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Railway Photographic Advertising in Britain, 1900-1939

Alexander Medcalf



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Railway Photographic
Advertising in Britain,
1900-1939

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Clare Wilburn, the fictional heroine of Francis Brett Young's *Portrait of Clare* (1927), struggled to find happiness throughout her life. After the death of her mother and her father's remarriage, she endured an austere upbringing, a turbulent youth and several failed relationships. In the book's final phase, Clare secludes herself in a fishing village on the southern horn of Torbay. There, settled in a trawlerman's house overlooking the anchorage, she finds a serenity not known previously. Brett Young describes how Clare chanced upon this sanctuary, having chosen it for no other reason than, when travelling in a railway carriage on her way to Wychbury, a photograph of the harbour had caught her eye and held it.¹ The reader is offered no further details about why this view in particular captured her attention, but is meant to infer that, at a low point in her life, the photograph alerted Clare to the existence of a different world which promised escape and recovery. Seated in the carriage, Clare was persuaded by a photograph intended to do just that: captivate daily commuters with the prospect of a holiday away from their quotidian responsibilities in a world that was more attractive and fantastical by comparison. Access to this world required passengers simply do as they did every day: board the train, show the ticket and make the journey.

At the time when *Portrait of Clare* was first published, advertising photographs were the constant companions on many journeys, as publicity-minded railway companies sought to showcase their services to passengers

who, confined to the railway carriage, represented a captive audience. The fictional Clare Wilburn was like millions of customers in real life who were greeted by railway advertising photographs each time they entered the booking hall, arrived at the platform or boarded the train. In addition, Britain's railway companies offered photographic views in a truly diverse assortment of guidebooks and pamphlets. These publications were designed to satisfy a range of tastes and pockets, covering niche interests and pastimes, introducing readers to different regions or exhibiting all that a particular railway had to offer in weighty tomes of over one thousand pages. Although these publications were in essence advertising, they were however sold to customers, with the largest guides costing a relatively inexpensive 6d. This was a price which many were willing to pay: railway literature was eagerly anticipated and proved incredibly popular, with the chief guides selling close to a quarter of a million copies each. Millions of customers were therefore exposed to the railways' competing promotional messages, which asked them to consider their everyday surroundings and picture what time away could do for their health, their relationship with families, to satisfy their interests and hobbies, and how it might affect their outlook on life.

Yet despite their popularity, the railways' advertising photographs, and the popular publications which they appeared in, have been almost completely overlooked by historians. Partly, this is due to the fact that the photographers and publicists responsible for their creation commonly laboured in obscurity: little is known about their background, artistic direction or working relationships. The same is true of the creative and corporate processes behind the output. Although thousands of original negatives survive, there is very little complementary information about why they were taken or selected for publication over others. These challenges complicate the integration of photographs into the broader cultures of railway and photographic advertising across the first half of the twentieth century, and the railways' photographic output has been overshadowed by the interest in their pictorial posters. But to overlook them is to ignore a significant advertising medium which for some railways represented the 'front line' of their promotional strategies. They are the material legacy of a major corporate image-making process which sought to capture and package for sale all that the railways had to offer during a period of increasing competition for customers' leisure time and expenditure.

This volume considers the development of railway advertising from 1900 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, to better understand why and how Britain's railway companies built up such an extensive photographic library to sell country destinations, seaside resorts, urban sights and, not least, railway travel. It seeks to unravel the complex and ever changing processes behind corporate sales communications and the resources dedicated to understanding passengers and encouraging them to consume. Shifting the emphasis away from pictorial posters, it contends that whilst photographs were initially prized by advertisers for their ability to show products and services with unparalleled realism, the railways' usage went far beyond providing an authentic record of locales in the areas listed above. Britain's railway companies used photographic guidebooks to engage customers' anxieties about the disappearance of traditional landscapes and local values; the modernisation of British culture and business operations; the place of the seaside in the collective imagination; the changing role of women as consumers and advertisers; as well as changing habits of moving and consuming travel. Railway photography was highly narrative; using models and carefully staged arrangements, it was intended to communicate vividly with passengers based on their tastes and abilities to consume. This volume maintains that the changing face of railway photographic advertising is therefore illustrative of a collective shift in the railways' corporate mindset, away from a 'take-it-or-leave-it' attitude to customers, and towards a developing view which saw them as individuals with different needs and desires which required satisfaction. Whilst the primary aim was to safeguard the railway business, the products of this process packaged and sold Britain on an enormous scale to customers at home and abroad, creating a corporate vision of Britain on holiday as well as contributing to how millions viewed themselves and the world around them.

THE RAILWAY COMPANIES OF GREAT BRITAIN

Following their initial availability as a form of passenger transport in the 1830s, railways rapidly revolutionised how far and how fast people and goods moved, challenging long-established notions of time and distance in the process.² They stimulated and gave access to new forms of consumption, and influenced the spatial development of many towns and cities. In these early years, however, they possessed little notion of serving passengers, or improving comfort and safety beyond the first class carriages.

It was left up to the government to require basic standards: Gladstone's well-known Act of 1844 stipulated that a third class train should run every day at one penny per mile, and that it should provide seats and basic protection from the weather.³ Yet for many years even such statutory conditions remained exceptional.

Certain companies grew large as they absorbed smaller regional concerns. Some became enormous, and enormously complex, businesses which dominated travel and employment across the districts they served. As Simmons and Gourvish have shown, few of the railway pioneers were professional men and the technical problems of railway management were only partly understood.⁴ However, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards the growth of railways as big businesses reduced the incentive for impulsive action: Gourvish has identified the increasing importance of the railway general manager, a position created in response to the need for strategic direction and management.⁵ As well as reconceptualising operating policies around the notion of 'public service', railwaymen began to study their customers' requirements and sponsor the idea that passengers did not represent a disorganised mass but functioned as groups which could be appealed to through dedicated and persuasive promotions.⁶

By the late nineteenth century, Britain's railways were some of the country's largest businesses, pervasive behemoths with intricate corporate cultures, and an inescapable part of everyday life for millions of people. With the outbreak of the First World War the companies were taken into state control and put into service for the war effort. However, upon their release from governmental restriction they were in bad shape financially, their machinery and workforce similarly beleaguered. The solution was to compulsorily reorganise over one hundred individual companies into the 'Big Four' regional railways, comprising the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER), Southern Railway (SR), the London Midland and Scottish (LMS), and the Great Western Railway (GWR). The theory was that larger, regional companies would increase efficiency, rationalise operations and discourage uneconomical competition.⁷ However, in the inter-war years they faced many new challenges: mounting rivalry from road transport, the decline of traditional heavy industry, more discerning passenger requirements, as well as intensifying competition for their discretionary income.

Although this book considers the development of advertising theories and techniques across the railway industry, it pursues a detailed case study of the GWR, one of the world's oldest and most successful railway

companies. This choice is partly down to the fact that the GWR is somewhat of an anomaly, being the only member of the 'Big Four' to survive amalgamation with its corporate identity intact. This unbroken history allows a unique assessment of the growth of advertising during the period under consideration. The GWR was also a prolific photographer and publisher, making it an immediately practical choice for this first in-depth study of railway photographic advertising. Much is also known about the GWR's general and economic development, internal organisation, staff conditions, locomotives and carriage design, although the lack of an academic business history represents a significant omission.⁸ Inaugurated in March 1835 as a scheme to link London with Bristol, and thus London with New York, the GWR grew steadily throughout the nineteenth century. Absorbing smaller railways, it nonetheless faced strong competition for travel over the south and west of England. Throughout its first forty years, business was roughly divided between passengers and freight, but from the 1870s passengers began to grow in importance as holidays became more affordable. Around this time (the exact year is unclear),⁹ the company's first advertising department was created and a handful of men were charged with making the company's services known to the general public.

By the early years of the twentieth century, the GWR was Britain's third largest company ranked by market value,¹⁰ and in 1911 comprised roughly 70,000 employees, making it the third largest employer in Britain, just behind the London and North Western Railway but far behind the General Post Office.¹¹ Having embarked on modernisation and upgrading of its system in the 1890s the company needed to ensure a return on this investment. Encouraging people to make discretionary journeys it perhaps had not occurred to them to make, raising the popularity of resorts in the winter months, and growing the travel habit more generally were some answers to this, which further increased advertising's importance.¹² In 1914, the GWR was the second largest supplier of railway services in Britain and spanned a territory of some 3000 route miles between London and the South West, parts of the Midlands, and Wales.¹³ Whilst the GWR retained its corporate identity following the post-war railway reorganisation, it nevertheless faced the same pressures as its competitors. It could also be said that surviving the amalgamation unaltered meant that the GWR was uniquely challenged: whereas the other railways reorganised and rethought their promotional strategies, drawing on the collective wisdom of previously competing departments which now coalesced, the GWR lacked this incentive. This situation will be explored in detail in Chap. 2.

As this outline suggests, the railways' financial, organisational and technological performance has attracted significant attention. Yet these companies represented much more than their role as travel facilitators. Transport history's cultural turn, which has been turning since the last decades of the twentieth century, has shifted attention away from the people who built and ran the railways and onto those who consumed them. The resulting scholarship has revealed the vast and varied extent to which railways impacted upon people's working and leisure lives, as well as the significance of their appearance in novels, songs, poems, early films and radio programmes.¹⁴ The experiences aboard the carriage, of speed and waiting, of fears about railway accidents and fellow passengers, recognise passengerhood as more than statistics about journeys taken and miles travelled, and as one of the quintessential experiences of modernity.¹⁵ However, the packaging and sale of railway travel, as well as what the companies knew or thought they knew about customers' propensity to travel, remain rather neglected issues.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAILWAY ADVERTISING

Although the promotion of products and services to a consuming public has a long history indeed, it was not until the final decades of the nineteenth century that some British advertisers broke with tradition and recognised that advertising might not merely be used to announce the availability of products but shape and direct the attitudes towards these.¹⁶ Reassured by attempts during the 1890s to professionalise and regulate advertising, more businesses became less sceptical about integrating it into their business. Advertising had to stand out in an increasingly competitive marketplace, and companies experimented with eye-catching methods to promote their products. The advertising professional took on a new importance, and although it was still difficult to discern the precise benefits of advertising, it was progressively viewed as a process which needed to be strategic, and include questioning who customers were, what they desired and what they thought of rival products. Improvements were by no means universal; Corley suggests that by 1914, despite significant progress in some areas, a great deal of advertising continued to be amateurish and unimaginative.¹⁷

The promotional efforts of Britain's railway companies followed a roughly similar pattern of development. There is broad agreement that even the earliest passenger railways of the 1830s grasped the need to entice

customers and had some understanding of the means for doing so. Public uncertainty about this new method of travel, stoked by contemporary satirists who depicted railway locomotives as fire-breathing monstrosities which devoured passengers and blackened the countryside, prompted the first railway publicity exercises, brands and advertisements. Image consciousness was reflected in the choice of impressive names, crests and colourful liveries which helped to fashion rudimentary corporate identities.¹⁸ However, further development was stunted because rail's novelty and speed meant that when new lines opened they quickly became much more popular in comparison to the corresponding road services.¹⁹ Confirmed as the new technical marvels of the world, railway advertising hardly needed to be innovative. Handbills, timetables and press announcements were used liberally, but focused on providing information about timings and cost rather than stimulating a spirit of travel.

Scholars differ over when exactly railway advertising rejected an approach based on price, range and service in favour of appealing to the individual customer's desires.²⁰ Hiroki Shin has argued that the final quarter of the late nineteenth century did not represent as a lacklustre stage in railway advertising but responded to a specific institutional and economic context.²¹ However, it is generally considered that, like many other companies, around 1900 Britain's railways began to make use of the developments in lithography and photographic reproduction to advertise through images and ask customers to consider what travel could do for their personality, status and aspirations. The railways' efforts responded to the nature of consumption. Population expansion accompanied by economic growth meant that incomes and leisure time increased. This varied by region and class: improvements were felt less by the working classes employed in traditional industries, but for those in middle-class occupations consumption opportunities generally improved.²² They were targeted with many new commodities as the character of consumption increasingly shifted from traditional staples to new fashionable items, as people increasingly defined themselves by what they consumed rather than what they produced.²³ The middle-class holiday epitomised this change; it could be restorative and educative but it also allowed people to consume conspicuously, showing that they had the money and, crucially, the right sensibilities to select an enviable destination. Railway companies realised that in order to get people to use their services more frequently they needed to target the desire to travel, and the purpose of railway advertising became to 'induce people who would otherwise not do so, to travel by

rail, and to encourage such as would travel a little, to travel more'.²⁴ Distance also became less important as companies sought to entice passengers to travel the length and breadth of the country in search of their perfect holiday.

