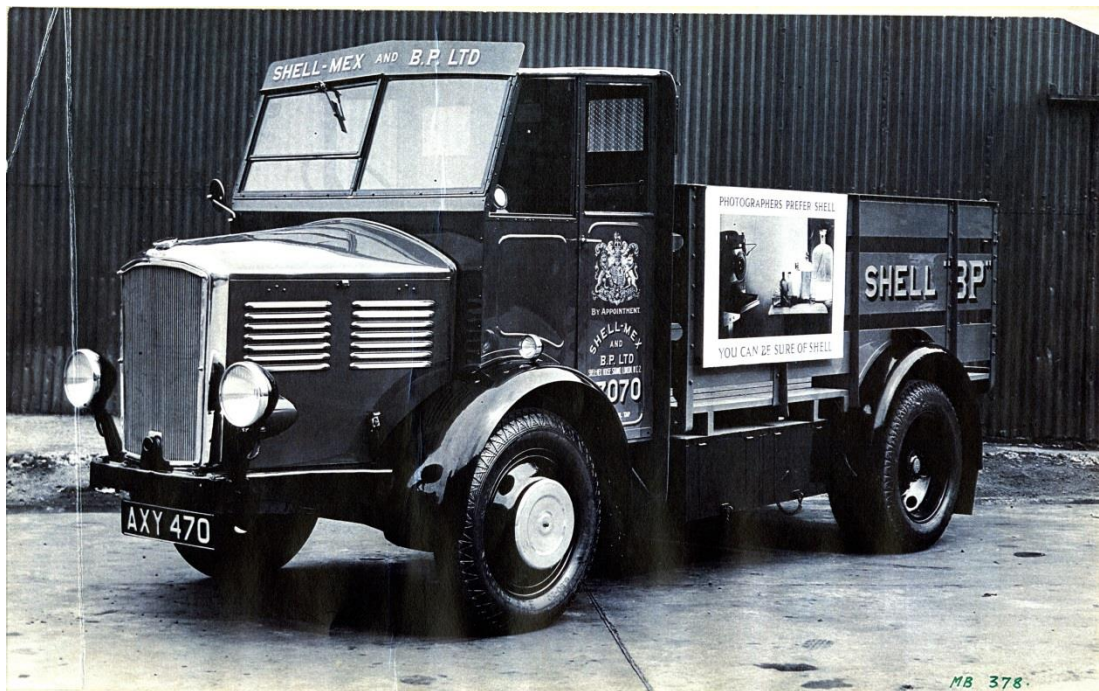


Fig. 3. Jack Beddington.



Fig. 4. John Armstrong, *Artists Prefer Shell*.

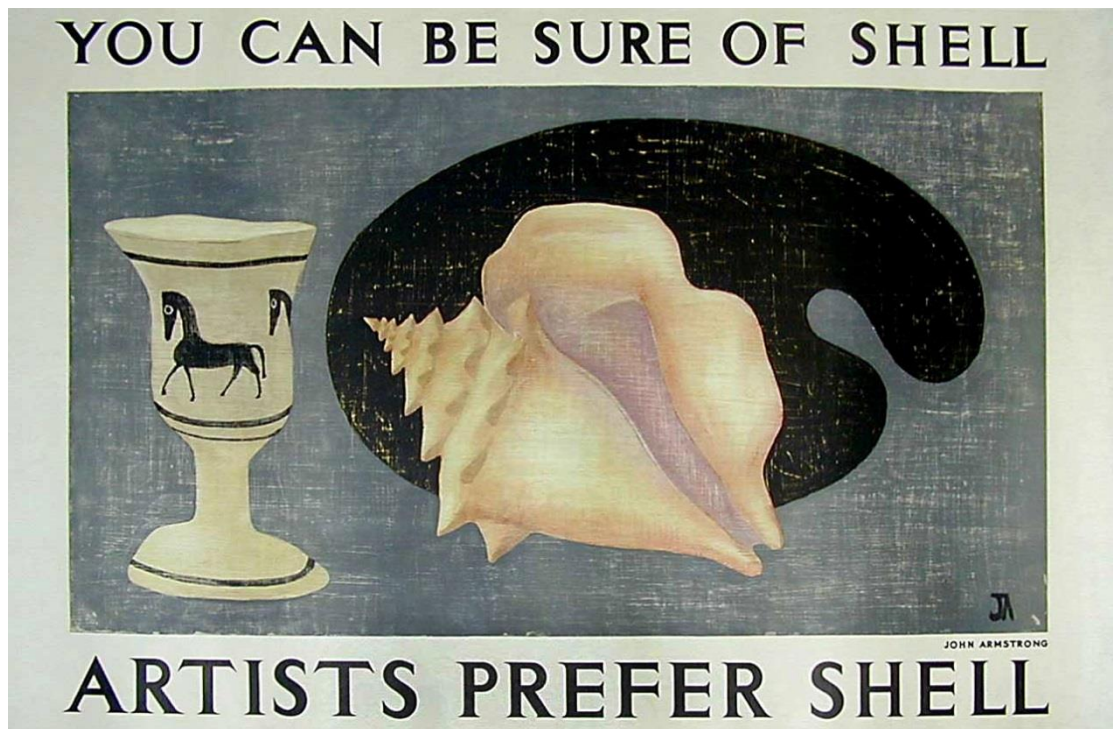


Fig. 5. Shell Poster from 1920.



