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The Dip Pen as a Source of Social Distinction in Victorian Britain

Lauren O' Hagan, School of English, Communication and Philosophy Cardiff University,
John Percival Building, Colum Drive, Cardiff, CF10 3EU
ohaganla@cardiff.ac.uk 07971979912

In the nineteenth century, Britain was the epicentre of pen-making, with around 75% of the world's dip pens being manufactured in Birmingham. While the ownership of dip pens was initially restricted to upper-class Victorians due to their expensive cost, the introduction of mass-production techniques and the 1870 Education Act led to their adoption by the lower classes. The democratisation of the dip pen offered manufacturers an attractive new opportunity to capitalise on Britain's deeply rooted class structure and use the pen as a strategy of distinction. This paper explores how dip pens, inkwells and blotters became marketed by manufacturers in ways that tapped into collective consciousness on social status, power and one's sense of limitations, thus reinforcing class divisions. In doing so, it uses Bourdieu's notion that personal possessions are the 'practical affirmation of an inevitable difference' and become the coordinating frame within which social life is grouped. This paper also investigates how Englishness, the notion of Empire and nationalism were used to sell pens abroad. It determines that pen manufacturers were able to build a highly lucrative trade through the exploitation of the 'social conditioning' of consumers on class and national identity.

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Biography

Lauren O' Hagan is a PhD student within the School of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff University. Her current research project is entitled 'Class, Culture and Conflict in the Edwardian Book Inscription'. It involves an interdisciplinary approach, that blends theory from Multimodality, Ethnography and Book History, to explore social class in Edwardian society through a dataset of 3,000 inscriptions present in books circulated between 1901-1914 in Britain. Alongside her PhD, Lauren works as a translator and EFL tutor.

The Dip Pen as a Source of Social Distinction in Victorian Britain

‘All men are equal – all men, that is to say, who possess umbrellas’¹

The second half of the nineteenth century is often considered to be a period marked by a growing preoccupation with personal belongings.² The Industrial Revolution, and the increase in wages that it brought about, threatened to erode Victorian society’s once-rigid distinctions of class and rank. As a result, upper-class consumers sought to bolster their social status through the ownership of possessions, while the emerging middle class began to recognise the worth of objects as symbolic markers of prestige.³ Even the poorer households stored the little wealth they had as things in the house rather than as money in banks.⁴ Although the concept of possessions as sources of social distinction was not something unique to the Victorians,⁵ it is clear that the increasing availability of mass-produced items meant that taste now became a trait to be cultivated. Taste not only spoke to the outside world of a person’s social status, but it also offered a means for coming to terms with one’s own identity in an unstable society.⁶

Advertisers latched onto this new ‘vanity culture’, realising that instruction in taste was not only a moral necessity, but also a way to provide new profits.⁷ Thus, they became ‘fashion intermediaries’,⁸ influencing consumers’ purchases by marketing items in ways that shaped cultural and social ambitions.⁹ While the 1851 Great Exhibition should not be conceptualised as a definitive turning point that marked the before and after period of consumer society,¹⁰ one cannot deny that it made goods become more affordable and challenged producers to acknowledge the importance of knowing customers’ desires to compete successfully and survive in an ever more competitive market. Through an awareness of market segmentation according to social class, manufacturers were able to offer a new way to innovate production, marketing and selling.

Carnevali and Newton¹¹ have argued that the piano marked the showpiece of the Victorian home, carrying multiple meanings regarding gentility, family life, taste and wealth. It was an item that began life as a luxury piece and gradually trickled down to the middle and working classes, its various designs, decorations and features communicating social placement. In this article, I argue that the pen served a similar function: it was an object that emerged as a luxury upper-class artefact, both practical (as a writing implement) and aesthetically appealing (as a display piece), yet, its portability also afforded it additional functions unavailable to the piano. It could be carried on a person as an itinerant symbol of status, much as an iPhone or a Gucci handbag might be used today, and thus, served as an identifiable emblem of prestige wherever the owner went. In this way, the purchase of the pen became framed not so much by the owner’s functional need to write, but rather as the owner’s need to display social standing and respectability.

Throughout the Victorian era, Britain was the epicentre of pen-making, with around 75% of the world’s pens being manufactured in Birmingham’s Jewellery Quarter.¹² The Jewellery Quarter was an industrial district made up of small and medium firms specialised in a range of industries from jewellery and coffins to pens and buttons.¹³ At its peak, ninety pen

manufacturers were operating in the area, the largest of which were Joseph Gillott & Sons Ltd., Hinks, Wells & Co., William Mitchell and Josiah Mason.¹⁴ Aware of the capacity for advertising as a 'commercial weapon',¹⁵ these firms used a combination of specialty and mass production as a strategy to both satisfy and create demand, just as Carnevali¹⁶ recognised in jewellery-making industries in the area.

In this article, I explore the growth of the dip pen in nineteenth-century Britain, and how it was branded by the leading companies to reap the full benefit of all segments of the Victorian market. More specifically, I will explore how Bourdieu's¹⁷ notion that personal possessions are ideal weapons in strategies of distinction was a key marketing concept of Victorian pen manufacturers as dip pen ownership gradually filtered down to the lower classes. I will also investigate the ways in which other 'bundles of items'¹⁸ related to writing, such as inkwells and blotters, became part of Britain's growing 'vanity trade' in which objects were held in high regard for their aesthetic appeal over their practical function, as well as how the notion of Empire was used to sell pens abroad.

The history of advertising in nineteenth-century Britain remains a relatively underexplored topic. While some researchers have focused on the impact that the 1851 Great Exhibition had on advertising,¹⁹ as well as the influence of advertising on Victorian women,²⁰ scant attention has been paid to specific examples of portable property and the ways in which they were marketed over time. Pens, in particular, are yet to be addressed from an academic perspective, as they remain confined to their status as mere *curios*. Thus, this study wishes to redress this imbalance by demonstrating that pens, in fact, throw new light on our understanding of nineteenth-century retailing and consumption, and offer a new way of thinking about social class, consumer culture and commoditisation in Victorian Britain.

The Pen Trade in Britain

From the sixth to the early-nineteenth century, the quill, made from goose or swan feathers, was the standard writing implement used in the Western world. While the quill facilitated writing on parchment and vellum, it also had several disadvantages: it needed to be sharpened frequently with a special knife known as a 'dressing', it had to be constantly redipped in ink, which often smeared, and its expected lifespan was just one week.²¹ Dissatisfied with the quill, the schoolmaster James Perry began to make steel pens by hand in 1819.²² These pens typically consisted of a steel nib mounted in a wooden holder, which had to be recharged with ink from an ink bottle, hence their more common name of 'dip pen'. After their commercial success, numerous industrialists began to establish steel pen factories, primarily in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter due to its concentration of highly skilled craftspersons and its proximity to an extensive canal network that aided transportation of goods to the docks in Bristol and Portsmouth.²³