The railways' product was, however, difficult to define explicitly. As Chap. 2 demonstrates, those responsible for railway advertising argued that selling railway travel presented unique challenges, and therefore could not readily be compared to the efforts of businesses in other industries in terms of cost, output or success. Britain's railways acknowledged that they needed to better understand customers, and not just why they travelled or their requirements and preferences when aboard carriages, but what they expected from a holiday and what motivated them to consume. Some held that the market for discretionary railway travel could usefully be divided based on demographics, family make-up, interests and budgets. Although the concept of market segmentation was only recognised in official parlance in the 1950s,²⁵ historians nevertheless agree that it shaped earlier selling practices.²⁶ The concept advocates that businesses divide mass markets into more manageable groups of customers unified by similar desires, requirements or ability to consume.²⁷ The railways agreed with the essential point behind this, and the chapters throughout this volume argue that photographic advertising was composed and released with particular groups in mind.

The interwar years have been identified as a pivotal period for advertising practice in Britain. The 1924 World Advertising Convention, held in London, was billed as the 'commencement of the effective organisation of British advertising'.²⁸ National expenditure on advertising rose from an estimated £31 million in 1920 to £57 million in 1928.²⁹ Significant progress was made in both the visual qualities of advertisements and the sophistication of the messages conveyed.³⁰ Robert Fitzgerald has argued that a 'marketing revolution' began in these years, representing a profound shift away from an occupation with production and products, to a business outlook with customers at the centre.³¹ Although British advertising is commonly thought to have lagged behind that of American businesses in this period, recent scholarship has challenged that assumption.³² Case studies demonstrate how the promotion of department stores, furniture, building societies and motor accessories engaged modern advertising theories.³³ Market research also began to be used more frequently, albeit in a rudimentary manner, as some businesses moved to analyse and quantify customers' activities, interests and opinions. Experimental advertising

messages were included on the side of airships, projected by searchlights, conveyed using moving models in shop window displays, and were lit up in neon.³⁴

The interwar years have similarly been represented as marking a shift towards more developed, aggressive and wide-ranging railway advertising. The period witnessed the enlargement of railway advertising departments, progress in the design of individual advertisements, locomotive and carriage styling with an eye to passenger interests, as well as experimentation with a range of other specialist techniques. Divall and Shin argue that 'official' corporate advertising, as well as 'semi-official' media such as company magazines, station design, merchandising and streamlining, characterised railway advertising. They contend that companies possessed a greater understanding of concepts such as 'customer service' than is generally appreciated.³⁵ But whilst some suggest that the railways contributed to the developing discourse on marketing,³⁶ others claim that they nevertheless lagged behind the strategies employed by companies in the United States.³⁷

The analysis of pictorial posters has dominated the scholarly interest in British railway advertising. Poster campaigns which featured symbolic content indeed represent crucial evidence of the railways' desire to segment the passenger market and encourage consumption primarily based on emotions rather than rational considerations such as cost and availability. Yet focusing on posters sustains common beliefs about the railways' advertising capabilities, and ignores the fact that in the 1920s certain companies began to question whether posters gave the best results.³⁸ Whilst posters remained a key strategy for many companies, railway advertising was incredibly diverse, and included postcards, press advertising, booklets, handbills, sales publications and photographs. In addition, some companies issued games and jigsaws, novelty records, and collaborated with department stores to create themed displays. Whilst this book focuses predominantly on photographic advertising, the mediums described above represent fruitful entry points into an advertising culture which was vibrant and characterised by innovation and experimentation.

From the 1920s onwards, Britain's railways not only competed with each other for passengers but increasingly with motor cars and buses as well. Motor manufacturers produced extensive advertising campaigns, which in some cases targeted railway companies directly, to suggest that motoring was superior to passengerhood in terms of speed, image and the ability to access leisure opportunities located off the beaten track at any

moment that pleased. Although on the whole the railways preferred to picture destinations, Chap. 6 examines the GWR's use of advertising photography to meet this challenge and address the negative assumptions surrounding the passenger experience. This reworked image was in part dependent on previous attempts to analyse and get to know passengers, finding out what they valued aboard the train as well as the reasons for their displeasure. The result was some of the GWR's most innovative photography, which used sets and life models as the company put the effectiveness of advertising to the test in convincing passengers that railway carriages really could rival the convenience, privacy and cachet of motor cars.

There is, however, a discrepancy between the sheer volume of railway guides, brochures, posters and press advertisements, and what is known about their formulation and production. Little official information on advertising's management has survived periods of war, company amalgamation, nationalisation and uncompleted attempts to transfer records to other formats,³⁹ and the traditional archival locations such as general manager's meetings, traffic committee minutes and reports are often frustratingly silent on advertising strategy. But absence of evidence should not be taken as evidence of absence. Company magazines and industry gazettes represent a valuable source of information on many topics relating to the operation and management of advertising. Advertising industry journals such as *The Advertising World* and *Advertiser's Weekly* can also be used to locate railway operations in the wider context of British advertising thought and practice. Publicity clerks and managers were regularly invited to speak on advertising matters, and their opinions, strategies and objectives are sometimes recorded in these periodicals. There were many interesting characters, some of whom were very vocal on the subject of advertising. London Transport's Frank Pick has attracted perhaps the most interest for his forward-thinking attitude towards promotions. Pick transformed an uninspired publicity department, using well-known poster artists to create a universal, easy to comprehend identity which branded all elements of the system.⁴⁰ In this volume, the reader will meet many others, such as the GWR's advertising manager William Fraser, and his daughter Dorothy who took over the editorship of the GWR's *Holiday Haunts* guide in 1929. Major John Dewar broke the mould: although he had not previously worked for a railway he possessed extensive experience from his time with the Empire Marketing Board. William Teasdale and Cecil Dandridge of the LNER were particularly fascinating personalities, who

seemingly did not overlook an opportunity to advocate the LNER's progressive advertising policies, or their role in them. The officials of each railway convened periodically to spar and compare achievements, as well as to defend railway advertising against external accusations of advertising ineptitude. Using the sources outlined above, Chap. 2 uncovers this competitive culture, reconstructing the cross-company advertising mindset which explored why and how customers should be approached, what were the most attractive forms of advertising, their results and which companies did it best.

The notion that Britain's railways were notable, even pioneering, advertisers has recently gained more credibility. However, there remains a substantial grey area about how and when this was achieved, and to what extent railways were driven by the need to envision passenger wants beyond practical considerations about the price and speed of services. The topic is vast and comparatively unexplored, and it is beyond the scope of this volume to give all the necessary answers regarding the intricate promotional cultures which arose at each railway, the individual collaborations with resort authorities, or a complete synthesis of the mediums used. Instead, it aims for a decisive step forwards by concentrating on one company in depth, expanded to other companies where appropriate and necessary, and by examining a significant yet hitherto neglected medium in photography. It contends that around 1900, several factors aligned to change the nature of advertising and professionalise the process, which also engendered a new visual direction which saw the GWR picture a bewildering array of holiday allurements, from ducking stools and hoary local characters, to lidos and bathing belles.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ADVERTISING

The look of advertising changed fundamentally during the first half of the twentieth century, as text-based appeals were replaced with a greater emphasis on visual ploys. For many businesses, visual advertising became crucial in communicating with and segmenting markets, helping to increase the sale of goods and services beyond the strictly utilitarian. As they sought unique ways to appeal to customers, the interest in photography also increased. Photography's application to advertising was limited before 1900 because reproduction was expensive, technically complicated, and results, for the daily press and its low-quality paper, were commonly unsatisfactory. The development of the photographic half-tone process in

the 1890s enabled better results, which were adopted by illustrated magazines and used in catalogues. But some remained reluctant to abandon pen-and-brush artists: whilst commercial photography offered realism, it was nevertheless viewed as unable to offer the emotional pull increasingly deemed essential to encourage customers to dispel their rational considerations.⁴¹

Photographic advertising in Britain is said to have lagged behind the creative efforts devised in other European countries and the United States. In the United States, photographers' abilities are said to have converged with the needs of advertisers in the 1920s.⁴² 'Straight' photography and authenticity, the early hallmark of photographic advertising, was frequently reworked or even abandoned in favour of securing specific visual effects. Whilst subjects rendered naturalistically did not disappear from advertising,⁴³ photographers such as Man Ray, Edward Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz became renowned for their exotic designs which pushed the boundaries of representation. As in the United States, designers in Europe used studio setups and scale contrasts, but added techniques such as negative photography, double exposure and photograms (a photographic image produced without a camera).⁴⁴ In Germany, for instance, László Moholy-Nagy and Albert Renger-Patzsch experimented with photomontage, commodity realism and documentary qualities in the advertising context.⁴⁵

David Mellor argues that British advertisers looked to the new German photography around the end of the 1920s for inspiration to rejuvenate the appeal of products and address declining sales brought on by the economic downturn.⁴⁶ The menswear retailer Austin Reed, which had used straightforward shots of men wearing the company's products in a range of social settings in its advertisements, began to experiment with photomontage,⁴⁷ and the technique was also deployed in the Crawford Agency's campaign for Worthington beer, the intention being to provide an arrestingly unconventional composition to promote an everyday commodity.⁴⁸ Contemporary articles in *Advertiser's Weekly*, which billed itself a journal 'devoted to modern advertising and selling methods', discussed photography more frequently from the mid-1920s onwards. Articles considered 'Pulling Results by Photographs' (a good photograph is infinitely more effective and convincing than a drawing); 'Art Photography in Advertisement Illustration'; 'Photographs That SELL Goods'; as well as special supplements on photography. But it also debated the claims regarding photography's superiority as an advertising medium, in articles such as

‘Photo or Sketch?’ and ‘Terrors of a Photographic Picnic’. By the 1930s, photography for advertising purposes was a growing industry in Britain. Demand meant that stock agencies did good business in offering models and shots to suit the requirements of a range of manufacturers who lacked their own facilities. Hewitt and Wilkinson’s study remains the only in-depth consideration of a British photographic agency.⁴⁹ To remain competitive, the output of this company, called Photographic Advertising Limited, concentrated on visions of consumers, using models and studio sets to produce imagery which sold intangible pleasures as much as the products shown. But it also satisfied those who did not seek to be, or could not afford to be, controversial.

Beyond exploratory discussions by Bartholomew and Blakemore, popular works exploring images from a nostalgic perspective, and passing references in general railway histories, there is no comparative analysis of the advertising photography employed by Britain’s railways. Bartholomew and Blakemore describe how, after initially employing official photographers for legal and architectural work, to record accidents as well as to illustrate news items in company magazines,⁵⁰ they were also used for publicity purposes. Photographs were mounted in railway carriages to promote the network: the Great Eastern Railway commissioned Payne Jennings in 1884, but others, including the GWR, used the Photochrom Company.⁵¹ By the turn of the century, photographs appeared on postcards and were used liberally in sales publications (see below), and this increased demand necessitated the creation of dedicated departments and well-honed working arrangements.⁵² Initially, the photographers’ tools were cumbersome cameras mounted on tripods fed by large glass plate negatives.⁵³ Their travelling apparatus consisted of five cases containing a 12 by 10 inch camera, slides, camera legs and lenses, the total weight of which could be over 80 lbs.⁵⁴ By the 1920s, following technical improvements, GWR photographers used simpler, lightweight cameras and nitrate film.⁵⁵

The sheer amount of views generated by these photographers is staggering: the National Railway Museum’s photographic collections comprise nearly 20,000 negatives produced by the GWR and its British Railways successor, the Western Region, between 1898 and the early 1950s. In addition to company photographers, the railways also employed the services of freelancers and stock companies. As in the case of railway advertising strategies more generally, scant information survives about how these views were acquired or selected for publication. Little is known

about the photographers who worked for the companies, and the published photographs are commonly uncredited. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the importance of this body of work. The quantity of views indicates that the railways believed wholeheartedly in this method, and their variety coupled to the annual quest for new content suggests that rather than simply decoration or illustration they were key tools in the drive to convince people to become passengers. As such prolific photographers, the railways bear scrutiny to discern what they can add to the current understanding of the development of photographic advertising in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century, as well as how myriad consumers were persuaded to vicariously experience place and leisure.

The photograph constructed as part of an advertising campaign is laden with evidence about what the individual or company responsible for its production wanted to communicate, what they thought about potential audiences, and how they hoped the image would be interpreted. Whilst there are always multiple ways in which an image can be understood, equally there is usually a favoured or dominant reading, a broad acceptance of the advertisement's message that advertisers anticipate most people will take. The analysis throughout this book is based on the reasonable assumption that railways constructed promotional photographs with this dominant reading in mind. This does not mean that all viewers accepted or comprehended the corporate meaning, but as this volume concerns business strategy it is reasonable to focus the analysis on the meaning intended by the producer. By placing the photographs in the corporate context of production, the chapters within seek to understand what the railways wanted to show and what they hoped the customer would take away. Discerning what the GWR wanted customers to 'see' is assisted by the accompanying textual descriptions and captions. At first these simply cited the location, but gradually began to reinforce visual messages and emulate company advertising slogans. The influence these small snippets of text probably had in directing the viewer's attention cannot be underestimated. To be clear, the subject of analysis here is the corporate use of photographs, not their interpretation on the consumer's part. It is very difficult to tell how this advertising was received by customers, whether they broadly agreed with or disliked the messages. Correspondence with customers and reviews of publications printed in the press is used in places for guidance as to how the GWR's output could be interpreted; however, this is done with an awareness that some examples may have been intentionally positive or, in the case of reviews, may even have been inserted by railway publicists.