Fig. 6. Fig. 5 poster in position.



Fig. 7. *Sma' Glen. Crieffe.*



Fig.8. Jean D'Ylen Shell poster.



Fig. 9. H.M. Bateman cartoon.

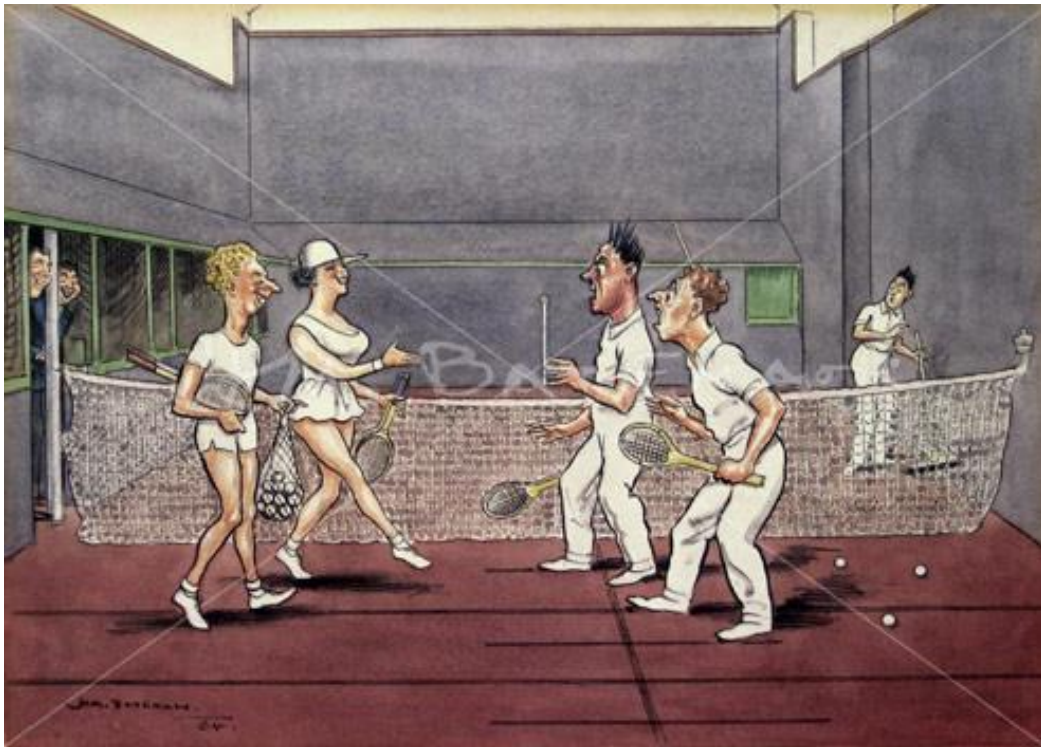


Fig. 10. H.M. Bateman cartoon for Shell.



Fig. 11. Dunlop Advertisement.



Fig. 12. Poster display on London Underground.



Fig. 13. Sir John Everett Millais' *A Child's World*.



Fig. 14. W.R. Frith's *The New Frock*.



Fig. 15. Frank Newbould, *Cornwall*.



Fig. 16. Cartoon, *London & North Eastern Railway Magazine*.