By the 1850s, Birmingham was the global centre for dip pen manufacture, adopting mass production techniques from button-making to create more than 100,000 types of pen and employing more than 8,000 workers across its some 120 factories.²⁴ Unusually, around 70% of these workers were women who were attracted by the substantial wage of 7s²⁵ a week

and the relatively healthy working conditions compared to other factories.²⁶ At its peak, 1,500 million pen nibs were being produced in Birmingham every year – a figure that was not far short of the entire world population at this time.²⁷ The two leading pen manufacturers of the Victorian age were Josiah Mason and Joseph Gillott. While very few of Mason's pens were sold under his name (they were primarily produced for Perry & Co. and Sommerville & Co.), Gillott's name was known across the world, particularly in the USA, which prompted the American consul, Elihu Burritt, to state that, 'In ten thousand school houses across the American continent between the two oceans, a million children are as familiarly acquainted with Joseph Gillott as with Noah Webster.'²⁸ Gillott established the first purpose-built pen factories in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, including the Victoria Works (in 1858) and the Albert Works (in 1868). These factories were so pioneering that they attracted visits from such public figures as Emperor Franz Josef of Austria, Sir Henry Morton Stanley and Ulysses S. Grant.²⁹

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, general trends in labour costs moved most pen manufacturing to the United States, decreasing the number of factories in Britain to just twelve.³⁰ Many of these companies survived by deviating into other manufacturing sidelines: Josiah Mason focused on split rings and cutlery, Hinks, Wells on typewriters and Perry & Co. on bicycle chains.³¹ Following the invention of the ballpoint pen in 1938 by Laszlo Biro, the majority of the remaining companies in the Jewellery Quarter ceased trade, sounding the death knell for the manufacture of traditional dip pens.³² Today, although just one company continues trading in the city – William Mitchell –, it is made up of an amalgamation of the Victorian pen giants Hinks, Wells & Co., Perry & Co. and Joseph Gillott. This company has survived through a focus on the niche artist and calligraphy market, producing pens for manga, mapping and linocutting. While the bars, restaurants and luxury apartments of the Jewellery Quarter today hide most visible traces of the once prominent pen industry, a visit to the recently refurbished Pen Museum in Frederick Street (set up within the original Albert Works) still serves to highlight the undeniable impact of the Birmingham dip pen on education, literacy and learning across the world between 1850 and 1900.

The Birth of Dip Pen Advertising

While many researchers have cited the Great Exhibition as being responsible for the birth of a commodity culture and modern consumption patterns,³³ recent studies have argued that many of these roots can, in fact, be found in the eighteenth century and its 'consumer revolution'.³⁴ The new access to exotic foods and raw materials (e.g. tea, coffee, sugar, tobacco) of the New World and Asia brought about an interest in 'upscaling, branding and status-seeking through consumer goods'.³⁵ De Vries argues that these goods allowed room for fashion and self-expression because they had greater 'breakability',³⁶ meaning that they were less likely to be kept as stores of value or to be inherited. While dip pens were not comestible products, they also had a level of 'breakability', given that their nibs could split, holders could snap and ink could run out. This limited durability meant that, like with foods, owners sought pens that reflected their personality and aspirations. When dip pens were first

produced in Britain in the 1830s, they cost 6d³⁷ per nib. As the average weekly working-class salary was just 4s³⁸ at this time³⁹ and almost 50% of the working-class population were illiterate,⁴⁰ this ensured that their usage was restricted to the middle and upper classes of Victorian society. Thus, all models, no matter what their design, served as markers of high social status. Carnevali and Newton⁴¹ found a similar trend with pianos, while O'Hagan⁴² discovered the same pattern with books, suggesting that this concept of luxury was a key aspect of early nineteenth-century advertising.⁴³

Newspapers and periodicals have been largely recognised as the chief modes of advertisement in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ However, McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb argue that these media were not unique to the Victorian era. They state that the widespread rise of commercial advertisements in newspapers can be traced to the eighteenth century when unrelated items were juxtaposed in print to offer readers a textual space of which to make sense.⁴⁵ Until 1853,⁴⁶ a rather expensive advertisement duty was in place to print in newspapers, which meant that much advertising was disguised in what Berg and Clifford call 'texts of useful knowledge',⁴⁷ such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, patents, trade catalogues and almanacs. Indeed, Raven claims that even the commercial paper of handbills, letterheads and insurance policies were used as early forms of advertising,⁴⁸ thus supporting Borkowski's view that the finest example of great PR is developing an 'advertising space without paying for it'.⁴⁹ The combination of heavy tax and the possibility of other more subliminal forms of advertising may explain why an emerging industry such as that of the dip pen largely avoided publishing advertisements in newspapers.

Instead, most dip pen manufacturers tended to promote their products through catalogues or display cards on which pen nibs were threaded or pasted. The card carried the brand name and was punched and strung for hanging in shops. Rickards and De Beaumont note that similar cards were also used to promote tap washes, teapot spout guards, dog leashes and key chains.⁵⁰ At a time when very few newspapers made use of visual devices,⁵¹ the display cards offered an innovative opportunity for manufacturers to combine word and image through a hands-on experience with the actual product. Furthermore, they allowed consumers to compare the written claims of the advertisers with a physical assessment of the product's quality. This proved to be a very popular tactic, given the growing mistrust of advertising in the light of the fraudulent practices of patent medicine sellers.⁵² Through the display card, manufacturers were able to distance themselves from these disreputable practices and stress the importance of respectability and virtue. These display cards can be considered as an evolved form of trade cards – a type of advertisement that emerged in the eighteenth century and served to promote the product, as well as reinforce the act of shopping and the notion of gifts.⁵³

An assessment of dip pen display cards from Britain's leading manufacturers (Gillott; Wells; Mitchell; Mason) indicates this new preference for a minimalist approach,⁵⁴ supplying basic information on the product's utility, quality and price as opposed to appealing to sentiment. Words such as 'long wear', 'flexible feed' and 'very strong and durable', which frequently reoccur in pen display cards from this period, enabled customers to make their

own minds up by viewing the product itself. The minimalist approach has also been identified in the advertising practices of Victorian tea companies, such as Hornimans,⁵⁵ as well as Gilbey's wines and spirits.⁵⁶ By placing great stress on the brand's quality, manufacturers were able to appeal to three marketing concepts which Altick terms 'package psychology', 'brand name psychology' and 'snob appeal'.⁵⁷ In other words, if a customer owned several items in the series, they would want to acquire the rest; a customer who was pleased with one item would regard all items as a guarantee of excellence; and the possession of items gave a person a pleasant feeling of status, no matter how humble their actual circumstances.