The GWR's photographic advertising was similarly not conceived in a cultural vacuum and the images cannot easily be separated from their social context. Contemporary British society changed rapidly during these years as it underwent periods of war and political change, and experienced technological breakthroughs and economic turmoil. Consumer society shifted dramatically in response to changing tastes, leisure patterns and abilities to consume, and people found that their opportunities for travel, both physically and vicariously in printed materials and on the screen, were significantly augmented. At the same time, visual mediums including the cinema, the press, magazines, modern art, architectural design and the popularity of personal photography became more pervasive means of chronicling change and shaping how British society viewed itself and others. Immersion in this culture made individuals supremely capable of analysing imagery, at any point between a superficial and a more intense level, which had implications for advertisers. By 'reading' the GWR's images with reference to the signs developed by, in and through middlebrow culture, this book considers what the GWR wished the potential consumer to think and feel about the places and subjects represented.

THE LITERATURE OF LOCOMOTION: GUIDEBOOKS AND AUDIENCES

If you have an appetite for figures, here is a feast. The 'Holiday Guide' issued by the L.M.S. weighs 150 tons in bulk; the hardy 'Holiday Haunts' annual of the G.W.R. uses up 4,870 miles of paper 18 inches wide; the L.N.E.R publishes well over 1,000,000 copies of holiday literature, varying from and [sic] 8-page folder to a 1,000 page handbook; the Southern Railway issue 50,000 copies of their 'Hints for Holidays' – a handbook that touches the scale at 2½ lbs.⁵⁶

Whilst Britain's railway companies used photographs diversely, this book focuses principally on their role in the sales publications and pamphlets produced by the GWR. This official terminology, 'sales publications', highlights an important distinction. Although commonly known as guides or guidebooks, sales publications had only a little in common with the practical aids which were intended to inform curious travellers.⁵⁷ Whilst railway literature had been available since the earliest railways, these were mostly unofficial guides produced by commercial publishers, describing where the railway in question passed through.⁵⁸ Detailed and informative,

Choi argues that what the train's velocity took away from experiencing place at the pace of the horse, early railway guides sought to bring back by narrating the passing landscape.⁵⁹ What they could not do, however, was recreate the rich palette of this scenery, and colour photography was rarely offered in railway guidebooks even as late as the 1930s. The release of the 'Guides to the Great Railways of England' series, published by Messrs. Morton and Co in the 1880s, which covered eight principal railways, sold well enough to encourage some railways to issue their own attempts.⁶⁰ Even by the late 1890s, however, this was not general practice.

Although many volumes followed aspects of this tradition, the publications released after 1900 generally represented a decisive material progression from earlier guides in that they focused more on creating and shaping expectations than offering practical guidance. The railways collectively were prolific publishers, releasing material on diverse subjects from seaside resorts to cathedrals, camping guides to angling advice, country retreats and historic towns. Upon opening one, readers were commonly greeted by chatty introductions which sought to inculcate the spirit of travel, suggest significant points of interest and touristic traditions. On the GWR, textual input came from various authors: before the war most of the guides were written by the historian A.M. Broadley, and afterwards popular travel writers such as S.P.B. Mais and Maxwell Fraser were brought in to revamp the content. The publications ranged from short guides of less than fifty pages, sparsely illustrated and with rudimentary particulars, to large 'all-line' guides containing hundreds of photographs (but, as suggested above, little in the way of colour views), selected with maximum appeal in mind. Maps, lists of key local information and accommodation helped readers in the more practical elements of holiday preparation. As the excerpt above from *North Devon Journal* attests, these represented a significant, resource-intensive undertaking.

Save for a prominent exception, Alan Bennett's unpublished thesis on the GWR, the railways' twentieth-century promotional publications have been all but neglected.⁶¹ Focusing primarily on the construction of 'Englishness', Bennett's research into the GWR's and SR's literature reveals the overarching character of some appeals, such as 'democracies by the sea' and picturesque tourist stops, demonstrating that the GWR understood the need to create bespoke advertising and appeals to the needs and sensibilities of different consumers. A major step in understanding the significance of railway text-based advertising, Bennett nevertheless recognises the need for complementary visual analysis to understand how

passengers were persuaded to consume.⁶² Guidebooks suffer a reputation as one-dimensional, superficial and inferior to supposedly ‘deeper’ accounts because of their association with mass tourism.⁶³ Yet they carry significant potential: unlike posters, the impact of which it was almost impossible for companies to gauge, the efficacy of literature could be judged through sales, responses to adverts, and customers who quoted publication titles when booking accommodation. On many railways they were considered the primary form of advertising; the GWR regarded its largest publication, *Holiday Haunts*, as the ‘backbone’ of publicity, at its height selling over 200,000 copies annually.⁶⁴ It is clear that, to the consuming public, this represented much more than advertising. It was appreciated by those who eagerly looked out for and purchased it, with new annual volumes reviewed and critiqued in national and regional newspapers. In the 1920s, reissued volumes of *The Cornish Riviera* and *Glorious Devon* sold 10,000 copies each, prompting new editions, and 71,000 copies of *The 10.30 Limited* were sold in the first six months.⁶⁵ The guidebooks likely helped many contemporary holidaymakers arrive at a decision about where to visit and what to do there. But it is equally possible that many more would have been enjoyed by armchair travellers, or retained to be consulted and to help remember holidays years later.

Taking the reasonable assumption that these were purchased by couples and families, the numbers reached might be safely doubled or even tripled. Considering the presence of a second-hand market, the practice of sharing copies, and those which were consulted in booking halls, one might put the number viewing the photographs within higher still. It is, however, difficult to precisely discern the audience for these publications. Available relatively cheaply, there were in theory offerings to suit all tastes and pockets. The introduction to the GWR’s inaugural volume of *Holiday Haunts* in 1906 stated that it catered to ‘the lover of the picturesque’, ‘the sportsman’, ‘the antiquarian’, as well as families who were ‘rich or poor, noble and simple’, and *The Cornish Riviera* made similar claims.⁶⁶ The GWR’s chief customers would have been drawn from London, and the towns and cities of the Midlands and Wales, although, as mentioned above, competition was increasingly on a national scale meaning that, in theory, everyone was a potential passenger. However, the majority would nevertheless have been those with sufficient means to contemplate the extended stays which the publications promoted, and who were not content to travel to the same place. Walton contends that the mainstay of the Edwardian seaside resorts was broadly the middle classes, with families drawn from this strata

the ‘lifeblood’ of many.⁶⁷ In the interwar years, this broadened in response to increased purchasing power and holiday entitlements where employment permitted. However, the presence of the working class was still minimal in the small, picturesque resorts located furthest from the large population centres.⁶⁸ Across the period, the railways also increasingly targeted overseas customers, and particularly Americans, and the value of this market will be discussed in Chap. 5.

It is beyond the scope of this study to sample and comment on each and every publication produced by the GWR. Wilson’s check list of publications comprises over fifty individual titles, many of which were republished in multiple editions.⁶⁹ Added to this were myriad pamphlets which distilled the essence of the larger guides to a few folded sheets and a handful of illustrations, but many are untraceable. This book therefore concentrates on the largest and most significant by size and circulation such as *The Cornish Riviera* (first published in 1904, priced at 3d, and extending to multiple editions edited by A.M. Broadley and later S.P.B. Mais), and the ‘all-line’ *Holiday Haunts*, which except for years during the wars appeared annually from 1906. Multiple editions of regional volumes such as *Glorious Devon* and *Somerset* offered a focused take on the myriad delights of certain areas, whilst guides to places such as Oxford and London narrowed this focus further. Specialist guides were released on rambling and camping, celebrations of the company’s history and vehicles, as well as dedicated ploys to the American market such as *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* and *Places of Pilgrimage for American Travellers*. Where possible, every attempt has been made to access niche pamphlets and publications to assess their adherence to, as well as departure from, the dominant view. The same is true of Britain’s other railways; although the primary concern is the GWR, its output is analysed against a significant sample of the photographic guidebooks published across the railway industry, from the ‘all-line’ guidebooks which competed with the GWR’s *Holiday Haunts*, to innovations such as *On the LNER with a Stereoscopic Camera* (1935).

Although there was no set formula, these were highly structured corporate creations which appeared in company-specific styles. Their garrulous introductions belie their importance at the forefront of increasing the railway business and to stem the mounting tide of competition. But in the drive to sell and represent all the railways had to offer, the guidebooks also provide an extensive picture of how middlebrow Britain, and occasionally customers beyond, was persuaded to think about different places and pastimes.

PICTURING PLACE

A curious idiosyncrasy of railway advertising released during the first half of the twentieth century is that vehicles, stations and staff did not feature at all prominently. Cutting-edge designs and powerful locomotives did have a promotional value, and took on renewed importance in light of escalating intermodal competition in the interwar years. But railwaymen acknowledged that whilst picturing locomotives had served as an important strategy in the nineteenth century, customers now approached railway services differently. Railway advertising therefore moved to focus predominantly on what was at the end of the line rather than what was on it, enticing passengers to travel further and more frequently by presenting them with a rich variety of places and experiences. As such the railways' publications contributed to an intense culture of place promotion throughout the period under consideration.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, holidaymaking beyond the day trip represented socially exclusive consumption. Afterwards it gradually became democratised, and by the early twentieth century, holidays away from home were becoming big business. John Walton has provided indicators of brisk growth between 1881 and 1911, which continued afterwards as more gained the right to paid vacations.⁷⁰ In response, advertising became more imaginative and professional, abandoning aloof exclusiveness in favour of encouraging mass tourism.⁷¹ Destinations invested heavily in their image, oftentimes collaborating with railways. These efforts provided a rich variety, reflecting the different ideas and budgets available in different towns. At the seaside certain themes became popular, such as promotion of healthy airs and waters and expansive beaches. But as Britain became a predominantly urban-dwelling nation, there was a commensurate interest in holidays in the countryside. Inland destination advertising built on a rich tradition of picturesque tourism, which had broadened out to include timeworn buildings, castles and churches, and traditional pastimes and labours. The vogue for health and fitness, hiking and later rambling, provided a different take on consumption in the countryside, centred more on vitality and beneficial exercise. Whilst the majority were seen to want holidays away from home, towns and cities were well-advertised, as travel providers sought to inspire pride in the nation as well as suggest to foreign visitors that such places provided the concentrated essence of British history.

The 'place image' has since been recognised as the foremost tool for communicating with potential customers,⁷² and whilst concepts such as

‘place marketing’ and ‘tourist gazes’ were not considered in such terms by the pre-nationalisation railway companies, the main tenets arguably existed in their approaches. The sociologists MacCannell and Shields argue that the chief task of place imagery is to construct ‘myths’ which are ‘chased’ by tourists.⁷³ Such myths constitute intricate webs of images, stereotypes and clichés associated with particular destinations, made to last through constant repetition and underpinned by widely shared cultural beliefs.⁷⁴ In the twentieth century, these images were increasingly created through photographs, and the fact that tourists could seek out and capture views using their own cameras meant a mutually reinforcing process of constructing and understanding place imagery.⁷⁵ Indeed, John Urry’s *Tourist Gaze* (which has been released in multiple editions, latterly co-edited with Jonas Larsen),⁷⁶ sees touristic consumption of places as primarily visual, as well as constituting the chief motivation in deciding where to take a holiday. For Urry, the multiple tourist gazes are socially constructed, the result both of the activities of tourists and marketers, and partly the products of history. The romantic gaze, for example, references the eighteenth-century practice of seeking picturesque scenery, updated to suggest rural solitude against busy urban areas. The collective gaze, by contrast, draws upon beliefs that working-class leisure has always been rooted in gregarious exploits and mass spectacle. Urry’s work has influenced the historical analysis of resort promotion,⁷⁷ but some have questioned whether a distinction between two main types of resort advertising is adequate to approach the diverse styles and customers.⁷⁸

Collectively, Britain’s railways pictured an enormous array of destinations; from large seaside resorts to quaint fishing villages, minor stopping points deep in the heart of the country, major cities and country towns. The photographs taken at these places were not merely illustrative but weaved complex stories about them, buttressed by the text and captions, and depended to a certain extent on educating the reader about how to approach this material. The railways also suggested what a perfect opportunity photographing them afforded and worked this into their appeals when they ran photographic competitions and reminded passengers not to relegate their cameras to the luggage racks. This book categorises the GWR’s chief appeals as centred in the countryside, the seaside, and towns and cities. This is not intended as a rigorous distinction, but reflects some of the challenges and themes in picturing different destinations, which enables each chapter to probe more deeply the nature of railways advertising and how it engaged with the interests and concerns of customers.