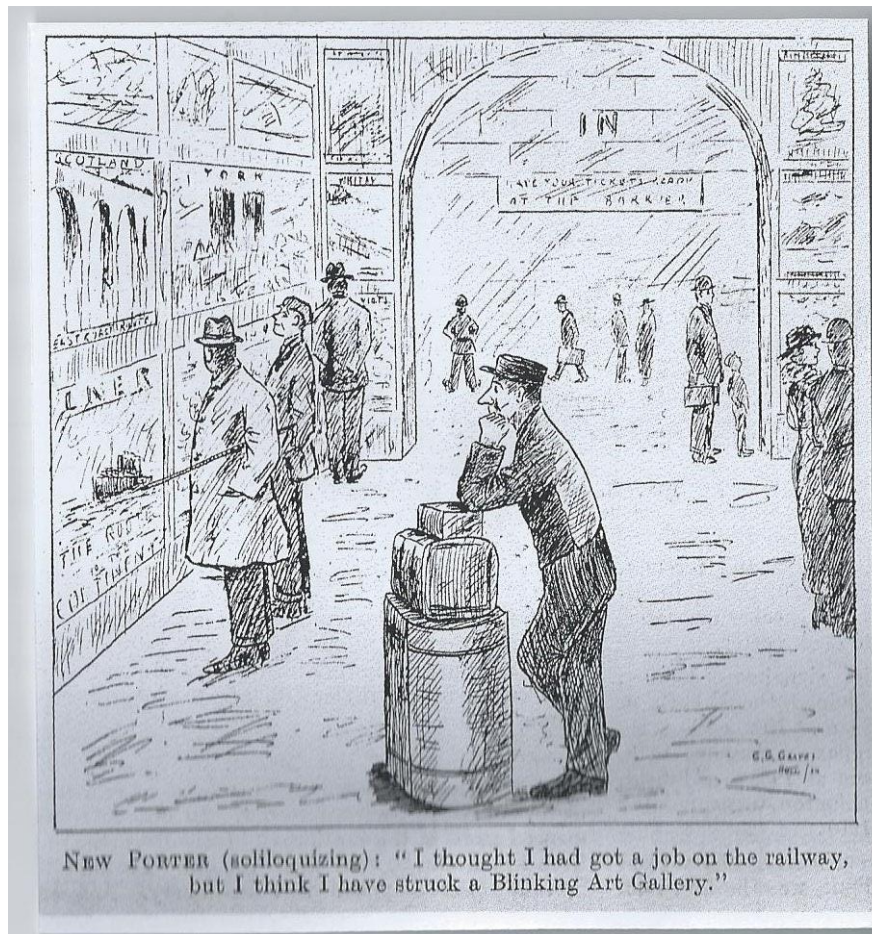


Fig. 17. 'Janus' advertisement.



Fig. 18. Ben Nicholson Shell poster.



Fig. 19. Paul Nash, *Footballers Prefer Shell*.

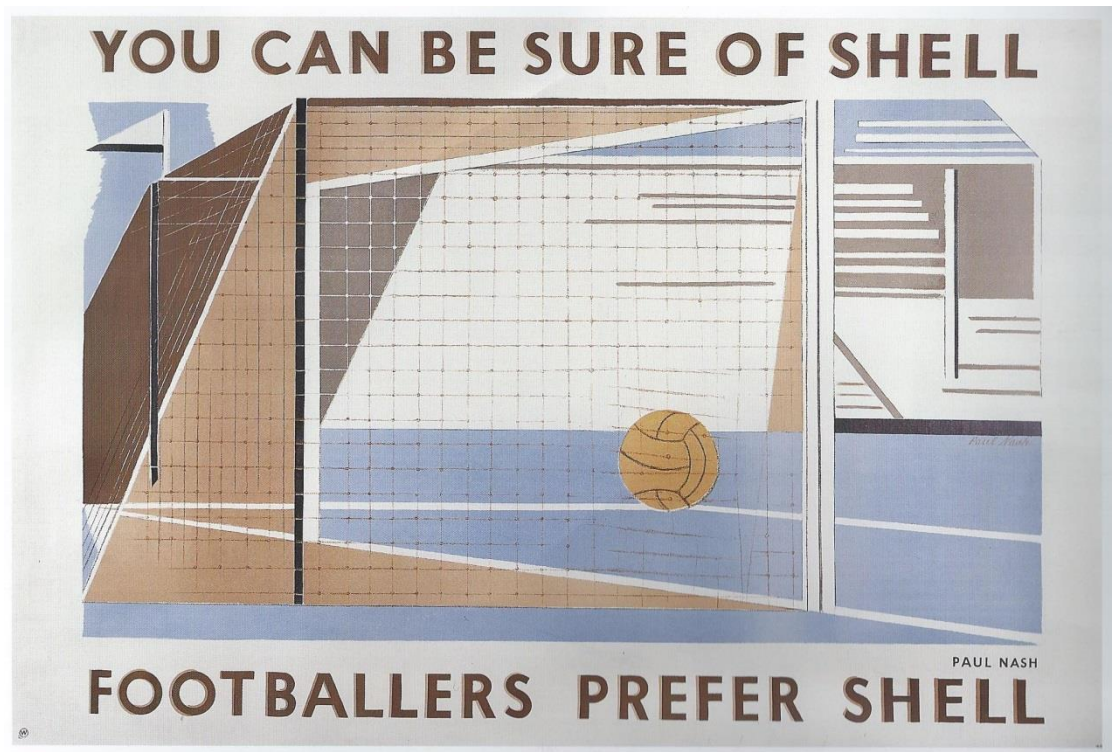


Fig. 20. Paul Nash, *Rye Marshes*.

