

HERITAGE CIRCLE

Stuart Bowell, The History of Advertising

The December meeting of the Heritage Circle at Rickinghall Village Hall was entertained by an interesting talk by Stuart Bowell about the history of advertising.

Stuart said that advertising aims to encourage people to purchase goods. It is based upon psychology and has become increasingly sophisticated in the ways in which it tries to impact on the inner self of purchasers. However, advertising is a relatively recent phenomenon. Pre-industrial societies supplied most of their own needs. Surplus goods could be exchanged with neighbours, often using a system of bartering. Gradually, markets developed. They were located in the centre of towns and villages or at crossroads or river crossings. Advertising was unnecessary as goods for sale were displayed openly on stalls.

As settlements grew, shops often evolved from market stalls. Early shops tended to have horizontal shutters which could be made into a stall but increasingly goods for sale were moved inside the shops and could not be seen. Signs showed customers what was available in the shop. Most people were illiterate and so a boot on a pole would indicate a shoemaker. Some of these signs may still be seen. A barber may have a pole painted in red and white, and a pawnbroker displayed golden balls. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, posters and printed handbills became more common as greater numbers of people were able to read. Some companies, like Colman's of Norwich, opened their factories to shopkeepers to emphasize their cleanliness and the quality of their products.

Stuart is particularly interested in enamel signs. These appeared from the 1870s and were very effective as they were eye-catching and tended to be displayed in prominent places. As they were made of metal, the signs were durable. They used bright colours and often had memorable phrases. They could even be made into the shape of the product. Signs for beer or sauces were often in the shape of a bottle. Slogans on signs might appeal to class values. Adverts for Bryant and May matches encouraged support for 'home industries and British workers.' They did not mention the appalling conditions of the women producing them. Hudson's made a 'soap for the people.' Other products, like Rinso, made work easier or saved money. Some outrageous claims were made which would not be allowed today. Craven A tipped cigarettes would 'not affect your throat.'

Enamel adverts were put in prominent places, such as on the side of shops. At railways stations small enamel ads were placed on the risers of staircases so that travellers would see the same sign repeatedly. Buses were, and still are, used for advertising. The use of enamel signs declined after 1939 as metal was in short supply. After World War II paper signs became more common, especially on hoardings around war damaged buildings.

Stuart completed his talk by reviewing aspects of modern advertising. An example was Guinness which is a prolific advertiser as it has no tied pubs to sell its beer. Clever, memorable slogans are used like, 'Guinness is good for you.' People without Guinness are 'Guinless'. Animals and humour are often used in its advertising. A recent survey voted Guinness as the best television ad when waves became white horses.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be on Wednesday 25 January at Rickinghall Village Hall when Sarah Doig will give a talk about *The Real Basil Brown*. New members and visitors are welcome. Further information is available at www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net.

Gerry Gurhy