There were many ‘claims’ on the countryside in the first half of the twentieth century, which posed problems for those concerned with selling it. The GWR’s response was not to sell a commonplace countryside but different visions intended to hold particular resonance with certain interest groups. Chapter 3 demonstrates how specific countryside visions were reflected upon and progressively manipulated to suit changing times. For example, those customers identified as ‘lovers of the picturesque’ were assailed with photographic narratives intended to create a fantasy land of historic and mythical destinations, where predominantly urban holiday-makers could reconnect with the land spiritually and in ways absent from the quotidian urban environment. In contrast, from the mid-1920s, and increasingly in the same publications, the GWR also showed hikers the way to corporeal consumption, where health and vitality were the main watchwords. This was again reshaped in the 1930s when rambling replaced hiking as a more popular, relaxed way of engaging with the countryside, and human relationships were sold in place of interaction with the land. The chapter examines what the GWR knew about these customers and how this was translated into photographic output; how it managed and negotiated difference between these very different groups who, elsewhere, fought over access to the countryside.

Certain images are inextricably associated with the popular seaside holiday of the first half of the twentieth century, such as golden sands, healthy air, ‘pretty girl pictures’ and cherubic children. But this also constituted a period of dramatic social change as Edwardian anxieties about bathing and display were gradually replaced with a focus on unbridled fun. Building on the fact that photography was fundamental to recording and propounding days at the beach, Chap. 4 considers the evolution of the GWR’s seaside advertising photography, and how it engaged with and departed from conventional images. The GWR sought to attract families (building on the popularity of personal photography and the desire to record previous moments), the ‘modern’ consumer (who was interested in amusement, high-spiritedness and tanning), and single women (who, with more opportunities open to them after the First World War, were keen to exert their new consumption opportunities despite opposition from certain quarters). This chapter shows how the GWR built up a visual vocabulary of seaside life, but raises the point that living up to this image may have caused controversy in reality.

Holidaymaking was and is chiefly viewed as taking the form of flight from urban areas, to leave one’s everyday environs. Thus the town is a

forgotten place in the history of holiday and travel advertising. Yet for the GWR it was essential to induce as many people as possible into these areas, regardless of the popular perception. Chapter 5 examines how the company worked to advocate the pleasantries of towns big and small, the famous ones and those off the beaten path. It shows that this was largely a ceremonial focus rooted in prominent landmarks and buildings, although the GWR did move towards extolling the virtues of being part of the crowd and urban hurry in the 1930s, in response to new techniques and tastes regarding how to photographically distil the essence of the city. There was an additional level of complexity, however, as Britain's historic towns were recognised as a significant draw for the foreign market and Americans in particular. The GWR's engagement with this significant market demonstrates a further richness to the company's tableau. Whilst the focus typically concerns the efforts of companies to induce the British to travel abroad, the GWR's example illustrates how Britain was sold visually to the wider world.

The title of this volume reflects that fact that the GWR's advertising was intended to attract customers from across Britain (and occasionally beyond). Focusing on the GWR means that there are practical limits to the geographical focus in this volume. The visual promotion of prominent tourist and holidaymaking areas such as Scotland, Yorkshire and Norfolk are therefore not considered, as these were accessed via other companies. The GWR's own focus was so vast and ever changing that some elements which appeared from time to time will not be considered here, such as the advertising in relation to Ireland and Brittany,⁷⁹ and the guides to cathedrals and abbeys which proved immensely popular and brought the company much goodwill. Nevertheless, in concentrating the focus to significant holiday areas the aim is to open up the railways' photographic advertising to further scrutiny, and it is hoped that others will take up the challenge in relation to other railway companies.

NOTES

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2. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918* (2nd edn., Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5–9.
3. Phillip Bagwell, *The Transport Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1988), 96–98.

4. Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 102; Terry Gourvish, *Mark Huish and the London and North Western Railway: A Study of Management* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972), 29.
5. Gourvish, *Mark Huish and the London and North Western Railway*, 260–67. See also Mike Savage, “Discipline, Surveillance and the ‘Career’: Employment on the Great Western Railway 1833–1914,” in *Foucault, Management and Organisation Theory*, ed. Alan McKinlay and Ken Starkey (London: Sage, 1998), 79–80; Geoffrey Channon, “The Business Morals of British Railway Companies in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Business and Economic History* 28, no. 2 (1999): 76.
6. Geoffrey Channon, *Railways in Britain and The United States, 1830–1940: Studies in Economic and Business History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 34; Terry Gourvish, *Railways and the British Economy 1830–1914* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 47; R.J. Irving, “The Profitability and Performance of British Railways, 1870–1914,” *Economic History Review* 31, no. 1 (1978): 46–66.
7. Harold Dyos and Derek Aldcroft, *British Transport: An Economic Survey from the Seventeenth Century to the Twentieth* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1969), 330.
8. Wilson’s 1987 book *Go Great Western* represents the only comprehensive attempt to study the company’s advertising: Roger Wilson, *Go Great Western: A History of GWR Publicity* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1987).
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11. Peter Wardley, “The Emergence of Big Business: The Largest Corporate Employers of Labour in the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States c. 1907,” *Business History* 41, no.4 (1999): 102.
12. Oswald Nock, *The Great Western Railway in the Twentieth Century* (London: Ian Allen, 1972), 9–23; Wilson, *Go Great Western*, 25.
13. Geoffrey Channon, “The Great Western Railway Under the British Railways Act of 1921,” *Business History Review* 55, no. 2 (1981): 188–216.
14. Colin Divall and George Revill, “Cultures of Transport: Representation, Practice and Technology,” *The Journal of Transport History* 26, no. 1 (2005): 99–112; Michael Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 237–39; Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

15. David Smith, *The Railway and Its Passengers: A Social History* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1988); Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*; Malgorzata Nitka, *Railway De-Familiarisation: The Rise of Passengerhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu śląskiego, 2006); Ana Parejo Vadillo and John Plunkett, "The Railway Passenger; Or the Training of the Eye," in *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space and the Machine Ensemble*, ed. John Plunkett and Michael Freeman (Oxford: Peter Lang 2007), 45–68.
16. Terence Nevett, *Advertising in Britain: A History* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 4–5; Elizabeth McFall, *Advertising: A Cultural Economy* (London: Sage, 2004), 155–56; Lori-Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5–7; Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'Respectable Persuaders: The Advertising Industry and British Society, 1900–1939' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2008), 3–6; Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (London: Verso, 1991), 5.
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23. Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*, 4; Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, 4.
24. Douglas Knoop, *Outlines of Railway Economics* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 235.
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28. D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 160–67.
29. Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, 145.
30. E. S. Turner, *The Shocking History of Advertising* (London: Michael Joseph, 1952), 166–225.
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 38. John Hewitt, "Posters of Distinction: Art, Advertising and the London, Midland, and Scottish Railways," *Design Issues* 16, no. 1 (2000): 31–32.
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79. How such places were presented provides further examples of creating imagery for distinct markets, and information on this can be found in Bennett's thesis; Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness'.

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Railway Advertising: Theory and Practice 1900–1939

Whereas before 1900 railway advertising was criticised by some as serving ‘only to swell waste paper baskets’,¹ afterwards it quickly began to be treated more seriously. Advertising matters were discussed widely in company and industry journals, where good practice was explained and the benefits advocated and evidenced where possible. Although advertising was still received sceptically in some quarters, now it garnered a lot of praise too. Despite the impact of war and the subsequent amalgamation, the groundwork laid before 1914 enabled promotional capacities to be strengthened in the interwar years. The Big Four companies became progressively more vocal on the subject, transmitting their philosophies, findings and practices via advertising conferences at home and abroad. Promotional efforts also drew upon new initiatives in customer research. The look of advertising changed: whilst pictorial posters remained a popular medium, eagerly anticipated by the public, the railways experimented with new styles of photography which used models and staged scenes, and focused on facial expressions, relationships and emotions to create an idealised spirit of holidaymaking. Yet as motor cars and buses competed for passengers, many commentators continued to suggest that an uninspiring and undeveloped attitude to advertising helped to explain why railway companies were losing out to their road-based competitors.

This chapter examines the development of advertising practices on the GWR and amongst its rivals, and how these changed throughout the first

four decades of the twentieth century. It identifies three stages; rapid advance and experimentation between 1900 and 1914; consolidation during the 1920s; and reinvention in the 1930s. This is not an arbitrary periodisation but reflects the impact of diverse influences such as the promise engendered by the turn of the new century; people's ability to spend more time and money on leisure; the character of this leisure and attitudes to it; the losses occasioned by war; the amalgamation of Britain's railways into four major concerns; the rise of intermodal competition; and not least the internal corporate fluctuations which influenced the GWR's approach to customers and its advertising administration. Using accounts from published and unpublished sources, including company magazines, staff records, advertising periodicals, traffic committee minutes and traditional business records, this chapter explores the evolution of a culture of railway advertising. It offers clearer insights into how different theories were received and implemented, and how aspects such as photographic advertising were constructed with customers in mind. The evidence shows that companies did not always respond as expected, or as has been written of them; the overall process of selling travel by rail was a challenging one which required perpetual reflection and revision. Establishing this context of production as far as possible within the limitations of the available sources provides an essential context in which to locate the GWR's photographs, which are considered in this volume's subsequent chapters.

STAGE I: AWAKENING

In 1913, an article published in the GWR magazine asked 'Do Railways believe in Advertising?' It acknowledged that the question might initially seem absurd given railways advertising's ubiquity, and the fact that timetables and handbills had been used for many years. Yet the author argued that 'there is advertising and *advertising* ... some forms of publicity have always been indispensable to the railways, such as timetables and excursion train announcements, but these could not be regarded as what is now implied by *advertising*'.² The article referred to a 'modern sense' in railway advertising which had developed since the turn of the twentieth century. Following decades of incremental progress, after 1900 railway advertising quickly received more detailed attention. The sense of opportunity accompanying the new century, rising real incomes amongst certain sections of the population, as well as the prospect of spending more time away from work and the expansion of promotional efforts in other industries, all prompted a

reconsideration of advertising's value to the industry. Britain's railway companies also needed to ensure that their extensive systems, on which they had invested so much, were used to their fullest extent. In recognition of this, by 1909 the advertising department was heralded as 'one of the most important departments of the railway of today' by the GWR magazine.³ Railway advertising was reviewed more frequently and in greater depth in a range of industry and company publications, but this comment also extended to the theories behind advertising, the need to conceive of passengers as customers, and on demonstrating advertising's effect.

The GWR's company magazine,⁴ which gained a reputation for its 'zeal' in reporting advertising matters,⁵ published monthly articles on topics including poster design innovations, the popularity of railway postcards, the novel attempts by station masters to promote travel, and generating publicity through competitions aimed at members of the public and staff.⁶ 'Rapid strides' in artistic advertising were covered alongside more thoughtful pieces on advertising's purpose and potential.⁷ Commentators argued that travel was a commodity, 'of which the demand can be increased like any other commodity', and the way to do this was by 'modern, reasonable and progressive advertising'.⁸ Yet the GWR's advertising men felt that rail's heterogeneous product and equally diverse market meant that, unlike manufacturers of chemical products, food, beverages or medicines, rail's 'commodity' was hard to define.⁹ Nevertheless, regular coverage of advertising matters allowed ideas to be debated and codified as general understandings of advertising's principles were translated into more formal practice. A further benefit to this recurrent consideration was to instil in staff at all levels the fundamental necessity of promoting the business.