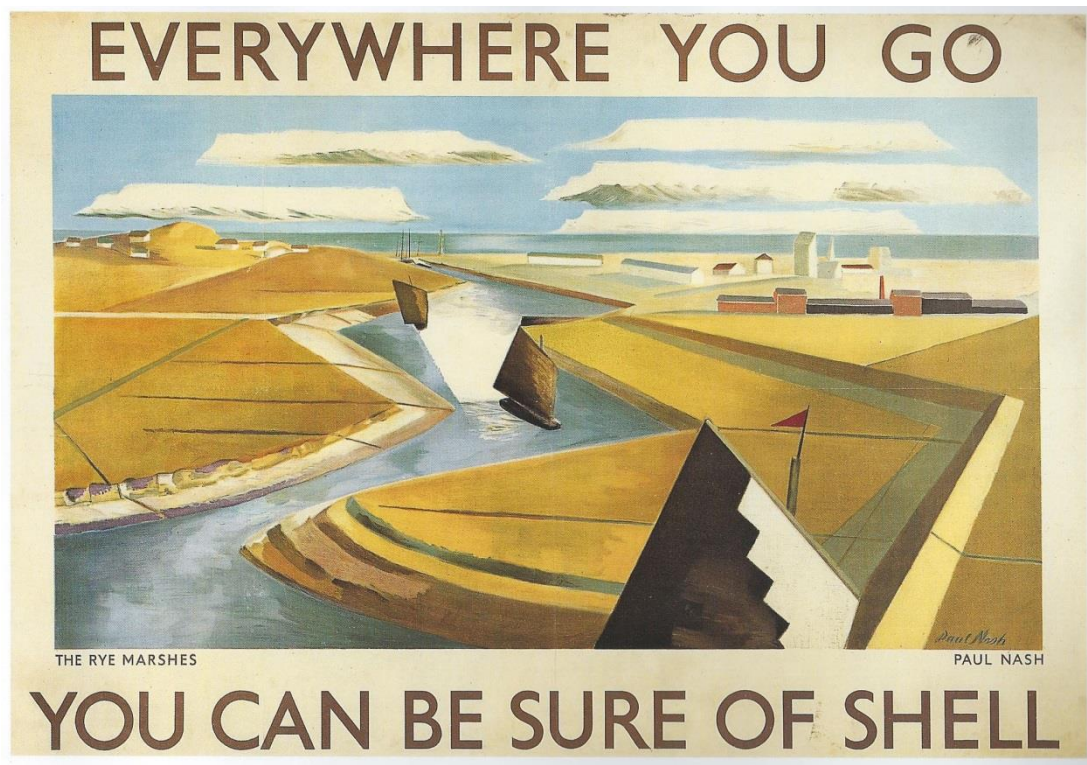


Fig. 21. Paul Nash, *Kimmeridge Folly*.



Fig. 22. Edward McKnight Kauffer, *Stonehenge*.

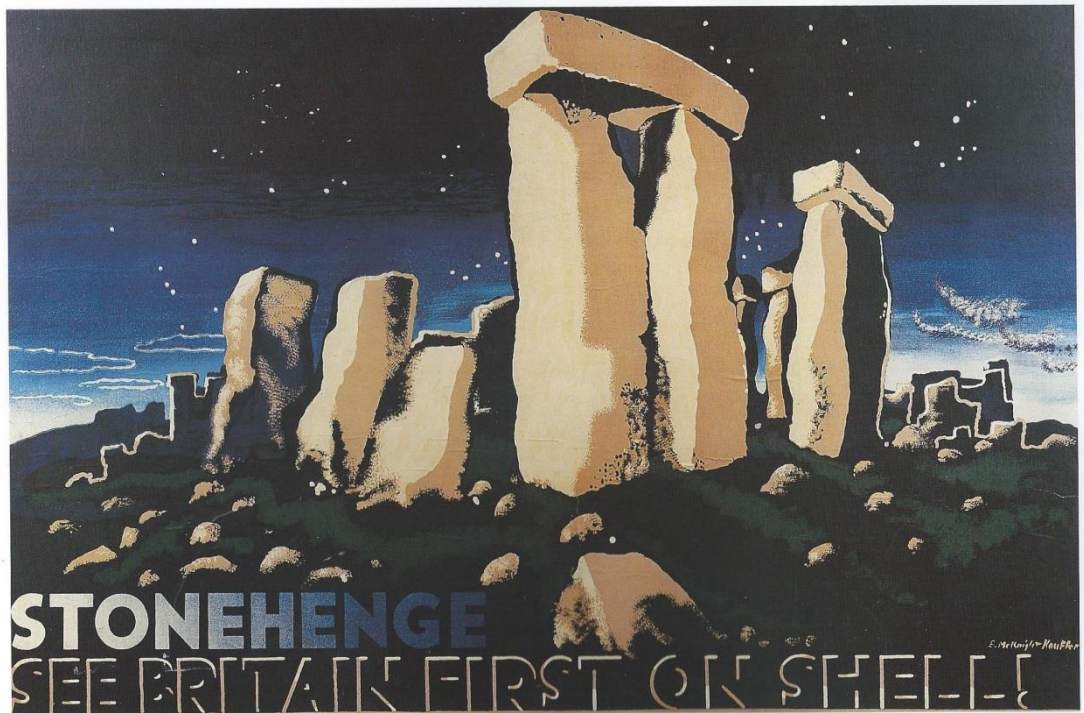


Fig. 23. Photograph of Stonehenge, 1930.



Fig. 24. Frank Dobson, *The Giant Cerne Abbas*.



Fig. 25. Denis Constanduros, *Long Man of Wilmington*.



Fig. 26. Avon advertisement.