Another way in which pen manufacturers, such as William Mitchell and Hinks, Wells & Co., sought to build their reputations was through the 1851 Great Exhibition. The Great Exhibition is often described as inaugurating a new way of seeing things that indelibly marked the cultural and commercial life of Victorian Britain and fashioned a mythology of consumerism and commodities.⁵⁸ Although the importance of the eighteenth century as a period in which consumer culture emerged is now becoming increasingly recognised by scholars,⁵⁹ it remains apparent that the Great Exhibition did constitute a crucial recognition on the part of manufacturers that it was by the 'very nature of the knowledge they imparted to consumers that they exerted their greatest control over them'.⁶⁰ This is evidenced by the fact that from 1851 onwards, the breadth of items on the market grew exponentially. Cohen claims that prior to internet shopping, the goods offered by Victorian retailers to the 'fickle public' far outstripped what has been available since.⁶¹ She notes examples of 7,000 bedsteads available in Hoskins and Sewell's furniture shop, while 300 varieties of sideboards could be bought from H.J. Benjamins.⁶² Equally, pen manufacturers in the Jewellery Quarter were producing 100,000 types of pen at the height of their production.⁶³

A manufacturer's presence at the Great Exhibition became a canny way to associate their products with prestige. This information became boldly presented on pen manufacturers' display cards as a symbol of their international renown, as well as on advertisements for other companies who had participated in the Exhibition, such as Wedgwood and Schweppes.⁶⁴ Similarly, the period following the Great Exhibition was also the first time in which pen manufacturers (e.g. Joseph Gillott) used the fact that they were 'penmaker to the Queen' as a central aspect of their advertising. Church argues that this 'branding through association'⁶⁵ allowed firms to extend their product lines and build their reputation. Carnevali and Newton⁶⁶ also note that piano manufacturers used endorsements from the royal family to convey prestige and reinforce brand reputation. Although not used within the pen industry, other manufacturers also sought out famous figures to head their advertising campaigns, thus challenging the belief that celebrity endorsements is a modern marketing practice. Famous examples include Bovril's use of Robert Baden-Powell and Rudyard Kipling for their advertising campaigns, and Oscar Wilde's support for Madame Fontaine's *Bosom Beautifier*.⁶⁷

Another popular form of advertising that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century was the use of false currency. Sweet⁶⁸ cites the example of Thomas Lipton printing fake pound notes, redeemable against goods from his store, while McClintock⁶⁹ notes the imported

French centime pieces that were stamped with the Pears brand name. Birmingham pen manufacturers were also involved in this practice, favouring the spade guinea token. These tokens were made in imitation of gold guineas of George III's 'spade' type issued between 1787 and 1799 and carried the names of the pens and the firms who produced them.⁷⁰ Used as gaming counters, these tokens were expected to be exchanged primarily by wealthy men when gambling and ensured that pens remained exclusive to the upper class.

While it has already been established that the segmented market was not something unique to the nineteenth century, it appears to have become consolidated at this time as a device to sell more products to target groups. Examples have been noted in unisex items, such as books, toothpaste and soap,⁷¹ which suddenly became genderised and split into products for males and females. Dip pen manufacturers also began to capitalise on Victorian concepts of what it meant to be a man and a woman, thus identifying potential ways in which nibs could be aimed at different genders. An 1855 advertisement from Joseph Gillott notes that ladies' pens are for 'fine neat writing, especially on thick and highly-finished papers,' while gentlemen's pens are for 'large free bold writing' (Figure 1). Here, women's writing is associated with upholding elegance and grace, while men's writing corresponds with the notions of grandness and courage. These stereotypes became a convenient way of organising knowledge⁷² and concretised the idea that women's writing practices were confined to 'feminine' activities, such as letter-writing and poetry, while men's writing practices were strongly linked to the world of business and economics.⁷³ In addition, while in the early nineteenth century, pens were simply named according to their nibs (i.e. extra-fine point, broad point etc.), now they became marketed using heavily gendered words: the large barrel, magnum bonum and black swan for men, and the Victoria, diamond stub and titquill for women. This practice particularly developed following the 1882 Women's Property Act, as women's right to ownership became legally recognised and thus, consolidated women as a new and profitable market.

The Democratisation of the Dip Pen

Perhaps the greatest development in dip pen advertising came as the result of two revolutionary changes in Victorian society: the widespread introduction of the handpress in factories and the establishment of board schools.

Although British pen manufacturers had been mass-producing dip pens since the 1830s, gradual improvements to machinery, particularly the handpress, meant that by the 1860s, pens could be produced at a much faster rate for a significantly cheaper cost. Consequently, production costs fell by more than 99.9%: now it cost 6d to produce 144 nibs as opposed to just one.⁷⁴ It was not just the pen industry that reaped the benefits of the invention of the handpress; it also had a tremendous impact on printing, enabling millions of copies of newspapers and books to be printed in a single day.⁷⁵ In tandem to this manufacturing innovation, the 1870 Education Act led to the creation of the first state-run schools, which enabled many working-class children to receive an education for the first time.⁷⁶ Pen manufacturers began to recognise a new and potentially enormous market for

their nibs. Soon, they contracted educational wholesalers to visit schools and sell headteachers the newly designed 'school board pen'.⁷⁷ This pen (Figure 2) was essentially a rebranding of the pens that had been previously exclusive to upper-class Victorians and demonstrates the novel and resourceful ways in which pen manufacturers were able to market the same products in different ways to gain additional income. O'Hagan⁷⁸ notes a similar practice with books, whereby the same copy was published in a range of different formats, covers and bindings to appeal to different types of consumers. The 'school board pen' provided many illiterate working-class children with the means to learn how to write. For this reason, it is arguably one of the most important educative inventions in the history of schooling.

The growing commitment of manufacturers to exploiting new potential markets, particularly made up of the lower classes, was taking place across many British product lines at this time from pianos and ceramics to jewellery and toiletries.⁷⁹ The introduction of lithographic print methods, which enabled products to be advertised with an image or design accompanying the text, removed illiteracy as a barrier to comprehension, while the creation of enamelled signs allowed advertisements to be displayed in places that working-class Victorians frequented, such as railway stations and omnibuses.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the final repeal of the newspaper tax in 1855 brought about an explosion in the number of advertisements printed in newspapers, again placing products within the reach of the newly literate lower classes.⁸¹

The possibility of adding imagery to advertising allowed many brands to gain a separate existence to which their name could be attached.⁸² Fry's, Pears and Quaker Oats, for example, became just as recognisable by their images as their brand name.⁸³ Many pen manufacturers, however, seemed to use images with a different function. The first pen advertisements by Joseph Gillott and Hinks, Wells & Co. to appear in newspapers showcased the various processes of pen manufacture, from stamping and raising to grinding and rolling, or the bustling factory itself. These images acted as symbols of authenticity that served to validate the high quality of the dip pens and the care taken to produce them. This was in contrast to the images used by the same companies on enamelled signs, whereby the globe was the dominating illustration, and appears to have represented the global expanse of the Birmingham pen industry. It is particularly interesting that the globe was chosen for display in areas of high mobility where people moved from one place to another. By manipulating the semiotic space around the pen, the unconscious as a public space was also able to be manipulated.⁸⁴ Thus, it acted as a subliminal form of advertising that unconsciously influenced commuters of the international importance of dip pens. This aspect of imagery may be worth exploring in more detail, as a cursory comparison with other products from the late-nineteenth century suggests that the changing of focus according to site of advertisement may have been something unique to the pen industry.