Prominent within this new discourse was an emerging notion of passengers as individual customers rather than a homogenous mass, as well as questions about how best to reach and influence them. In 1907, GWR officials wrote of the desire to remove chance from passenger inducement and turn the process of holiday selection from tradition or impulse to something scientific which could be manipulated through carefully directed advertising, underpinned as far as possible by information about customers and their travelling habits.¹⁰ This was much harder to achieve in reality, and turning supposition into science was revisited periodically, as in 1909 when officials called for a 'Science of Commercial Advertising', which should target the passenger's 'consciousness',¹¹ and again in 1913 when advertising men were advised to 'study their audiences'.¹² In these cases, the GWR's aspirations broadly synchronised with those of the wider

advertising industry, where ‘science’ was used as shorthand to describe a more rigorous approach to sales which should, when possible, rely on statistics and ‘solid reasoning and persuasive argument’ rather than ‘mere blatant statement and loud-voiced self-recommendation’.¹³ Railway advertising came to be seen as more than an intuitive consideration of demand which was dependent upon a complex and growing array of theories, expertise and technologies. Indeed, it was increasingly looked upon as a distinct profession for specialists, and the ‘advertising man’ began to be admitted as an expert as necessary to the overall railway business as the engineers and technicians.¹⁴

GWR publicists found that they could draw on significant, but not particularly revealing bodies of information about customers’ travel habits. Since 1840, the Regulation of Railways Act had required every company to deliver statistics on the aggregate traffic in passengers and freight to the Board of Trade.¹⁵ It is difficult to discern how far this information was attended to even after 1900: some historians argue that companies were unaware of the costs of operating particular types of services and that the aggregate picture of profitability for the entire organisation was what mattered most.¹⁶ Irrespective of this, statistics alone still treated passengers largely as a mass, which was precisely what the new attitudes sought to address. Companies were encouraged to look at consumers not merely from the point of view of the company, but to tell the public ‘what can be done for them’.¹⁷ Recognising the existence of individual tastes and requirements within the overall market was viewed as a more helpful way of dividing up rail’s promotional appeals and services.

This viewpoint also gave rise to parallel considerations about the different groups who consumed railway travel, primarily ordered by demographics and location, including families, couples and foreign travellers, but increasingly extending to niche groups such as walkers, golfers, artists, fishermen and antiquarians. The North Eastern Railway’s publicity manager grasped the potential of such an audience, but also the attendant complexities:

The business of a railway company is to sell transportation, in large or small amounts, to people of varying tastes and with varying amounts of money to spend. Moreover this selling of transportation is inevitably attended by competition. In the case of passenger traffic, especially holiday traffic, it can be said that competition is universal, since every inhabitant of a country is a possible traveller.¹⁸

The fact that everyone in the country was a potential traveller posed an enticing yet profoundly challenging prospect. Communicating with varied markets required different advertising strategies which would present the services in an ‘attractive, convincing and forceful manner’.¹⁹ The railways’ goal became to ‘induce people who would otherwise not do so, to travel by rail, and to encourage such as would travel a little, to travel more’.²⁰

ADVERTISING OUTPUT

Reaching more and varied consumers, and doing so in a calculated and nuanced fashion, meant improving traditional publicity avenues as well as making sensitive use of new innovations. The GWR introduced slogans such as ‘The Holiday Line’, suggested by Welsh artist Archibald Edwards and adopted in 1908,²¹ and the ‘Sportsman’s Line’, and organised regular poetry, essay, photography and poster competitions which encouraged people to connect more deeply with the company’s messages, as well as making its advertising stand out. These were roundly praised by advertising commentators.²² That it advertised extensively in the regional press, sent out motor buses filled with promotional material to tour the countryside, and pitched stands at national events confirms that the company viewed everyone in the country, irrespective of their distance from the GWR’s heartlands, as a potential customer.²³ Promotional activities became progressively diverse across the chief railway companies, and whilst the railway poster remained a strong feature of many campaigns, timetables, postcards and press announcements characterised by an enormous variety of designs were all deployed.

A significant change in this era, however, was the use of photographs. Photography as used for promotional purposes was not unknown before 1900: the GWR had been one of the first railways to use the services of the Photochrom Company, which had provided photographic views for display in carriages since the 1890s.²⁴ By the turn of the century, photographs were constant companions in the carriages of many railway companies (the *Illustrated London News* lauded the ‘Travelling Picture-Gallery’ provided by the North Eastern Railway’s carriages),²⁵ and at their stations. Although illustrated guidebooks had been available for many years, photographic guidebooks were commonly the most expensive to produce and purchase.²⁶ The development of the photographic half-tone process in the 1890s enabled quality photographic reproduction, prompting deeper consideration by advertisers about how to use photography’s

unique abilities to sell commodities. For the most part, the chief benefit was seen to be the impression of realism and truthfulness that photographs offered over an artist's sketch.²⁷

In 1904, the GWR took a bold step, releasing *The Cornish Riviera*, a publication which combined literary descriptions of destinations, similar to those of traditional travel guides, with information on accommodation and travel, and half-tone photographs (later photogravure plates) This represented a novel concept for an affordable brochure, and *Riviera* proved immensely popular, the first edition selling 250,000 copies.²⁸ Reviews too were favourable, at least those assembled by the GWR in the company magazine from middlebrow magazines such as *The Ladies Field*, *The King* and *The Lady's Pictorial*.²⁹ *Riviera's* success persuaded the GWR to prepare a larger publication covering its entire territory, and in 1906 *Holiday Haunts* was announced as a comprehensive guide to all destinations made available by GWR services. By including accommodation, timetable and fare information alongside lyrical descriptive passages and abundant illustrations, *Holiday Haunts* sought to inspire the desire to travel and show how to satisfy it. By 1909, the volume was circulating close to 100,000 copies.³⁰

As the title 'sales publication' suggested, *Holiday Haunts'* aim was to smooth and shape the process of selecting the holiday, whilst also challenging prospective customers to travel beyond their traditional haunts by presenting this as an easy and rewarding endeavour. As the concept was refined, photographic illustrations moved from sporadically supplementing the descriptive text to being the centre of attention. On opening the GWR's guides customers were greeted by dozens, and later hundreds of photogravure plates. They did more than simply illustrate destinations, however, being used to construct narratives about consumption centred diversely on family togetherness, unspoiled landscapes, traditional village worlds untouched by modernity, and capacious shorelines. Images were placed before text indicating how the GWR saw the selling process; customers' senses were targeted first before a more rational appeal was made with regards to where to stay, cost and other practical details. *Holiday Haunts* was released annually, and the fact that photographic content was updated for each volume meant that no two guides were exactly alike.

Riviera and *Holiday Haunts* were joined by dedicated publications for individual areas such as *North Wales—The British Tyrol*, *Devon: The Shire of The Sea Kings*, *South Wales: The County of Castles*, *Southern Ireland: Its Lakes and Landscapes* and *The Severn Valley—Through the Land of the Lords*

Marchers from Shrewsbury to Worcester. The text was largely supplied by the historian A.M. Broadley in these years, and whilst company photographers supplied the majority of the photographs, the GWR also employed companies such as the Clarke and Hyde Press Agency and Topical Press Agency.³¹ Guidebook production quickly came to represent a significant investment in promoting the system, and although it is not possible to identify a direct correlation with journeys taken, anecdotal evidence from the company, as well as reports of increased enquiries at resorts, suggests that the impact on the public was significant. Released in March each year, they served an important role as an imaginary way to visit the places described, and by encouraging armchair travellers to dream about these destinations the GWR hoped not only to inspire more travel, but also create a cumulative, favourable impression of its system. The guides also capitalised on an age of burgeoning amateur photography and camera ownership. They provided inspiration, showing people the attractive sites and sights which they could visit and capture for themselves.

The questions of whom these publications were intended for and who purchased them are difficult to answer neatly. In theory they were for everyone, as the introduction to *Holiday Haunts* stated, for ‘the lover of the picturesque’, ‘the sportsman’, ‘the antiquarian’, as well as families who were ‘rich or poor, noble and simple’.³² Whereas previously the GWR’s chief customer bases would have been London, the Midlands and Welsh towns and cities, as noted above competition was now increasingly on a national scale. However, those purchasing such guides would most likely have been wealthy individuals and families interested in the lengthier holidays and itineraries described in the guidebooks. They may also have had the inclination and the means to travel around, hence spending 6d on a guide to provide suggestions about what to see and where to go. The advertisements included towards the rear of the guides afford further clues: the GWR advertised luggage in advance schemes, alongside advertisements for local produce such as ciders, cheeses and biscuits, and more expensive holiday items including binoculars, telescopes and hunting clothes.

As argued throughout this volume, the visual content provides perhaps the best indication in the absence of an official viewpoint, and the details of this will be elaborated upon further in the following chapters. But briefly here, within the main guides, scenic valleys and rural idylls targeted the lover of the picturesque; beach scenes and children’s donkey rides were selected for families; and sportsmen and women received a totally different appeal centred on adventure. Castles and cathedrals suggested

what the antiquarian might like to do. Ultimately, whilst the guides adopted a catch-all approach, tailored content within recognised the contrasting views and desires of the market. This could of course have been aspirational to some, so it seems that a broadly middlebrow audience, wealthy enough to afford the expense and time away, but not wealthy enough to seriously contemplate extended foreign travel, were appealed to (variations within this were catered for, as seen in the segmentation of the guides and the experiences offered within). By contrast, British railways also perceived a large market overseas and particularly in the United States. There they set up dedicated offices and released bespoke publications (see Chap. 5).

* * *

In 1911, the *Railway Times* asserted that railway companies were now ‘fully alive to the advantages to be obtained from publicity’.³³ The amount of variation in practice and the widespread sense that still more could be done suggests that this assessment was some way off the mark, but certainly by the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 railway advertising had developed significantly. From almost no published comment on the subject in the 1890s it now featured regularly, and the discussions which served to codify advertising theories generated a great deal of output, some of which was praised as innovative and enterprising. It should be acknowledged that some of the ideas represented what railways *wanted* to do, and in other ways railway advertising had far to go to become truly sophisticated. Customer research, for example, was conducted in a very rudimentary fashion, if at all. Value for money was also difficult to prove conclusively, although some provided statistics in support of campaigns: the increase in the number of passengers from District Railway stations to Southend in August 1913 was held up as ‘conclusive proof’ of advertising’s effect.³⁴ But this does not diminish the fact that the GWR and its rivals invested new energy in debating the position of the passenger, and how best to use it to grow the business, and the impact of this can be seen in new and reworked communications. The forceful nature of the approach was now predominantly visual, with increasing prominence given to photography as a means for delivering the message. A passenger-centred approach had begun to dominate the way railways considered their advertising, as publicists were implored to look at the railway from the point of view of the customer.

STAGE 2: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE 1921–1929

Britain's Railways Resume Advertising

Whilst on the one hand wartime restrictions stunted promotional activities, the need to motivate the nation to keep fighting meant that publicity and propaganda came to be appreciated at the highest levels.³⁵ The 1920s witnessed forward strides in the professionalisation and organisation of advertising. The Empire Marketing Board was established in 1926, tasked with transforming Britain's contracting economy by encouraging people to buy goods produced at home and in the Empire. Some companies, though by no means all, began to employ large-scale market research techniques as businesses competed by conceptualising and reaching out to customers in new ways.³⁶ *Advertiser's Weekly* included practical guides on mass instincts, how knowledge of psychology could help the copywriter to 'get home' by appealing to the emotions of potential customers,³⁷ and how to get 'the facts' through market research.³⁸ It hailed the attempts of the Publicity Club of London's Bureau of Advertising to advance scientific advertising by securing, analysing and collating the public's views on buying.³⁹ Advertising matters also attracted a reasonable amount of public interest, and this was equally so for railway advertising, which was discussed in the national media from time to time. The comments concerned its character, novel departures, new publications, but also where it was felt the railways could do more. Some, for instance, believed that railway stations should not just be clean and functional, but inspiring places which were an aesthetic delight.⁴⁰ Such matters joined the perennial discussions about the experience on board the railway carriage, as well as the new topic of road–rail competition. Commentators and members of the general public, particularly regular passengers, considered themselves experts in all aspects of railway operation and voiced their opinions about what railways could and should offer.

Britain's railways resumed advertising activities in 1921 after their release from wartime state control. During this period, the Government had intended to guarantee pre-war revenue levels and for four years this appeared a decent bargain. Yet when conflict ceased, lack of maintenance, reduced investment and massively increased costs left the railways in a precarious financial position. Recognising the need for further intervention, the 1921 Railway Act amalgamated Britain's railway companies into four regional concerns. Enacted on 1 January 1923, amalgamation fundamentally

altered how Britain's railways presented themselves to the public. Firstly it renamed them, meaning that the history and public reputation of long-established corporate identities were effaced overnight. The new companies, the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER), Southern Railway (SR) and the London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS), required swift reaffirmation of their corporate persona which, in reality, took time to achieve.⁴¹ As they adopted new identities and welcomed new colleagues, advertising matters again became an important point for discussion.