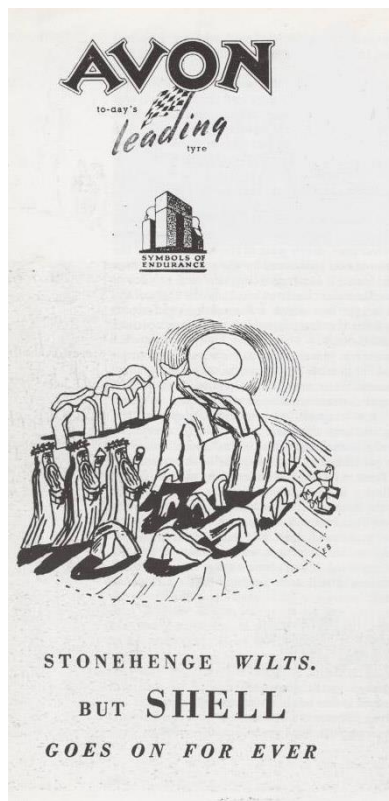


Fig. 27. Book Cover, *Britain and the Beast*.

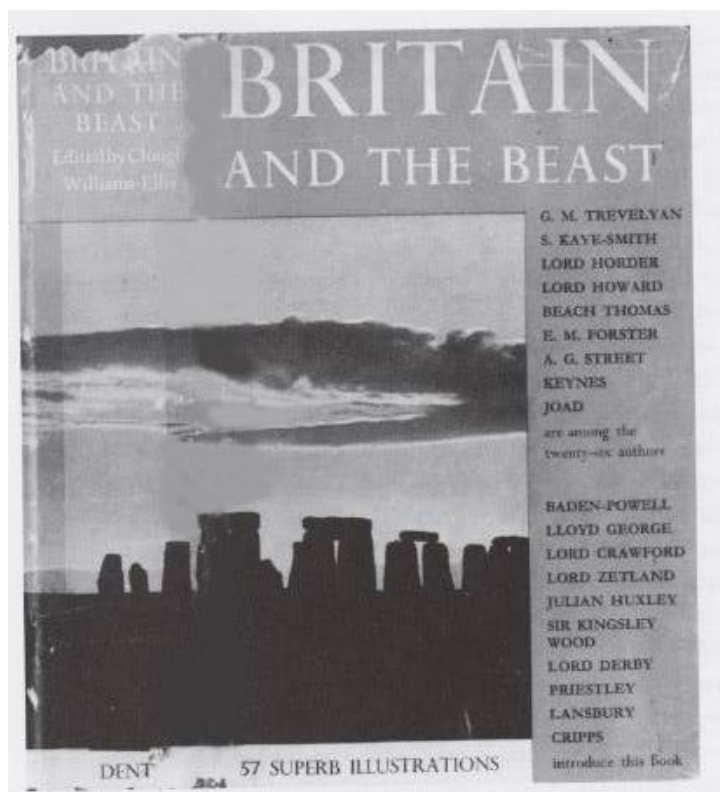


Fig. 28. Lord Berners, *Faringdon Folly*.



Fig 29. Portrait of Lord Berners by Gregorio Prieto.

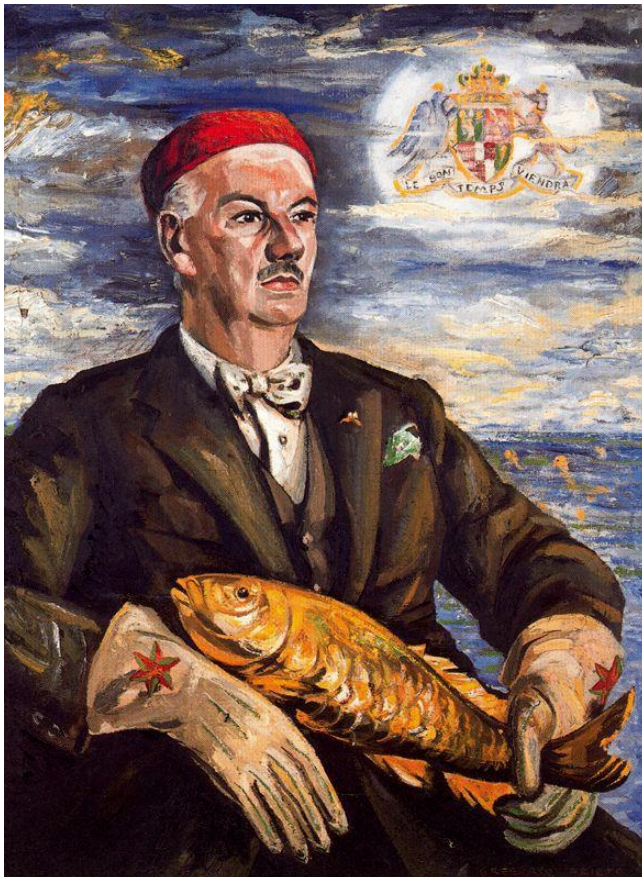


Fig. 30. Graham Sutherland. *Nr. Leeds, Kent.*



Fig. 31. Graham Sutherland etching of oast houses.