The late-nineteenth century also brought about other innovative methods of advertising, such as magic lantern shows, 'sandwich' men and advertising vans.⁸⁵ The central position of these advertisements in cities, whether in print or physical forms, ensured that

they could not be missed by any passers-by. While these methods of advertising were strongly favoured by hatters, newspapers, restaurants and sewing machine producers,⁸⁶ why pen manufacturers did not become widely involved in this practice clearly requires more exploration. It may be that, unlike other products, a pen was a staple necessity for most people and thus, it subscribed to the adage that 'good products sell themselves'. It could also be that, due to their central location in the heart of Birmingham, pen manufacturers were more aware than other industries of the boundary between over- and under-advertising. Thus, they tread a fine line between providing 'consumer cues'⁸⁷ to shoppers and turning Britain into 'a sordid and disorderly spectacle from sea to sea'.⁸⁸

The Consolidation of the Segmented Market

According to Bourdieu, cultural consumption is predisposed 'to fulfil a social function of legitimating social difference'.⁸⁹ The democratisation of the dip pen posed a direct challenge to this social difference, reducing the potential of portable property for taste differentiation, as well as its value as an indicator of cultural capital. In other words, the growing use of dip pens amongst the lower classes meant that the upper class had to find new ways in which to distinguish themselves from the 'masses'. Conscious of the upper-class concern that it was sacrilegious to reunite 'tastes which tastes dictate should be separate',⁹⁰ pen manufacturers began to develop new marketing strategies that split products into class-based markets. While Berg⁹¹ has traced the notion of class-based markets to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is fair to say that they became consolidated in the nineteenth century as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the increasing prospect of social mobility. It is also worth pointing out that the social distinction of nineteenth-century consumer products was not something unique to the pen industry; examples have also been noted in the advertising of books, pianos and ceramics.⁹²

Responding to upper-class demands, pen manufacturers began to produce luxury gilt embossed nib boxes that featured decorative patterning and engravings, which were in direct contrast to the standard lithographed cardboard nib boxes that were typically issued (Figure 3a). Pen manufacturers also exploited the upper-class obsession with the 'vanity trade' by cutting nibs into decorative designs, such as manicules, the Eiffel Tower and Montgolfier balloons (Figure 3b) or producing limited edition nibs for special occasions, such as the pontification of Leo XIII in 1878 or Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897 (Figure 3c). They also manufactured expensive coloured glass nibs, which came with ornamental pen holders – both bold statements of the owner's high social status and wealth (Figure 3d). All of these products were advertised with the strapline 'the best pens for those who can afford to buy them,' which singled out the upper class as a unique and exclusive group and encouraged them to become actively involved in what Bourdieu calls the 'stylistation of life'.⁹³ Carnevali and Newton record similar examples in their study of pianos, noting that designs by famous artists or the use of certain materials brought prestige to the brand and attracted upper-class consumers.⁹⁴ When viewed in this context, it becomes apparent that the upper class used

their personal possessions as subtle forms of symbolic domination that distinguished them from other class groups and ensured that their tastes remained separate.

Many manufacturers also became aware of the potential new market offered by the lower-middle class – a group made up predominantly of clerks and shopkeepers.⁹⁵ This group was largely preoccupied with social emulation and pursuit of status, and often purchased items that could not be classed as basic necessities but were seen as what Masterman terms ‘empty symbols of prosperity’.⁹⁶ Their belief that the ownership of personal possessions would lead them to be recognised by others as having passed the test of personhood in society⁹⁷ made them an ideal target for many advertisers. Supple⁹⁸ notes that products such as bicycles, sewing machines, newspapers, clocks and watches, wallpaper, pianos and window glass all became marketed in ways that appealed to this new class group.

In the world of pen manufacturing, mid-range product lines were introduced that appealed to particular lower-middle-class occupations or pastimes. Such examples include pens marketed as specially adapted for ticket collectors, bank clerks and cartographers, as well as for specific activities, such as letter-writing, note-taking and recording telephone messages (Figure 4). Pens were also developed for writing marginalia; in this case, marginalia pens were split into three possible product lines: the book pen, the newspaper pen and the magazine pen. Essentially, all of these tasks could have been carried out with the same pen, but potential lower-middle-class consumers, who felt anxious to give the impression that they belonged, were highly susceptible to the wording of the advertisements and as such, they purchased pens for which hitherto they had had no need.⁹⁹ Veblen terms this ‘conspicuous consumption’,¹⁰⁰ meaning that in a bid to emulate the upper classes, this group used items to index wealth, even if they often experienced financial difficulties in keeping up this appearance.

One of the more innovative developments was the stave pen – a five-nibbed pen that could be used to write sheet music (Figure 5). While pen manufacturers produced gold-nibbed stave pens for the upper-class market, they also designed steel-nibbed stave pens aimed specifically at the lower-middle class who often kept pianos in their homes as signs of status (although as Ehrlich¹⁰¹ notes, they were often hired or bought on credit). Although these pens provide support for the notion that the lower-middle class exhibited external signs of wealth associated with a condition higher than their own, the fact that these pens were cheap substitutes also betrayed this group’s uncertainty at belonging in their anxiety to give the impression that they belonged.¹⁰² Thus, as with other ‘token’ items such as cars or servants,¹⁰³ these pens were mere symbolic gestures of an unattainable social status which risked exposing the lower-middle class’s true nature.

With the exception of glass nibs, there was often actually very little to distinguish the quality of an upper-class nib from a lower-class nib. However, by introducing a price tier system and tailoring products to suit specific class groups, pen manufacturers influenced the evolution of class identities. O’Hagan¹⁰⁴ made similar findings with books, noting that the use of specific words in advertisements and the ordering by price in catalogue played a significant role in making items ‘integral threads in the fabric of social life’.¹⁰⁵ This enabled

manufacturers to place items into a vacuum as objects with cause, which meant that each class-based product appeared so natural that what manufacturers were saying could only be considered to be pure and simple fact.¹⁰⁶ Thus, items such as pen nibs became not just a set of conventions for governing the representation of things, but also a series of procedures that regulated the social hierarchy of Victorian society.

Writing Paraphernalia and Victorian Commodity Culture

While Richards¹⁰⁷ claims that the 1851 Great Exhibition was largely responsible for the Victorian craze for commodities, this obsession can also be said to have developed as a result of the increase in household formation during the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁸ Cohen¹⁰⁹ argues that the Victorians were ‘the first people to be closely identified with their belongings’ and that they associated moral uplift with the ‘accumulation and harmonious arrangement’ of their possessions. As we have already seen, for Victorians, personal possessions were part of their ‘extended self’¹¹⁰ – both major contributors to and reflections of their own identity – and life was measured by the number of commodities they consumed. For this reason, commodities were often bought to be displayed in parlours and drawing rooms or were purchased as portable property to be transported and exhibited on the move, whether in the office, a railway carriage or in a club’s smoking room.

As exemplified by the dip pen, falling production costs progressively opened the market of commodities to the lower classes. Increased lower-class access was also aided by a growing awareness of the importance of material possessions as status indicators, as well as the increasing accessibility of pawnbrokers and hire purchase.¹¹¹ Thus, commodities became the ‘practical affirmation of an inevitable difference’,¹¹² strongly reinforcing class consciousness in Victorian society and becoming the coordinating frame within which social life was grouped.¹¹³

As the potential of possessions as social hierarchical devices grew, manufacturers began to recognise the similar profitability of what De Vries and Vohra term ‘bundles of items’; that is, objects that could be grouped together due to their complementarity. De Vries and Vohra claimed that as buyers have preferences for sets of related items, ‘bundles’ represent a profitable means of new revenue for sellers.¹¹⁴ By the nineteenth century, the concept of ‘bundles’ was familiar in the context of tea, the term ‘equipage’ used by manufacturers since the eighteenth century to encompass the teapot, sugar bowl and milk jug.¹¹⁵ Now, the term became extended to describe any paraphernalia related to a particular daily practice; ‘bundles’ connected with dressing, smoking, eating and, of course, writing became introduced to consumers as necessities,¹¹⁶ despite the fact that many were non-essential items.