Selling railway travel was keenly debated, and continued to be acknowledged as 'technically, psychologically and commercially bestrewn with difficulties and pitfalls'.⁴² Opinion was divided: some noted the 'extraordinary strides' being made in railway advertising and saw the railways as possessing an inherent advantage over other advertisers in that their 'goods' were natural or architectural scenery,⁴³ whereas others believed that they failed to make the best use of advertising.⁴⁴ Despite a number of shared concerns, the way that advertising was treated by each individual company reflected their somewhat unique situations and challenges. W.M. Teasdale, the LNER's advertising manager, implemented sweeping changes, commissioning well-respected commercial artists such as Tom Purvis.⁴⁵ At public and industry engagements, Teasdale crafted an image of the LNER as a forward-thinking business, and communicated what he saw as British railways' advertising problems and potential, sometimes internationally, such as at the 1926 Philadelphia Convention of the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World.⁴⁶ The LMS kept the public informed about its post-war difficulties as well as its aims for the future, commissioning seventeen Royal Academicians as part of a poster campaign on 'LMS Developments'.⁴⁷ The SR's war-beleaguered system received public criticism, which was exacerbated by the company's continued silence on its shortcomings.⁴⁸ With the appointment of a public relations officer in January 1925, however, the company won back some goodwill by openly acknowledging its difficulties.⁴⁹

The GWR was, however, the anomaly, retaining its corporate identity because it was by far the largest company in its particular region. Whilst others reorganised and entered a new phase of promotional work, the GWR, lacking this large-scale change but well-positioned in theory, is said to have been unable to capitalise on this opportunity.⁵⁰ More to the point, its advertising suffered as a result. But this does not tell the whole story. Although the GWR might not have advanced as expected, direct comparison with Britain's other railways, or indeed other companies, overlooks the situation peculiar to the company and those of its competitors.

Appointed in 1924, the GWR's new advertising manager, William Fraser, had worked for the company for over thirty years, receiving promotion through various divisional offices, accounting and estate departments.⁵¹ Although this trajectory had begun to be criticised after 1900, it would be a generalisation to suggest that men ingrained with particular, company-specific ways of doing things were limited by this when it came to tackling broader strategic issues such as advertising.⁵² Fraser was also supported by a general manager, Felix Pole, who had a keen interest in promotional activities. Pole was responsible for the enlargement and renaming of the advertising department as the 'publicity department' in 1924; for him it captured a more useful understanding of communication, encompassing the promotion of goodwill and good relations with the public.⁵³ The renaming appeared to suggest that advertising was viewed as an outdated way of characterising the totality of the department's activities, which included a receptiveness to the opinions of the outside world. On this point, the department invited consultants to debate changes within the wider advertising industry and the different challenges the railways faced, so that GWR publicists could 'see ourselves as others see us'.⁵⁴

Whilst it took several years to revise *The Cornish Riviera* and *Holiday Haunts* completely, Fraser oversaw the creation of a plethora of new sales publications, including first editions of *Camping Holidays*, *Cotswold Ways* and *Glorious Devon* in 1923, 1924 and 1928 respectively. An entirely new publication, *The 10.30 Limited*, issued in 1923, offered a comprehensive but down-to-earth description of modern railway practice aimed at 'children of all ages'. *Through The Carriage Window*, published in 1924, taught travellers to make every railway compartment an observation post, encouraging them to keep their cameras handy even on the journey.⁵⁵ A company history designed for the popular market, *Brunel and After: Romance of the Great Western Railway*, appeared in 1925. Throughout the 1920s, the character of *Holiday Haunts* however remained roughly comparable to its Edwardian forbears. Published in 1922, the pre-amalgamation *Hints for Holidays* by London and South Western Railway, for instance, carried innovative features such as colour plates and, for Ventnor, a double-page photograph with arrows which showed readers how to draw the pages together to create a full picture of the seafront.⁵⁶ Although the page extent grew to over one thousand pages, and fresh photographic views were provided each year, there was little to distinguish one annual volume of *Holiday Haunts* from another for many years. The lack of radical change at the GWR probably reflected the fact that *Holiday Haunts* continued to

prove popular with the public, achieving its highest sales figures in this decade. The GWR was likely wary about radically altering a successful formula. As other companies caught up, by the end of the 1920s each company's main 'all-line' guidebooks looked very similar, suggesting that they generally agreed on what the customer wanted in terms of the layouts and views, which took in populous views of beaches, landscapes, features such as bridges, and historic attractions.

The 1920s represented a period of progressive development in the use of photography for advertising purposes. The subject featured regularly in *Advertiser's Weekly* throughout the decade, but there was little consensus on technique, usage or effectiveness. A special supplement on photography for advertising purposes in the 7 January 1927 number contained various viewpoints. Contributors speculated on the reasons why photographs continued to be comparatively neglected, which fundamentally concerned the impossibility of satisfactorily reproducing photographs in daily newspapers: 'the day this problem has been solved completely, one will have to talk about the complete revolution in the advertising field'.⁵⁷ But in addition to the technical issues regarding reproduction were the possibilities of individuality and artistry which, despite popular opinion to the contrary, were as unlimited as in any other graphical technique.⁵⁸ The majority of this comment continued to laud photography as a 'certificate of fact', to meet the demands of a public 'satiated with a surfeit of cleverly contrived copy cunningly worded in praise of certain commodities'. But one author, F.J. Mortimer, editor of *Amateur Photographer*, invited photographers to have the courage to let their imagination run as freely as they would when drawing, and help the camera leave the draughtsman behind.⁵⁹

Throughout the 1920s, the GWR released fewer posters than its competitor railways, and by the end of the decade its designs were distinctly lacklustre by comparison. But taking this as an indicator of advertising conviction ascribes a status to posters which was not universally shared by contemporaries. Whilst GWR officials agreed that posters were attractive and popular with the public, their effect was immeasurable. Speaking to the GWR's debating society, one commentator argued that a great failing of railway advertising was the over-reliance on posters.⁶⁰ The company was not alone in this judgement. London Transport, lauded at the time for its poster designs, believed that 'all the Royal Academicians in the world will not help...a late-Victorian policy will not function in 1924'.⁶¹

The year 1924 was in fact the first year that advertising expenditure was categorised and discussed at the GWR's Traffic Committee's annual meeting. Taking subsequent meetings into account, the figures show that, with

the exception of 1928, when economic depression enforced savings, expenditure remained relatively stable throughout the decade. Press advertising, poster and guidebook production received the largest sums, and passenger advertising dominated that spent on freight. Compared to businesses in other sectors expenditure was fairly low. In 1928, Cunard's annual public relations expenditure reached £370,000,⁶² and Cadbury's an estimated £700,000 by 1930.⁶³ However, it is difficult to determine the level of commitment from expenditure alone. Railway officials agreed that it was difficult to prescribe a finite figure to devote to advertising, although 1 per cent of gross receipts was said to be a good guide. Comparing advertising expenditure with passenger revenue (Table 2.2), the GWR appeared to follow this formula, and an article in *The Railway Gazette* suggests that this was the case on the LNER as well.⁶⁴ At the start of the 1920s, the GWR's expenditure was roughly double that of London Transport, which spent £60,000 on advertising in 1921.⁶⁵ But Britain's railways were also no different to other businesses which believed in the value of advertising but nonetheless found it difficult to discern conclusively what worked best and how much to spend. This was nevertheless a time when spending excessive amounts of money on advertising and releasing it indiscriminately was viewed as appallingly wasteful.⁶⁶ Whilst imperfect comparisons, promotional budgets for the likes of Cadbury also included provision for free samples and promotional items, whereas the GWR in fact sold a portion of its publicity which helped to slightly offset cost (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 GWR Advertising expenditure 1924–1929 (£)

	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Press advertising	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	60,000	75,000
Printing of publications & posters incl. <i>Holiday Haunts</i>	40,000	50,000	66,500	65,000	33,600	28,000
Advertisements on omnibuses & underground trains	2200	2000	4200	3200	2700	2700
Misc. incl. commercial advertising publicity	10,000	6000	NA	2000	2000	4500
Freight/goods advertising	6500	5000	NA	4000	4000	5000
Total	108,700	113,000	120,700	124,200	103,000	115,200
Less estimated receipts from sale publications	5065	9800	25,700	16,200	23,300	15,200
Total	103,635	103,200	95,000	108,000	80,000	100,000

Compiled using data from TNA, RAIL 250/354, Traffic Committee Minutes 1923–1926; RAIL 250/354, Traffic Committee Minutes 1926–1929.

Whilst costs associated with publications actually declined, this was due to better working relationships with printers as well as the GWR's practice of conducting its own printing where possible to maximise economy.⁶⁷

Rudimentary market research to better direct such efforts also began to take off in the 1920s, although it is difficult to substantiate whether any of the railways met the aspiration of 'getting the true facts – all the true facts – reading them correctly and then putting into effect that course that is logically indicated'.⁶⁸ There were many ways of getting to know passengers: for instance, the LMS sought to discover its most productive form of advertising on two special trips; a whist drive excursion and a half-day excursion from Liverpool to London, where a company representative asked passengers how they came to hear of the trip.⁶⁹ The GWR's own investigations were based on correspondence expanded in the 1920s, some of which was reproduced in the company magazine. First appearing in July 1922, the GWR's company magazine included a section titled 'People We Have Pleas'd', to serve as a reminder to staff that their efficiency and courtesy was appreciated by the travelling public, but also to encourage them to maintain high standards. Indeed, the section was broadened in 1926 to include correspondence from those less pleased with the service they had received, in 'People We Intend to Please'. In each case, it suggests that the correspondence received from passengers was considered seriously. Discussed in greater detail in Chap. 6, passenger correspondence provided the company with useful insights into how to renegotiate the public appeal of rail travel against road transport.

From time to time, the quest for qualitative information about customers extended to more novel methods of collection. The team of publicity department clerks sent to manage the GWR's Empire Exhibition stand reported on the effectiveness of GWR publicity amongst the public as well as the lengths taken to establish this. For 166 days in 1924 the company's stand at Wembley attracted considerable attention, and the report to the Superintendent of the Line included sales statistics for each company guidebook, as well as more anecdotal evidence on customer appetites.⁷⁰ To further determine impact, exhibition organisers and cleaning staff were interviewed each day, and the GWR's team was able to report that very little was being thrown away. Railways recognised the need to know more about customers when designing services and advertising for them, as well as methods to check progress after it had been released.

RAILWAY CHALLENGES

Although prior to the First World War Britain's railways had been relatively insulated from road competition, the 1920s saw the increasing popularity of the motor bus, and the availability of more reliable and affordable private cars, as well as a burgeoning second-hand market.⁷¹ Car manufacturers and bus operators now developed advertising, which in some cases targeted railway passengers directly. The same was true also of the companies supplying fuel and motor accessories: in addition to a 'reason to buy' approach based on the technical qualities of the products, Shell Oil's 1920s' advertising included more humorous and playful designs aimed at the sensibilities of its upper-middle-class clientele.⁷² Motor manufacturers printed lavish brochures and advertised fiercely in daily newspapers. The character of these appeals moved away from recounting mechanical particulars and clichés about rapid acceleration and new standards in reliability, to outline how ownership would make the customer feel, or appear in the eyes of peers and the opposite sex.⁷³

By 1925, whilst the population of Great Britain had increased by two million in nine years, in the same time railway journeys had *decreased* by the same number.⁷⁴ This trend provoked increasing alarm at the GWR's Traffic Committee meetings. The Traffic Department report for 1927 recorded the setting up of rival bus companies, which had further removed rail revenue.⁷⁵ The 1928 report relayed the problem more explicitly: 'the decline in passenger train travel is attributable to the continued depression in trade, road motor competition and the increased user [sic] of privately owned motor cars'.⁷⁶ Rail's response, which diversely included improvements in speed, comfort and streamlined cladding to suggest modernity, will be discussed in depth in Chap. 6.

Table 2.2 GWR Passenger revenue intervals

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total receipts from passenger traffic (£)</i>
1913	7,286,416
1924	13,917,942
1929	12,781,195
1932	10,525,861
1934	10,589,140

"A Brief Review of the Company's Hundred Years of Business," GWRM, September, 1935, 495–501.

Economic and social upheavals posed different challenges. Many railways had initially developed to serve a range of traditional industries, which by the late 1920s had fallen into unarrested decline. They now needed to rebalance business by competing for leisure passengers. In this case, they did not differ from many businesses which recognised that in times of depression more advertising was needed, not less.⁷⁷ The LNER's new advertising manager, Mr Cecil Dandridge, stated that something in the region of 30 per cent of LNER passenger business came from speculative travel, but this was threatened by alternative and competitive methods of travel, along with other challenges for surplus income including cinema tickets, gramophones and radios.⁷⁸ A revolution in holidaymaking practice forced the railways to further reconsider their established messages. Before the mid-1920s, many holidaymakers still held essentially Victorian anxieties about mixed bathing, the display of flesh, and class divides at resorts.⁷⁹ Exposure of the skin to the sun's rays had been regarded as a mark of working-class roughness.⁸⁰ But the new rights for women, higher incomes, the broadening of the middle classes and the maturity of a generation keen to forget wartime austerity progressively reshaped the British holiday.⁸¹ People were encouraged to forgo their reticence and reserve and consider time away from work and the city as, above all else, fun.⁸² This culminated, at the dawn of the 1930s, in the 'Bathing Boom' with enjoyment and hedonism the main watchwords. This new ethos of sunshine and freedom necessitated railways remodel their appeals so as not to appear staid as ever greater competition, on an increasingly national basis, characterised the seaside holiday market.