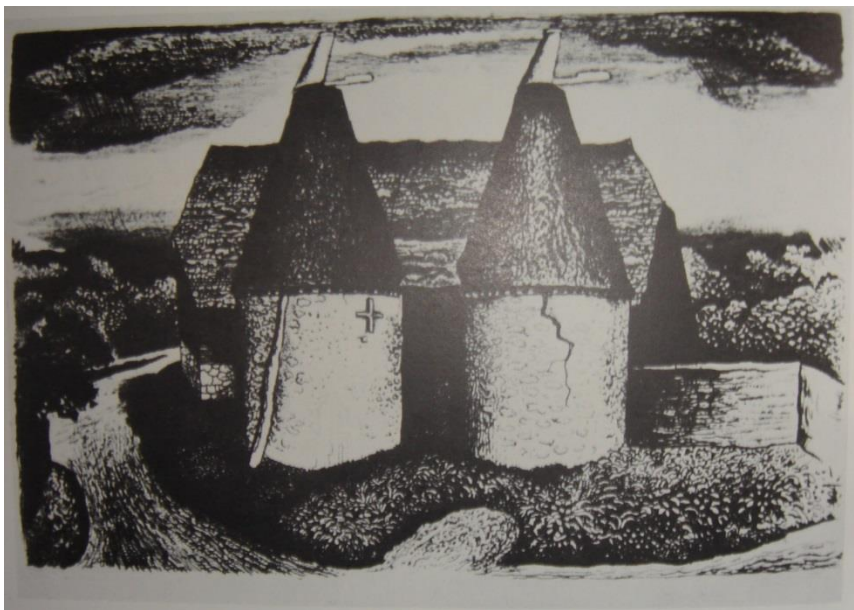


Fig. 32. Graham Sutherland, *The Great Globe, Swanage*.

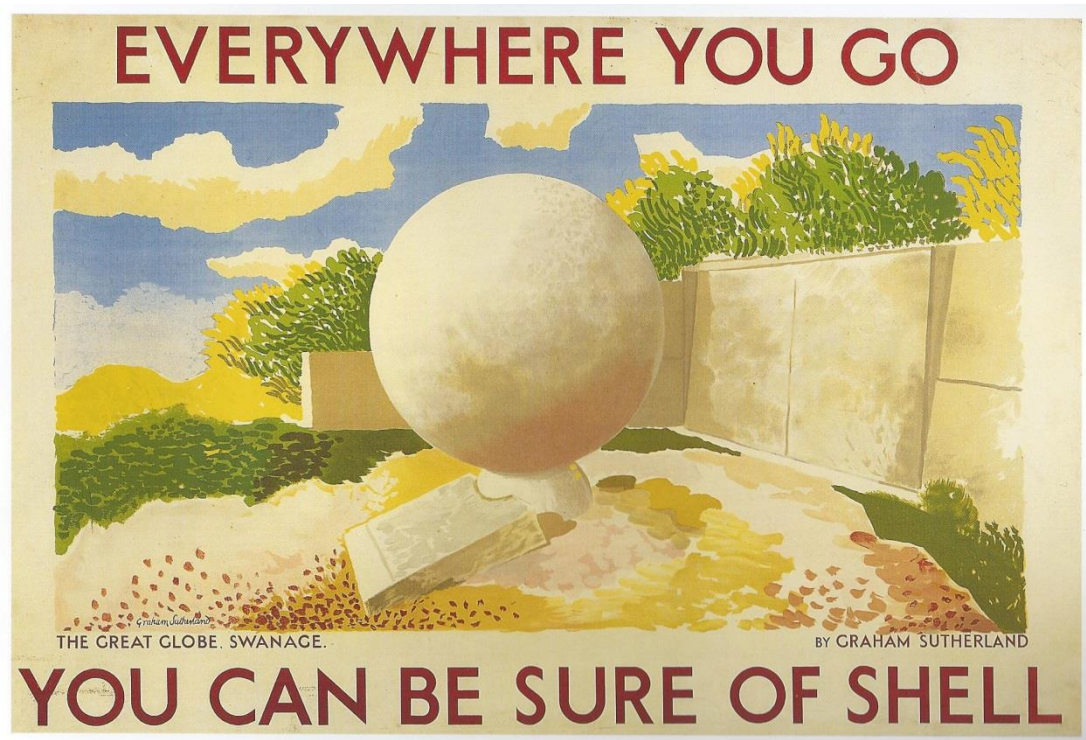


Fig. 33. Graham Sutherland, *Brimham Rock, Yorkshire*.



Fig. 34. Paul Nash, *Landscape at Iden*.