Pen manufacturers began to concentrate on two staple items – the inkwell and the blotter – both of which provided a common ground for everyone, as all pen users needed such articles to dip and absorb ink respectively. The fact that these products ‘traversed all fields of social production’¹¹⁷ meant that they did not require such explicit advertising in the same way as the pen. Instead, their marketing relied on the specific material and aesthetic

choices made by manufacturers that were fruitfully exploited to self-define each class group in Victorian society.

Early examples of Victorian inkwells consisted of fairly plain pewter or brass designs. When the use of dip pens spread to working-class pupils of board schools in the 1870s, it became clear that simple and cheaper designs were needed. As a result, desks became fitted with glass or ceramic inkwells (Figure 6a) that an ink monitor would fill from a large bottle. For working-class adults, the original manufacturer's clay bottle was often used, or they improvised with their own bowls or eggcups. However, the iron gall ink that was typically employed was highly corrosive and risked permanently contaminating the containers if not washed thoroughly.¹¹⁸ While the types of inkwells that the working classes used were largely restrained by their disposable income, their choices provide support for Bourdieu's notion that, unlike other class groups, the working classes were far more concerned with practicality over symbolic meanings.¹¹⁹ This was largely due to their belief that every object was created to perform an explicit function as opposed to just looking aesthetically appealing. Nonetheless, the fact that some members did channel their increased purchasing power towards actual glass or ceramic inkwells rather than simply giving a new use to bowls or eggcups suggests an element of 'enhancement',¹²⁰ used by Supple to describe an improvement in traditional living standards through the acquisition of improved goods (e.g. linoleum floor covering, armchairs instead of kitchen chairs). This also demonstrates how even the poorest in Victorian society were somewhat influenced by the idea of 'conspicuous consumption'. As Veblen¹²¹ notes, 'except under stress of the direst necessity, very much squalor and discomfort will be endured before the last trinket or the last pretence of pecuniary decency is put away.'

As with pen nibs, highly ornate and decorative inkwells were produced for the upper class that stood in direct contrast to their low-cost working-class glass and ceramic counterparts. Similar high quality examples can be noted in the ceramics, silverware and textile trades at this time.¹²² The recent invention of the portable inkwell or 'travel escritoire' (a compact device housed in a compendium containing ink and paper) was also aimed at affluent upper-class Victorians. It was typically created in unique novelty designs that reflected upper-class life, such as violin cases, Post Office London directories and Gladstone bags (Figure 6b). This made it a transportable status indicator when travelling around Britain or abroad. According to Appadurai, these types of luxury items have their own special register of consumption that cues rhetorical meanings related to taste and fashion regulation, semiotic virtuosity and the reproduction of elite status.¹²³ Cohen claims that these items were, in fact, 'wasteful goods' that came to represent reputability.¹²⁴ Thus, just as she cites the preference for sterling silver table services over utilitarian pot metals, so decorative inkwells began to be seen as more respectable than glass or ceramic designs.

Novelty inkwells also became popular amongst the lower-middle classes. However, these inkwells were cheap assimilations that largely fell into the bracket of 'kitsch', described by Richards as 'elaborately aestheticised commodities produced in the name of large institutions'.¹²⁵ They commonly featured animals and mythological creatures, as well as

images of famous monuments or vistas (Figure 6c), which served as 'miniature attempts to signify the gigantic by compressing the public sphere into a narrow compass of small objects designed for private consumption'.¹²⁶ The introduction of novelty designs can be noted across many different consumer products at this time from pig-shaped pencil cases and owl pepper pots to boar head soap dishes and bird scissors.¹²⁷ Cohen claims that these items arose from the consumer's need to make a dreary object more exciting.¹²⁸ However, it seems more likely that they were the result of astute manufacturers who recognised a new market with disposable income ready to 'bend their energies to live up to their ideal of decency'.¹²⁹

Queen Victoria inkwells were also popular amongst the lower-middle classes. Richards¹³⁰ also cites many other examples of objects that used Victoria's image, such as perfume bottles, trinket boxes, brooches, bookmarks and jump-rope handles. He argues that while products with the Queen's insignia were respectable, using an overt image of her face made an item 'kitsch'. This is because the insignia acted as a guarantee of quality, while the face placed the item at an unlikely intersection between the vast public heraldry of the crown and the private procedures that circumscribed its more intimate use.¹³¹ The same can be said of the Queen Victoria inkwells: despite the lower-middle class's unabashed attempt at 'social posturing'¹³² in a bid to access what they considered to be a legitimate form of culture, their inexperience in matters of taste meant that their consumption preferences were not 'reputably correct'.¹³³

The blotter was another object that became highly teemed with social signification. Before its invention at the beginning of the nineteenth century, salt was typically sprinkled over written text to speed up the drying process. Early Victorian models of the blotter were made of silver or bone and were covered in felt used to soak up ink directly from the tip of the pen before starting to write. Like with nibs and inkwells, the 1870 Education Act made it necessary to find inexpensive ways of equipping schools with blotters. This led to the widespread introduction of blotting paper, a new invention that had been pioneered in the United States by Joseph Parker & Son. Blotting paper consisted of soft absorbent sheets that could blot ink without damaging a pen's nib or smudging written words (Figure 7a). This made it ideal for young children who were learning to write, as well as members of the working-class who could not afford the expensive decorative alternatives. This provides further support for the idea that the working classes deemed the use of an object more important than its aesthetic appearance. However, it would be an overstatement to claim that this belief was representative of the entire group, given that those with more disposable income (i.e., the skilled artisans) may have placed more importance on the social meanings of their possessions. As Johnson¹³⁴ claims, just as many struggles occurred between 'adjacent strata distinguished only by minor gradations of possession and consumption' as between the monolithic class groups.

While the upper class recognised the advantages of blotting paper over felt, they did not consider it to be aesthetically appealing. As a result, pen manufacturers began to attach blotting paper to the underside of blotters, which could then be hidden within a flat, decorative frame on the desk surface. This provided the perfect balance of practicality and

presentability. Gradually, new forms of the blotter developed in 'rocker' designs that featured handles and curved bases, which enabled excess ink to be picked up directly from the document instead of the pen's nib. These rockers became produced in a range of materials, such as wood, stone, metal, porcelain and glass. They also changed in response to the fashion trends of the Victorian era; examples inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, Anglo-Japanese style and Art Nouveau have all been found (Figure 7b). Again, the introduction of choice in materials, designs and decorations was not something unique to the pen industry; examples can be found in carpets, chairs, wallpaper, fireplaces and most other home fixtures.¹³⁵ This was strongly influenced by the emerging upper-class concepts of the 'home as a stage' and 'personality' as an outer manifestation of a person's self or, indeed, imagined self.¹³⁶ Manufacturers across the board picked up on the importance of these notions and began to capitalise on them.