* * *

As part of a report investigating why the railways were losing customers to new rival modes, *The Railway Review* printed Councillor C. Auger's assessment of the general condition of railway advertising. Their backwardness in this field, he claimed, was leading to an inexorable revolution in how Britons opted to travel.⁸³ However, others believed this criticism unwarranted, and when called upon to defend their profession the railways' advertising departments did so vehemently. Officials from the SR and GWR requested Auger visit their departments and witness the advertising process close up. Auger's observations were recorded in the *Railway Review*, along with his contrition upon finding 'not an army of grey-beards...with antiquated ideas and no set purpose' but 'a collection of

very energetic, able and youthful-looking individuals, working with diligence and skill in the face of significant challenges'.⁸⁴ But in truth the mounting challenges of the 1920s were not simply overcome. The LMS's public emphasis on modern business efficiency hid shortcomings that affected staff morale and public attitudes, and SR's public esteem could only have improved following its disastrous lack of public relations.⁸⁵ This was true of other big concerns; Rowntree struggled to meet new markets and adopt appropriate marketing in this decade and J. Walter Thompson's forceful efforts on behalf of General Motors alarmed some British consumers.⁸⁶ The decade therefore represented a period of continuity and change where advertising played an increasingly crucial role in promoting the business and communicating with customers, but a formula for success continued to be elusive.

STAGE 3: REINVENTION 1930–1939

*Too many long years of monopoly, too many careers begun, continued and ended without competition, too much security and not enough danger, too much take it or leave it, too much war time control – all these have left their ugly scars on the railway business.*⁸⁷

Britain's railways viewed the 1930s as the beginning of a new era in which competition, economic stagnation and the changing holiday tastes had transformed the landscape of railway operation. With the trade depression and unemployment easing, the railways became obsessively preoccupied with increasing their business as much as possible. Intensified road competition even occasioned railway cooperation on the 'It's Quicker By Rail' (1930) and 'Square Deal' (1938) campaigns, intended to improve rail's overall public image and boost staff morale.⁸⁸ The 1930s saw renewed discussion on subjects such as 'The Importance of Publicity' and 'The Value of Advertising', as well as encouraging new forms of promotion.⁸⁹ The contributors contended that businesses which advertised survived: the LNER's Cecil Dandridge argued that, whilst advertising was not the panacea for all the ailments afflicting the transport industry, 'when judiciously applied, in conjunction with efficient and attractive service, it has never yet failed to produce results which show a reasonable return on the outlay'.⁹⁰ All four railway companies attended advertising conferences and conventions, and assessed the work of other industries at home and

abroad.⁹¹ The GWR even debated modern advertising practices with representatives of the Bank of England, the results of which were published in *The Railway Gazette*.⁹²

Each railway went further to attract custom. The LMS's Advertising and Publicity Officer, Loftus Allen, argued that, 'People must be induced to travel not only more frequently but further afield. There is not as much money to be made in taking the people of industrial Lancashire and Yorkshire to the nearby coast resorts...the Scot should be tempted to come South'.⁹³ The GWR's George Orton gave a similar assessment in 1936, noting the company's firm belief there was 'hardly a soul in the country that cannot be attracted to [the railway] at some time or by some means'.⁹⁴ Discretionary and long-distance travel was of paramount importance, but the awareness of individual groups with particular interests and travel needs also increased. Whether the 'single men and or women, the honeymooners, the family man, the Rambler, the sportsman, the camper, the tourist, the sightseer, and those with only an occasional half-day or day to spend', the GWR tried to ensure that it could offer something to please everyone.⁹⁵ The company prepared specific appeals and fare incentives for rambles, golfers, theatre-goers and dog owners. The interest in foreign markets gathered pace as well: although difficult to pinpoint exactly the economic value of foreign travel to the companies during the interwar years, according to Bratter's 1931 study *The Promotion of Tourist Travel by Foreign Countries*, tourist expenditure by Americans in the United Kingdom in 1929 was estimated at 40,590 dollars, the third largest behind Germany (44,676) and France (137,143).⁹⁶

At the GWR, the sense of a new era was intensified by wide-ranging internal reorganisation affecting the publicity department. In 1931, a new general manager, James Milne, was appointed and William Fraser retired to be succeeded as head of publicity by K.W.C. Grand.⁹⁷ Grand spent little time in the post, as did his successor George Orton, who was quickly promoted to the position of commercial assistant in 1934, where his ideas nevertheless continued to shape how the GWR was publicised. Each was a seasoned railwayman, but Orton's successor, Major John Dewar, had a background which was, aside from military service, assiduously promotional. Dewar joined the GWR having been in charge of outdoor publicity for the Empire Marketing Board.⁹⁸ This departure suggests both the recognition that advertising was a business which necessitated a new level of expertise, and that the best person to tackle rail's public image may not have been someone already fully committed to the career.

In the summer of 1929, Dorothy Fraser, who worked under the pen-name Maxwell Fraser, and was the daughter of the outgoing head of publicity as well as a well-travelled Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, was selected to completely re-write *Holiday Haunts*. Agreeing to work exclusively for the GWR, Fraser took a considerable pay cut, accepting £150 plus £50 travel expenses. She agreed, however, that working for the GWR itself was of ‘considerable value’, presumably a reference to thousands more who would now read her work.⁹⁹ The GWR also became the first British railway company to employ a female salesperson for passenger traffic. Miss Audrey Shirliff joined the Superintendent of the Line’s office in the autumn of 1936 and was principally involved in contacting women’s organisations, distributing advice on promoting outings and excursions, itineraries, sight-seeing, amusements and catering.¹⁰⁰ She recognised the influence that women had in consumption as well as the work needed to listen to these customers.¹⁰¹ Her appointment was an important step in bringing the GWR in line with other advertisers; women had played a greater role in previously male-dominated sales and advertising departments since the mid-1920s.¹⁰²

The railways participated in an advertising mindset which was geared ever more towards influencing customers at an emotional rather than rational level. A *Railway Gazette* report on ‘Planned Publicity for a Specialised Market’ cited an example from rail’s chief competitor, concluding that

a man will buy a motorcar for many reasons other than to provide transport or because his old one is worn out and these reasons involve personal idiosyncrasies, personal taste, personal needs and personal emotions. He may deny himself other things to buy it; he will make sacrifices.¹⁰³

In 1936, GWR staff made a similar observation, recorded in the company’s magazine: ‘the successful salesman is the man who...can “put over” his subject in such a way that the prospective customer judges not only from the point of view of price but is also persuaded by the more subtle appeals’.¹⁰⁴ The GWR recognised that its most effective appeals were ‘seen and not read’, and required less an informative appeal to the calculating mind, and more ‘a scientific appeal to the conscious and subconscious’.¹⁰⁵

The scale of the GWR’s advertising in the 1930s was truly significant. In 1932, 72,000 illustrated folders and 415,000 booklets were published

and circulated throughout the British Isles and in the United States, and nearly 100,000 pictorial posters were printed.¹⁰⁶ The year 1933 saw 67,019 enquiries for information dealt with through the post. In that year, the company also produced its first official sound films with descriptive running commentaries, and put these into circulation at cinemas. By 1939, it had built up a library of 16mm films, which were made available to clubs, institutes, women's guilds, societies and schools 'who are prepared to arrange free cinema displays at which a minimum of fifty persons will be present'.¹⁰⁷ Whilst certain mediums such as press advertisements, posters and guidebooks represented the chief means through which to promote in terms of financial outlay, as the figures on advertising expenditure in Table 2.3 suggest, in reality this was an integrated approach which relied on supplementary means as well the design of carriages with customers in mind, and attitudes to customer service.

In terms of funding such initiatives, the GWR was still to find the best division of resources. As Table 2.3 shows, in the 1930s press advertisements continued to draw the bulk of expenditure whilst other costs remained at similar levels. Although companies looked to new markets it was impossible to advertise everything that the railways had to offer, so they selected 'the most attractive items'.¹⁰⁸ The consistent expenditure suggests again that, as well as relatively stable economic conditions, the GWR had further refined its advertising process.¹⁰⁹ But it also continued to experiment with novel departures such as games and jigsaws.¹¹⁰ During the 1938 Christmas season, the company collaborated with department stores in London and Bristol to host a cinema-train complete with Santa, GWR guard and a mocked-up station setting with booking office and posters. The children could choose between a 'journey' to the North Pole or the Cornish Riviera, with as many as 2000 children a day opting to do so, according to the company's estimations.¹¹¹

THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF RAILWAY GUIDES

Railway guidebooks were a key battleground for holiday custom; the GWR's *Holiday Haunts* was described internally as the company's 'backbone' of publicity, at its height selling 250,000 copies annually.¹¹² Cecil Dandridge made a similar assessment at the LNER, calling that company's all-line *Holiday Handbook* 'our first line of persuasion'.¹¹³ Yet in this decade the railways confronted a public accustomed to more sophisticated forms of visual communication. Owing to declining cost and improved repro-

Table 2.3 GWR Advertising expenditure 1930–1939 (£)

	1930	1931	1932	1933	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Press advertising	74,510	62,650	62,150	64,000	68,000	68,000	75,000	75,000	74,000
Printing of publications & posters incl. <i>Holiday Haunts</i>	25,000	24,000	24,000	24,000	24,000	24,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Advertisements on omnibuses & underground trains	2350	2350	2350	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000
Misc. incl. commercial advertising publicity	7500	5000	5000	4000	4000	4000	6000	6000	7000
Freight/goods advertising	7500	7500	7500	6000	6000	6000	6000	6000	6000
Total	116,500	101,500	101,000	100,500	104,000	104,000	114,000	114,000	115,000
Less estimated receipts from sale publications	14,000	15,000	15,000	14,500	14,000	14,000	14,000	14,000	14,000
Net cost	102,500	86,500	86,000	86,000	90,000	90,000	10,000	100,000	101,000

Compiled using annual statistics from TNA, RAIL 250/357, Traffic Committee 1932–1937. The vote for advertising expenditure happened on different dates but roughly occurred in the first weeks of November, sufficient time to establish the success of the outgoing campaign and to begin the following year's preparations.

duction, the daily newspaper had become an altogether more visual experience.¹¹⁴ Inexpensive photo-magazines on all manner of subjects sold well, and cinema was one of the most popular forms of entertainment. Amateur photography also enjoyed a significant following in the 1930s, as proved by a 1931 competition run by the Kodak company, which drew over three million entries between May and August of that year. The competition rewarded the popular and everyday rather than the elite, and the winning photograph, a snapshot of a young lady silhouetted against the sunset, taken on the Isle of Man, further emphasises the popularity of this kind of view during these years.¹¹⁵ As Chap. 4 will demonstrate, the GWR moved to court this snapshot culture in their attempts to keep their views attractive and current.

The shift in tastes encouraged advertising photographers to abandon authenticity in favour of a carefully staged ‘story’ about consumption.¹¹⁶ Many stock photographic agencies were formed to satisfy demand. In 1935, J. Walter Thompson advertising agency opened its own photographic studio built specially for advertising purposes. It offered impressive facilities, with staff being able to turn on 30,000 watts of light—enough to light a movie set. It had enough imitation grass to make a smallish lawn, enough sand for a realistic beach, and enough cotton wool and Epsom salts to build a section of the Cresta Run. The agency also compiled a list of over one thousand models, their size and their wardrobe. This allowed the agency to have direct control over photographic output, the net result being time saved and better photographs at a reasonable cost.¹¹⁷ However, the results of such companies varied and as the decade progressed commentators began to rail against the uniformity and lack of ingenuity on offer.¹¹⁸ Just when commercial photography was maintaining ‘high and interesting standards’, stock photographs threatened to ruin photography’s burgeoning advertising potential.¹¹⁹

On the GWR some of the only published comment on photographic direction is sadly not very revealing. In ‘The Production of Holiday Haunts’, Maxwell Fraser wrote that ‘the chief view observed in obtaining new photographs is that each view must indicate the character of the scenery of the individual “Holiday Haunt”’, but went on to say that it should be free from the allurements of holiday seasons: ‘if some resorts are peopled with gay bathing parties in the height of summer the picture leaves this to the imagination’.¹²⁰ This is perplexing because it runs counter to the direction the GWR evidently took in the following years. Indeed, 1931’s guide was the first revolutionary break with tradition. The introductory pages

proclaimed that year's volume to be 'The New *Holiday Haunts*'.¹²¹ An entirely new feature was introduced, billed as helping the reader in their holiday selection. Instead of each county being arranged alphabetically, the guide was divided into seven 'Holiday Lands': London and Southern Counties; The Cornish Riviera; Glorious Devon; Somerset, Dorset and Channel Islands; North Wales; South Wales and Monmouthshire; and The Midland Counties and Isle of Man. Fraser's textual revision was substantial, but the chief change of the 1930s was the recognition that to market a destination it was no longer enough to picture a place; it was increasingly sold as a human experience. Fraser's example raises the question about how much input the editors had on the pictorial side. Correspondence between Dewar and Fraser suggests that the two became increasingly at odds regarding the presentation of the guide, and S.P.B. Mais was brought in to provide introductions to the 'Holiday Lands' in the mid-1930s.