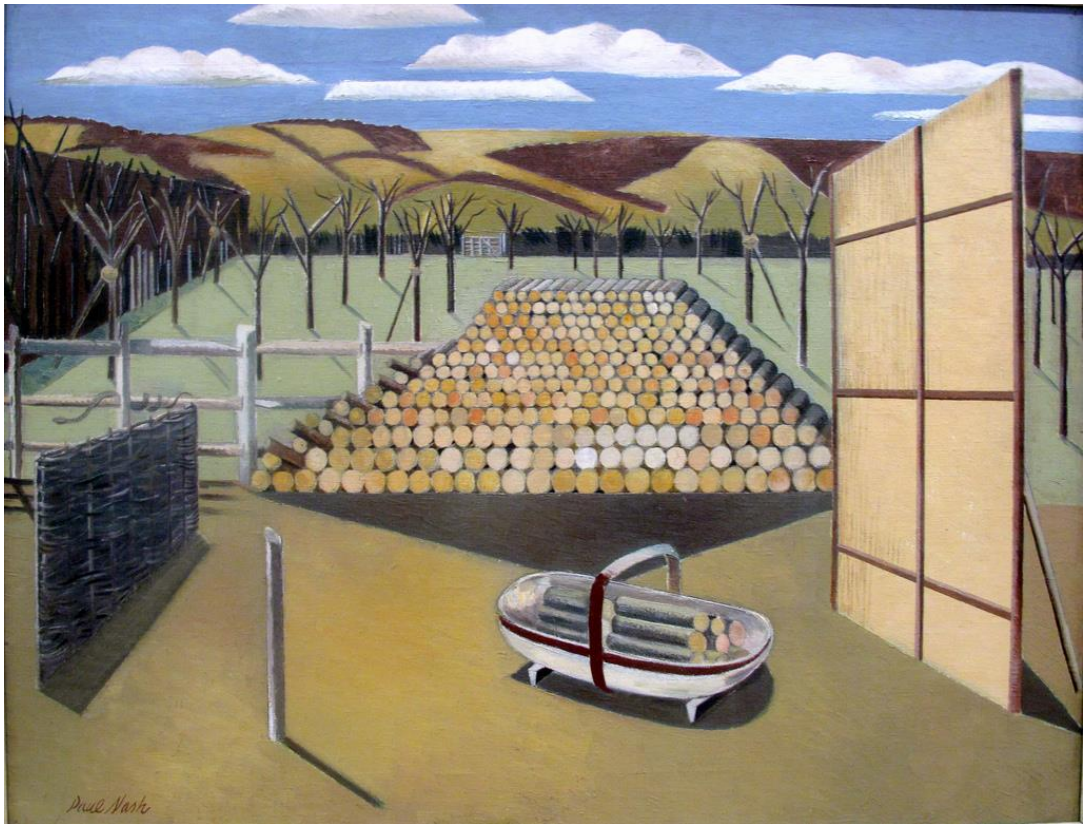


Fig. 35. Tristram Hillier, *Tourists Prefer Shell*.

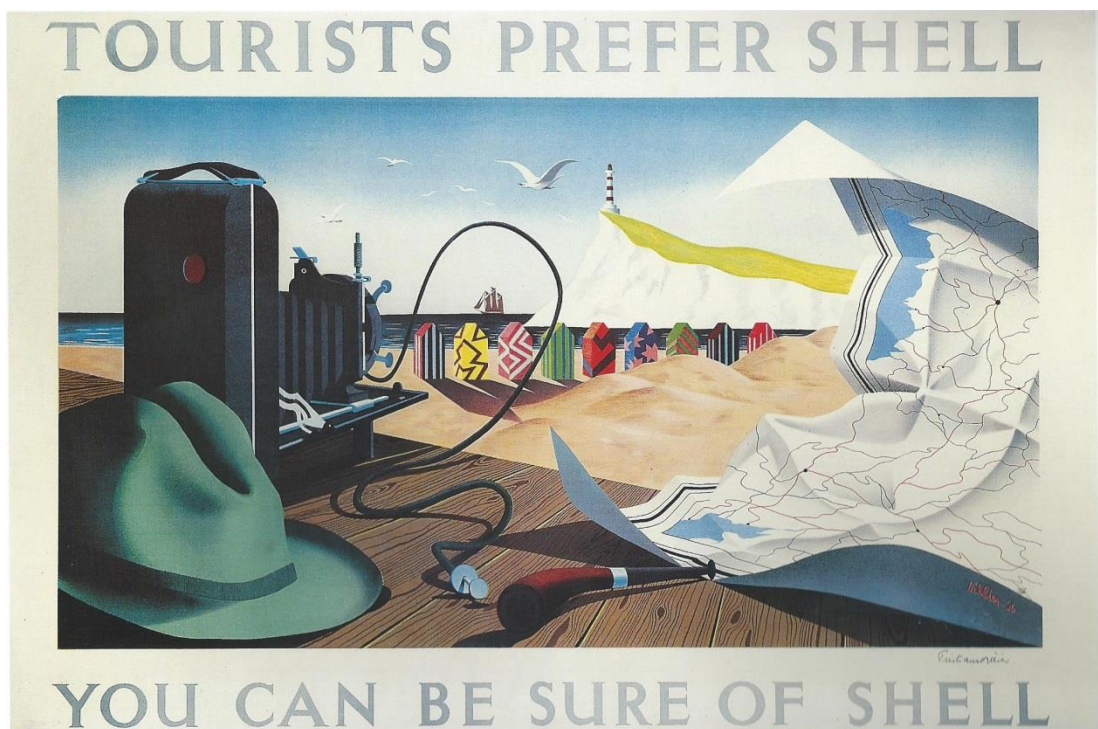


Fig. 36. Advertisement for Orient Line Cruises.