The production of 'kitsch' souvenir designs aimed at the lower-middle classes did not escape the blotter either (Figure 7c). These blotters largely copied upper-class designs, but in cheaper and lower quality forms. Allen and Anderson¹³⁷ argue that it was easy for manufacturers to offer these 'knock-off' goods, as the lower-middle classes mistook the arbitrary and socially structured judgements of the upper classes when choosing their personal possessions for choices that required special cultural knowledge. This meant that, as much as they aspired to be like them, the lower-middle classes were restricted by their misconstrued assumption that there was a link between the expensive and aesthetically-pleasing items of the upper class and 'intelligence'. This misconception was largely responsible for the entire industry that grew out of specialising in what Allen and Anderson term 'palatable versions of legitimate culture',¹³⁸ as well as the knowledge tools that are believed to be necessary to appropriate such culture. As a result, it became a very real prospect that at the house of a lower-middle class Victorian,

One may knock for admittance with the head of a goat, wipe one's feet upon a Newfoundland dog, approach the hostess over a carpet strewn with bouquets, converse with one foot upon a Bengal tiger and contemplate birds of paradise upon a wall; that one may be called upon to interpose the Bay of Naples between an elderly lady and the fireplace, to slice a pineapple upon a humming bird and place one's finger glass upon the countenance of a Tyrolese peasant.¹³⁹

In order to produce blotters at a suitable price for a lower-middle-class audience, the innovative idea of using blotting paper as an advertising opportunity for local companies was developed. According to Rickards and De Beaumont, the portability of blotting paper made it 'a desk-top trade card and year-round promotion piece'.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the company information printed on the paper acted as a form of subliminal advertising that intruded upon the private sphere of the owner's home. Thus, pen manufacturers were able to entice the lower-middle classes with practical and affordable blotting paper, while simultaneously beguiling them with further potential products to buy. Shortly, other manufacturers also

noticed the potential of blotting paper as an advertising device. A cursory glance on photo-sharing and auction websites shows examples of insurance, shoes, oil and cigarettes all advertised in this way. As the majority of lower-middle-class members worked as clerks, they would have used blotting paper on a daily basis, thus coming into regular contact with these advertisements. Furthermore, given that these members were desperately searching for a place in Victorian society, it is likely that they would have been highly influenced by the messages transmitted through this means.¹⁴¹

In some households, the inkwell and blotter were displayed on an inkstand. While upper-class examples tended to consist of gold or silver platters (Figure 8a), the standard design that was rolled out across all board schools was a simple wooden tray (Figure 8b). Lower-middle-class inkstands, on the other hand, often consisted of wooden or glass decorative boxes that featured various compartments to hold pen nibs and pen wipers (Figure 8c). Many inkstands appear to have taken their design from early tea caddies, demonstrating the impact that equipage and 'bundles' had on nineteenth-century product marketing. Moreover, the variation in inkstand materials and design according to class also bears some resemblance with tea equipage consumer practices: Pettigrew notes a preference for silver and tortoiseshell caddies amongst the upper classes and wood amongst the lower classes.¹⁴² Some upper-class Victorians also owned elaborate cast iron pen holders (Figure 8d). These pen holders were bold and overt symbols of social status that resembled miniature versions of sword racks and typically held between six and ten pens.

These 'bundles' demonstrate that the Victorian field of consumption was the site of a struggle between legitimate, middlebrow and popular culture. This struggle was predominantly created by manufacturers, be they of pens, ceramics, tea or pianos, themselves who recognised how to exploit the strict hierarchy of Victorian society through the marketing of their products. As most Victorians were self-constrained by the pre-existing social stratification that constituted their definition of reality, manufacturers were able to accomplish their goal successfully without the need for much coercion or direction through advertising.¹⁴³ Like many other successful Victorian companies, by taking advantage of the natural state of 'how things are' in British society, pen manufacturing was able to evolve into a highly profitable business.

Selling Pens, Selling Empire

As stated at the beginning of this paper, in the nineteenth century, 75% of the pens used in the world were manufactured in Britain. While the exploitation of Britain's deeply embedded class system offered a primary way for manufacturers to sell pens within the British market, a different strategy was required for the successful international purchase of pens. Richards notes that following the global success of the 1851 Great Exhibition, it became clear that the best way to sell British products to other countries was to sell them the ideology of England.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, recognised symbols of English identity, from the monarchy and the Houses of Parliament to Shakespeare and John Bull, began to be printed on all sorts of household objects from matchboxes and biscuit tins to tea packaging and toothpaste.¹⁴⁵ Nib boxes were no

exceptions (Figure 9). By oscillating between the private and public domain, these objects acted as examples of 'practical ideology',¹⁴⁶ offering an imaginary way of relating to the real world based on mass-marketed notions of Britain as an organised system of ideas and images. Plotz claims that these images were also aimed at reproducing a sense of belonging for British people living abroad whose life overseas may have led them to look back towards a 'hypostatised unity' of Britain.¹⁴⁷ Richards¹⁴⁸, however, has a more sceptical belief that the primary objective of these images was to embody notions of the innate superiority of the English race, their global mission and the beneficence of the items that they bestowed upon the world. Despite their seemingly different views, it is possible that Plotz and Richards' ideas are compatible: these symbols may have served to remind expats of the characteristic emblems of British identity, while simultaneously transmitting messages to foreign countries about Britain's supposed might and power.

Products were also used to emphasise the strength and expanse of the British Empire and to represent the material wealth that it created. For Victorians, the economic growth of Britain was a key aim of the British Empire and the surplus production of consumer goods came to be seen as an important way in which to consolidate domestic support for imperial expansion.¹⁴⁹ As a result, pen nib boxes, as well as products as diverse as bacon, soap, cocoa and furniture cream,¹⁵⁰ all became adorned with world maps marking British territory and ships, as well as sea monsters, stars and quotations from Shakespeare. Hack¹⁵¹ argues that these designs, which were echoed in later posters by the Empire Marketing Board, simultaneously suggested that the British Empire was unified and modern, yet deeply rooted in British culture and history. According to McClintock, by abstracting the product from the social context and human labour involved in its production, it became more than merely a symbol of imperial progress; it became the agent of history itself.¹⁵²

While one cannot assess the ways in which consumers would have interpreted the images on the pen nib boxes, it is difficult to deny the claim that the images chosen became 'receptacles for containing, and vehicles for advancing, a particular political ideology'.¹⁵³ Thus, they provide support for the view that favourable opinions on the Empire were aided by instruments of information that appeared reputable in appearance but were often insidious in their appeal. Richards¹⁵⁴ claims that the advantage of promoting Empire on items such as matchboxes or toiletries over other conventional propaganda was that the boxes would be kept until the item ran out. This certainly appears to be something that pen manufacturers kept in mind when producing pen nib boxes. This ensured that the message remained with recipients for longer, thus moving Empire from the domain of politics into the 'the sanctum sanctorum'¹⁵⁵ of the consumer where it became an 'unthreatening decorative fixture'.¹⁵⁶ By turning items into what Richards calls a type of 'portable Crystal Palace',¹⁵⁷ manufacturers were able to exhibit in miniature the superiority and surplus productivity of English industry.

A feature of marketing abroad that appears to be unique to the pen industry is that of altering packaging in order to make it relevant to a specific target country. Thus, while many other British products abroad were advertised with the sole purpose of highlighting Britain's power (e.g. Pears soap, Bovril, Beecham's pills¹⁵⁸), pen nib boxes were redesigned according

to a country's emblems. Hinks, Wells & Co.'s no. 2771 fine point pen, for example, was marketed as the 'King Christian IX pen' in Denmark, its box featuring a portrait of the Danish King. In France, however, it was rebranded 'la vraie Plume de Soldat' – the true soldier's pen – and emphasised an image of the *tricolore*, appealing to France's national pride and military might (Figure 10). Other similar examples include the use of a koala (Australia), Cervantes (Spain), Pinocchio (Italy), an elephant (India) and an eagle (USA).