Fig. 37. Maurice A. Miles, *Polperro*.

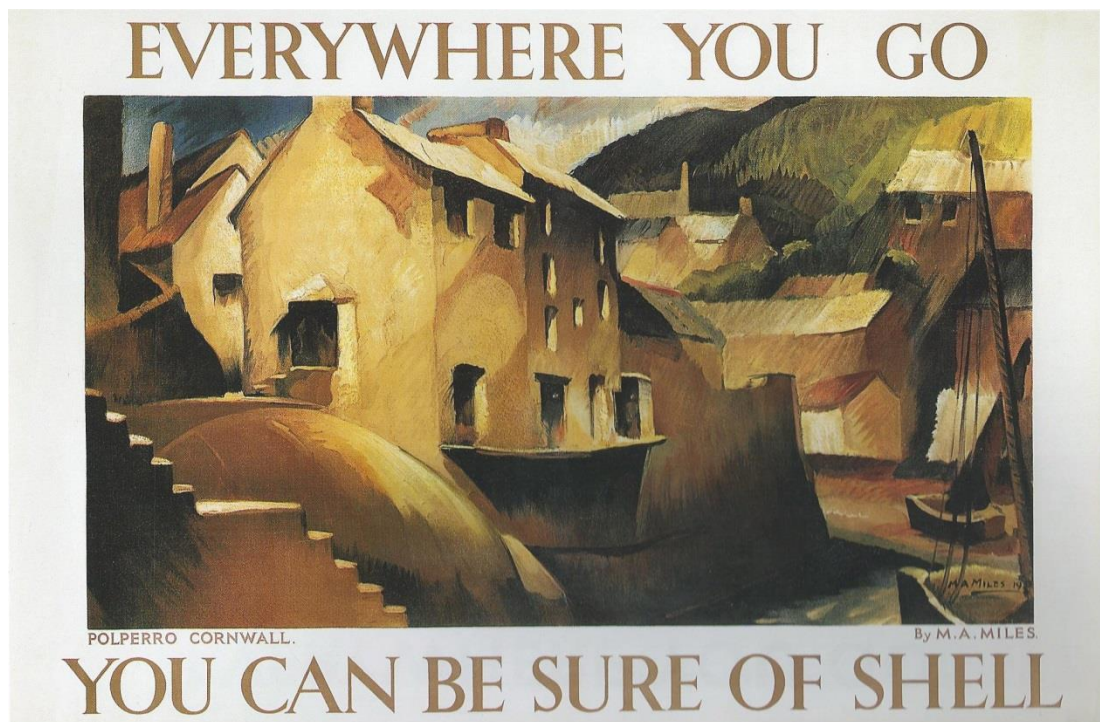


Fig. 38. Vanessa Bell, *Alfriston*.



Fig.39. Vanessa Bell, *Alfriston* painting.



Fig. 40. Vanessa Bell, *Still Life with Eggs*.



Fig.41 'Janus' figure.

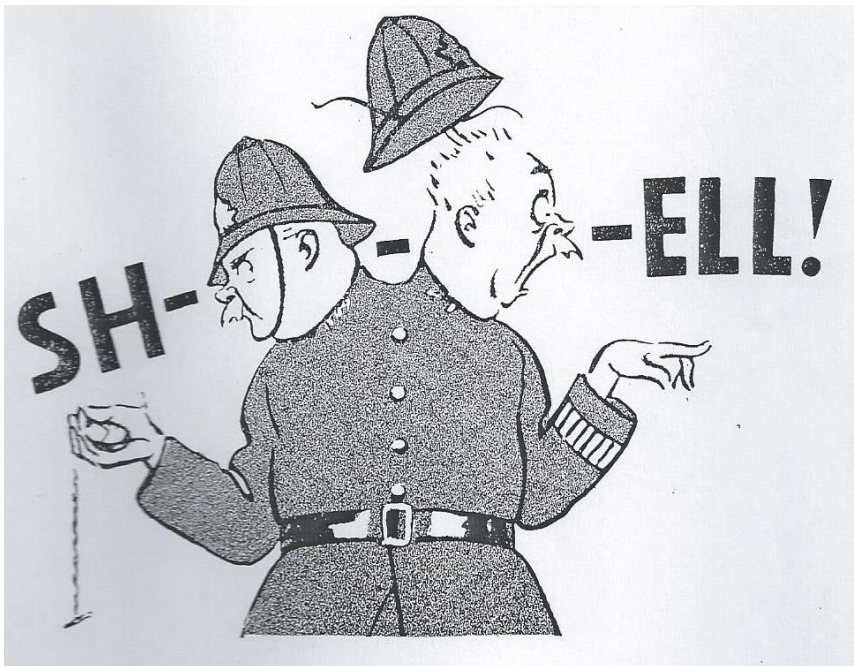


Fig. 42. Rex Whistler, *Reversible Faces*.



Fig. 43. Rex Whistler, *The Vale of Aylesbury*.



Fig. 44. Rex Whistler and friends.



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