Today, the exploitation of cultural identity in advertising is well-established as a means of enhancing the reputation of a producer and thus, selling a product.¹⁵⁹ In the Victorian era, a time in which patriotism was a vital constituent and solid fundament of most countries' national identity, this proved to be a particularly successful marketing device for manufacturers. What set pen manufacturers apart from others, however, was that they did not just limit their images of national identity to Britain, but rather drew upon each target country's images. In this way, they created a positive impression of both their products and their producers and promoted patriotism as a noble and sacred character of national identity.¹⁶⁰ Although these individual images associated with each country's national identity were strategic economic choices made by pen manufacturers as opposed to actual concern with each country's wellbeing, the popularity of the pens across the world demonstrates that these manufacturers were highly successful in their actions.

Conclusions

Following its invention in 1824, the dip pen gradually became the subject of an elaborate and artful marketing campaign that spread its usage across the world, transcending both social hierarchies and geographical boundaries. While the dip pen began its life as a tool of the upper class, mass-production techniques and the 1870 Education Act led to its adoption by the lower classes of Victorian society. The democratisation of the dip pen offered pen manufacturers an attractive opportunity to capitalise on Britain's deeply rooted class structure and use the pen as a strategy of distinction. While the pen was certainly not the first product to be marketed in this way,¹⁶¹ it is clear that it emerged at a time in which Britain was experiencing vast threats to its long-established hierarchical system. 'All the way up and all the way down the scale, there's some discontent. No one is quite sure where they stand and everyone's fretting,' lamented H.G. Wells' *Kipps*.¹⁶² As a result, more than ever, consumers were paying attention to the importance of pecuniary strength, and the ability to display that strength in a tangible way.¹⁶³ This brought about the profitable challenge not of how to meet supply with demand, but rather how to meet demand with supply.

In response, pen manufacturers introduced a price tier system, marketed limited edition, decorative and glass nibs, and exclusively designed inkwells and blotters, which offered the upper class a vehicle through which to assert themselves in a social space and objectify their economic means and cultural preferences. They also recognised a new lucrative target in the lower-middle classes who were also impressionable to the concept of the pen as a status symbol. By mistakenly associating culture with knowledge and assuming that the arbitrary, aesthetic items owned by the upper class were legitimate in cultural

spheres, this group bought into the cheaper 'knock-off' and novelty designs produced by pen manufacturers. Thus, they became avid consumers of what Bailey calls 'commercialised modes of mass individualism'.¹⁶⁴ In contrast, most members of the working classes welcomed pens as sources of intellectual emancipation that enabled many of them to learn to write for the first time. For this group, aesthetic appeal was not a major concern; instead, the ownership of a pen was looked upon with pride in recognition of the fact that they now had both the literacy and the financial means to purchase one. However, they were not completely ignorant of the possibility of being evaluated by the products which surrounded them. Thus, even at risk of debt, some members purchased items that they could not really afford. These items may have had a similar function to clean rent books or whitened doorsteps, which Entwistle¹⁶⁵ considers to have been important outward manifestations of respectability, even amongst the poorest of Victorian families.

In contrast, the dip pens that were marketed abroad strongly emphasised symbols of England or the British Empire, as well as national figures and images from the target country of the product. Like many others, pen manufacturers cannily tapped into the growing nationalist rhetoric that was spreading internationally in the nineteenth century and in doing so, were able to invade the homes of consumers with subtle political discourse. While nationalism is often treated as a modern advertising tool that arose as a result of globalisation,¹⁶⁶ it is clear that it was being used successfully in the nineteenth century to sell pen nibs, toothpaste and soap, to name but a few products.

Bourdieu¹⁶⁷ argues that it is no accident that when tastes have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively by the refusal of other tastes. This is clearly demonstrated through the dip pen, which was marketed as offering designs to suit all Victorians, regardless of their social background, yet in doing so, served as a culturally hegemonic product that reinforced class divisions in Victorian society.

The dip pen exemplifies how personal possessions constitute a key aspect of a person's identity from which one's entire lifestyle can be determined.¹⁶⁸ This is not only due to the fact that they were largely purchased based on the extent to which they embodied the economic and cultural necessity of the owner, but also because the social meanings embedded in them were deeply engrained in the owner's subconscious from a very young age, whether that be regarding social class (in Britain) or national identity (abroad). In Britain, this 'social conditioning'¹⁶⁹ meant that lower-class consumers ended up excluding themselves from the upper-class products from which they were excluded, as the social order inscribed in their minds led them to believe that cheap substitutes were 'the best that they could do'.

By establishing a segmented market approach and tapping into collective consciousness on social status, power and one's sense of limitations in Britain, while playing up to notions of nationalism and patriotism abroad, pen manufacturers were able to build a highly lucrative trade that enabled British dip pens to rule the world.

¹ Leonard Bast in E.M. Forster, *Howard's End* (London: Edward Arnold, 1910), 58.

² Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 11.

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- ³ Francesca Carnevali and Lucy Newton, 'Pianos for the People: From Producer to Consumer in Britain, 1851-1914', *Enterprise and Society* 14, no. 1 (2013): 41-42.
- ⁴ Peter Stallybrass, 'Marx's Coat', in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Places*, ed. Patricia Spyer (London: Routledge, 1998), 202.
- ⁵ Examples of social distinction and personal possessions in the eighteenth century have been recognised by Dries Lyna and Ilja van Damme, 'A strategy of seduction? The role of commercial advertisements in the eighteenth-century retailing business of Antwerp', *Business History*, 51, no. 1 (2009): 100-121; Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, 'Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century', *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 2 (2007): 145-170; and Jon Stobart, 'Status, gender and life cycle in the consumption practices of the English elite. The case of Mary Leigh, 1736-1806', *Social History* 40, no. 1 (2015): 82-103.
- ⁶ Cohen, *Household Gods*, xii
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 109
- ⁸ Regina Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 9-10.
- ⁹ See, for example, Carnevali and Newton, 'Pianos for the People' (pianos), Cohen, *Household Gods* (table services) and Lauren O'Hagan, *Class, Culture and Conflict in the Edwardian Book Inscription: A Multimodal Ethnohistorical Approach*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2018.
- ¹⁰ As claimed by Thomas Richards, *Commodity Culture of Victorian Britain* (London: Verso, 1991).
- ¹¹ Carnevali and Newton, 'Pianos for the People', 38
- ¹² Brian Jones *People, Pens & Production in Birmingham's Pen Trade* (Birmingham: Brewin Books, 2013), 2.
- ¹³ Francesca Carnevali, 'Golden Opportunities: Jewelry Making in Birmingham between Mass Production and Specialty', *Enterprise and Society* 4, no. 2 (2002): 273-274.
- ¹⁴ Bob Miles, 'The Pen Trade'. Jewellery Quarter <http://www.jquarter.org.uk/webdisk/morepentrade.htm> (accessed 23 November, 2018).
- ¹⁵ Richard Mayer, 'The Advertising Agency', in *Practice of Advertising*, ed. Adrian Mackay (London: Elsevier, 2005), 71.
- ¹⁶ Carnevali, 'Golden Opportunities', 274
- ¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2010), 70.
- ¹⁸ Described by Sven De Vries and Rakesh Vohra, 'Combinatorial Auctions: A Survey', *INFORMS Journal on Computing* 15, no. 3 (2003): 287 as "combinations of related items"
- ¹⁹ Richards, *Commodity Culture of Victorian Britain*; Roy Church, 'Advertising consumer goods in nineteenth-century Britain', *Economic History Review* 33, 4 (2000): 621-645; Gerard Curtis, *Visual Words: Art and the Material Book in Victorian England* (Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Co., 2003).
- ²⁰ Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming angels: advertising and Victorian women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- ²¹ 'The History of the Pen Trade in Birmingham' display in The Pen Museum, Unit 3 The Argent Centre, 60 Frederick St, Birmingham B1 3HS, 11 April 2018.
- ²² Miles, 'The Pen Trade'.
- ²³ Ben Hurst, 'How Birmingham led the world in pen nib production... before changing technology wrote off the industry', 19th January 2014, *Birmingham Post*, <https://www.birminghampost.co.uk/lifestyle/how-birmingham-led-world-pen-6522659> (accessed 23 November, 2018).
- ²⁴ Jones, *People, Pens & Production in Birmingham's Pen Trade*, 2.
- ²⁵ Roughly £39.20 in modern-day money.
- ²⁶ Thomas Milner, *Our Home Islands: Their Productive Industry* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1857), 267.
- ²⁷ Miles, 'The Pen Trade'
- ²⁸ William Mitchell, 'William Mitchell Product Catalogue 2013-2014'. <https://www.williammitchellcalligraphy.co.uk/sites/default/files/William%20Mitchell%20Product%20Catalogue.pdf>. (accessed 23 November, 2018).
- ²⁹ Miles, 'The Pen Trade'
- ³⁰ Sarah Loat, 'The Pen is Mightier', 17th March 2009, *BBC News*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham/content/articles/2009/03/13/the_pen_room_feature.shtml (accessed 23 November, 2018).
- ³¹ Miles, 'The Pen Trade'
- ³² Michelle Roper-Shaw, 'When Birmingham led the world in pen nib manufacturing', 28th April 2017, *Office Supplies Blog* <http://www.officesuppliesblog.co.uk/2017/04/28/birmingham-led-world-pen-nib-manufacturing/> (accessed 23 November, 2018).
- ³³ For example, Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian Britain*.
- ³⁴ For example, Berg and Clifford, 'Selling Consumption'; Lyna and Van Damme, 'A Strategy of Seduction'; Beverly Lemire, 'The Power of Things in Eighteenth-Century Studies', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 50, no. 3 (2017): 341-

344; Joyce Burnette, 'The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present (Review)', *Enterprise and Society* 12, no. 2 (2011): 482-484.

³⁵ Maxine Berg, 'Luxury, the Luxury Trades, and the Roots of Industrial Growth', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 173.

³⁶ Sven De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 129.

³⁷ Roughly £2.80 in modern-day money

³⁸ Roughly £22.40 in modern-day money

³⁹ Dale Porter, *The Thames Embankment: Environment, Technology, and Society in Victorian London* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1998), 176.

⁴⁰ Devon Lemire, 'A Historiographical Survey of Literacy in Britain between 1780 and 1830', *Constellations* 4, vol. 1 (2012): 259.

⁴¹ Carnevali and Newton, *Pianos for the People*, 61.

⁴² O'Hagan, *Class, Culture and Conflict in the Edwardian Book Inscription*, 26-27

⁴³ In 'Luxury, the Luxury Trades, and the Roots of Industrial Growth', Berg has suggested that luxury was not unique to the Victorians and was also a key focus of eighteenth-century advertising.

⁴⁴ Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001): 39-40; Graham Harding 'Competition is useless': how Gilbey's retail and marketing innovation dominated the British wine and spirits market, 1857-1922', *History of Retailing and Consumption* 2, no. 1 (2016): 54.

⁴⁵ Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* (London: HarperCollins, 1982).

⁴⁶ British Library, 'Concise History of the British Newspaper in the Nineteenth Century' http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/news/concisehistbritnews/britnews_19th/index.html (accessed 23 November, 2018).

⁴⁷ Berg and Clifford, 'Selling Consumption', 146.

⁴⁸ James Raven, 'Serial Advertisement in Eighteenth Century Britain and Ireland', in *Serials and Their Readers 1620-1914*, eds. Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester: Publishing Pathways, 1993), 105.

⁴⁹ Mark Borokowski, *Improperganda: The Art of the Publicity Stunt* (London: Vision On, 2000), 9.

⁵⁰ Maurice Rickards and Sally De Beaumont, *Encyclopedia of Ephemera*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 122-123.

⁵¹ John Styles, 'Manufacturing, Consumption and Design', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter, (London: Routledge, 1994), 541.

⁵² Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian Britain*, 175

⁵³ Berg and Clifford, 'Selling Consumption', 146-147

⁵⁴ Jonathan Reinartz, 'Promoting the Pint: Ale and Advertising in late Victorian and Edwardian England', *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* 22, vol. 1 (2009):29.

⁵⁵ Erika Rappaport, 'Packaging China: Foreign Articles and Dangerous Tastes in the Mid-Victorian Tea Party', in *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*, ed. Frank Trentmann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 125-146.

⁵⁶ Harding, 'Competition is Useless', 62

⁵⁷ Richard Altick, *Writers, Readers and Occasions*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 184.

⁵⁸ Hermione Hobhouse, 'The Legacy of the Great Exhibition', *Royal Society of Arts* 143, vol. 5459 (1995):49.

⁵⁹ See Lyna and Van Damme, 'A Strategy of Seduction'; Berg and Clifford, 'Selling Consumption' and Stobart 'Status, Gender and Lifecycle'

⁶⁰ Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian Britain*, 7.

⁶¹ Cohen, *Household Gods*, 39.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Loat, 'The Pen is Mightier'.

⁶⁴ West Midlands History, 'The Great Exhibition' <https://historywm.com/collections/great-exhibition> (accessed 23 November, 2018).

⁶⁵ Church, 'Advertising consumer goods in nineteenth-century Britain', 636.

⁶⁶ Carnevali and Newton, 'Pianos for the People', 53.

⁶⁷ Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians*, 42.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 53.

⁶⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 212.

⁷⁰ John Winter, 'The Spade Guinea Advertising Token', 22nd December 2014, <http://www.johnwinter.net/jw/2014/12/the-spade-guinea-advertising-token/> (accessed 23 November, 2018).

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- ⁷¹ See O'Hagan, *Class, Culture and Conflict in the Edwardian Book Inscription*, 29-29; Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, 29; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 169.
- ⁷² Sean Brierley, *The Advertising Book*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 150.
- ⁷³ Jan Marsh, 'Gender Ideology & Separate Spheres in the 19th Century', 2016, Victoria & Albert Museum <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/g/gender-ideology-and-separate-spheres-19th-century/> (accessed 23 November, 2018).
- ⁷⁴ Department for Culture, Media and Sport. 'A Golden Opportunity. Heritage Minister Lists 106 Buildings in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter' https://web.archive.org/web/20080727103925/http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/2310.aspx (accessed 23 November, 2018).
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