Indeed, great efforts were made to revise the visual output, meaning that within the space of a few years many guides which had been issued since the Edwardian years quickly became unrecognisable. The GWR incorporated new ways of capturing, posing and presenting subjects in line with the theories about linking experiences and lifestyles to products. Rather than images of the destination or wide-angle shots of populous beaches, the company selected individuals drawn from its own staff, holidaymakers and agency models. People were paramount: facial expressions, poses, interactions, clothing and holiday paraphernalia were all carefully staged in order to illustrate particular stories about consumption. Lighting techniques to direct the viewer's attention to certain points in the photograph, disciplining the eye's movements, featured in this innovative photographic work. This also had further benefits for segmenting the market, enabling the GWR to show in more detail which type of customer belonged at different destinations. Photographs were meant to bring the destinations alive and populate them with stories about how people would feel and what they would experience, hence the increasingly peopled photography. They showed what family togetherness looked like, companionable experiences and attractive people to be found. Photography was the opening salvo to draw the potential consumer more deeply into wanting a holiday and playing down the practicalities such as travel, accommodation and price.

On the page, photographs also appeared in novel arrangements: sometimes used in pairs, where tourists looked through binoculars on one page and spied a mountain or interior scene on the other. The relationship

between text and image also improved; no longer were the photographs simply placed either one or two to a page, but now appeared in a variety of sizes, the corners increasingly curved rather than squared off for a more informal look. More emotive and narrative captions helped viewers approach GWR photography in the 'correct' corporate way. To get the right look the GWR enlisted the help of professional companies such as Fox's Model Agency.¹²² Fox's were specialists in photographic models and posed photography, one of many firms set up to satisfy the demand for glamorous photographic imagery amongst a range of advertisers.¹²³ The GWR first commissioned Fox's to photograph its carriage and hotel interiors, peopling these spaces for the first time. Little detail survives on this relationship, the cost or the individuals involved, other than the commercial assistant's comment, in 1936, that excellent results were being secured by co-operating with photographic and film agencies.¹²⁴ Even though the standard holiday imagery might have shared a similar visual grammar with the more constructed examples, models packaged these connotations more slickly. The aesthetic was, however, not unique to the GWR, as other railways used stock imagery companies including Kodak, the Pictorial Press, Aerofilms Ltd, Photochrom and indeed Fox's. Each desired a similar look: Cecil Dandridge described the LNER's *Holiday Handbook* as 'profusely illustrated with lively and human photographs, not merely representing the stereotyped view of the places we were endeavouring to advertise, but rather suggesting at the same time the atmosphere and the holiday mood which might be found there'.¹²⁵ The LNER's experiments also extended to three-dimensional images in 1935's *On the LNER with a Stereoscopic Camera*. This short brochure featured a range of scenes, and the inclusion of coloured glasses for viewing the photos was a very different take on the attempts to bring the imagery to life. Britain's railway companies now thought in supplementary terms about how to build aspiration, atmosphere and mood into their photography, and chose to do so predominantly through peopled content.

The new style was noticed in reviews. *The Railway Gazette* proclaimed the outstanding feature of railway holiday handbooks to be the pictorial sections in each.¹²⁶ *The Times* claimed that they became 'more persuasive every year'; 'the literary descriptions more beguiling, the illustrations more insistent in their invitation'.¹²⁷ It praised the GWR's *The Cornish Riviera, Somerset and Glorious Devon* and made especial mention of the photographic illustrations: 'the reader ... undecided about his programme ... is still in possession of crowded budgets of finely reproduced photographs from which to taste a vicarious holiday'. Likewise, the *North Devon Journal*

praised the 1933 edition of *Holiday Haunts* ‘the best the Great Western Railway has ever produced’, including ‘the finest collection of pictures of the West included in one book’. Of the new visual style in particular, the writer noted that ‘the new method of treatment is such that the smell of the sea and moors: the laugh of happy children at play on Cornwall’s golden sands: the vastness of the valleys of the Cader country, or the lazy warm content inspired by the Somerset thatch, are revealed in a moment’.¹²⁸

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter began by identifying the need to know more about how advertising was understood by Britain’s pre-nationalisation railway companies, to what degree the customer was considered as a central component, and how photography developed as a means of communicating with passengers. An exhaustive review has not been possible; the advertising cultures of other railways have not been treated with the same detail as the GWR, neither have the host of experimental initiatives which hardly got past the drawing board but nonetheless speak of a developing advertising culture. The evidence nonetheless demonstrates that by the end of the 1930s the companies collectively exhibited many facets of improved advertising. This advertising was underpinned by attempts to theorise and research more accurately the passenger’s viewpoint rather than basing this on supposition. Aspirational advertising became a growing strategy amongst British companies in the interwar years,¹²⁹ and on the railways was embraced as a way of connecting with customers on a more emotional level. Although Britain’s significant railway companies did not employ eminent photographers or agencies, and it is difficult to tell explicitly what they thought about the theories which connected photography to advertising, photography was used with exceptional diversity and with a conviction that it could sell the railway service in a unique way.

Divall and Shin argue that there was no handbook available to guide railway publicity men in their campaigns, and that railwaymen only half understood their experiments to create a differentiated market out of a public which had previously been viewed as largely homogenous.¹³⁰ In truth, it was far from an exact science, and there was indeed no official handbook, but the pages of comment, opinion and experience-based practice devoted to railway advertising matters in this period suggest a culture

which was receptive and innovative, even if it did not have all the answers. Having laid the groundwork of advertising operations, the remaining chapters in this volume consider the specific narratives deployed in photographic advertising, and how railway services were rendered visible.

NOTES

1. *The Railway Times*, July 3, 1897, 19.
2. “Do Railways Believe in Advertising?,” *Great Western Railway Magazine*, April, 1913, 102. (GWRM hereafter).
3. GWRM, May 1909, 101.
4. The Magazine was founded in 1888 as the organ of the GWR Temperance Union, but when the Union ran into financial difficulties in 1903 the GWR purchased the magazine. It soon became a valuable corporate asset with a wide readership, sold to staff at a nominal fee. See Mike Esbester, “Organizing Work: Company Magazines and the Discipline of Safety,” *Management and Organizational History* 3, no. 3–4 (2008): 220; Roger Wilson, *Go Great Western: A History of GWR Publicity* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1987), 164–66.
5. “Railway Advertising,” *The Railway Times*, August 31, 1912, 223.
6. See, for example, GWRM, December 1904, 205, and June 1908, 118.
7. GWRM, September 1904, 145.
8. “The Grave Defects of Railway and Steamship Advertising,” *The Advertising World*, June, 1905, 21.
9. GWRM, May 1913, 141.
10. GWRM, May 1907, 99.
11. GWRM, May 1909, 101.
12. GWRM, May 1913, 141.
13. *The Advertising World*, July 1910, 32.
14. “Is the Railway Advertising Man Properly Recognised as a Force in Modern Railway Work,” *The Railway Gazette*, August 25, 1911, 172–73; September 8, 1911, 216; September 15, 1911, 248.
15. Phillip Bagwell, *The Railway Clearing House in the British Economy 1842–1922* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), 19.
16. David Smith, *The Railway and Its Passengers: A Social History* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1988), 86.
17. GWRM, May 1909, 101.
18. *The Railway Gazette*, June 28, 1907, 326.
19. GWRM, May 1909, 101.
20. Douglas Knoop, *Outlines of Railway Economics* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 235.
21. Wilson, *Go Great Western*, 24.

22. “Progressive Advertising in the Great Western,” *The Railway Gazette*, August 26 1910, 257; *The Advertising World*, August 1910, 159.
23. GWRM, June 1914; GWRM, April 1905, 136.
24. D. T. Timins, “Art on the Railway,” *The Railway Magazine*, May 1900, 417–26.
25. “A Travelling Picture-Gallery,” *The Illustrated London News*, April 4, 1903, 522.
26. This was the case in other countries with a developed touring culture too. See Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere, “Canada by Photograph: Instructed Looking and Tourism of the Late Nineteenth-century Canadian Landscape,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 49, no. 99 (2016): 314.
27. *The Advertising World*, June 1907, 52.
28. Wilson, *Go Great Western*, 83–84.
29. GWRM, April 1904, 49.
30. Wilson, *Go Great Western*, 112.
31. Wiltshire and Swindon Archives (WSA), 2515 210 Box 150/6, Letter from Clarke and Hyde Press Agency to GWR’s Superintendent of the Line concerning use of photographs in advertisements; 2515 210 Box 146/6, Memorandum of arrangement between Topical Press Agency and GWR for special photographic work. Commercial photographers were highly regarded for their perceived expertise regarding the appropriateness of image-based appeals for different audiences. See Robin Lenham, “British Photographers and Tourism in the Nineteenth Century Three Case Studies,” in *Visual Culture and Tourism*, ed. David Crouch and Nina Lübbren (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 95–6.
32. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1906).
33. “Advantages of Publicity,” *The Railway Times*, November 18, 1911, 490.
34. “Value of Advertising,” *The Railway Times*, October 25, 1913, 403.
35. Terence Nevett, *Advertising in Britain: A History* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 138–44.
36. D.L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the Cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 10.
37. *Advertiser’s Weekly*, June 9, 1922, 301–02.
38. *Advertiser’s Weekly*, November 19, 1926, 280.
39. *Advertiser’s Weekly*, October 20, 1922, 461.
40. *The Times*, January 22, 1924, 13.
41. *The Railway Gazette*, September 14, 1923, 330; Michael Bonavia, *The Four Great Railways* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1980), 20–26.
42. “LMS Posters by RA’s,” *The Railway Gazette*, December 28, 1923, 808. See also “Wider Railway Publicity Wanted,” *The Railway Gazette*, November 2, 1921, 361; “Railway Advertising,” *The Railway Gazette*,

- October 2, 1924, 436; "Railways and Public Relations," *The Railway Gazette*, April 11, 1924, 552; "Railway Salesmanship and Public Relations Work," *The Railway Gazette*, December 23, 1927, 786; "Commercial and Advertising Psychology," *The Railway Gazette*, February 18, 1927, 216; "Joint Railway Publicity," *The Railway Gazette*, March 8, 1929, 355.
43. "Railway Posters," *The Times*, June 20, 1924, 12; *Advertiser's Weekly*, March 3, 1922, 271–74.
 44. "More and Better Railway Advertising," *Advertiser's Weekly*, October 30, 1925, 186.
 45. John Hewitt, *The Commercial Art of Tom Purvis* (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University Press, 1996), 14–18.
 46. *The Railway Gazette*, September 14, 1923, 330. See also "British Railway Advertising Problems," *The Railway Gazette*, July 2, 1926, 16–19; *The Railway Gazette*, February 18, 1927, 216.
 47. "LMS Posters by RA's," *The Railway Gazette*, December 28, 1923, 808; "The Year 1925 in Railway Publicity," *Advertiser's Weekly*, January 1, 1926, 34.
 48. "The Truth about the Southern," *Advertiser's Weekly*, January 30, 1925, 174.
 49. "Regaining goodwill from a public that had grown critical," *Advertiser's Weekly*, July 9, 1926, 42–44. On the SR's efforts see also "Railway Salesmanship and Public Relations Work," *The Railway Gazette*, December 23, 1927, 786; "Propaganda Publicity on the Southern Railway," *The Railway Gazette*, January 7, 1927, 8–16.
 50. Julia Wigg, *Bon Voyage! Travel Posters of the Edwardian Era* (London: HMSO, 1998), 9; Beverley Cole and Richard Durack, *Railway Posters, 1923–1947: From the Collection of the National Railway Museum, York, England* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 6; Bonavia, *The Four Great Railways*, 39–45; "The Year 1925 in Railway Publicity," *Advertiser's Weekly*, January 1, 1926, 34.
 51. A synopsis of Fraser's career was included in profile in GWRM, November 1931.
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 55. GWRM, December, 1924, 468.

56. *Hints for Holidays* (London: London and South Western Railway, 1922).
57. *Advertiser's Weekly*, January 7, 1927, 10.
58. *Advertiser's Weekly*, January 7, 1927, 9.
59. *Advertiser's Weekly*, January 7, 1927, 7–10.
60. TNA, ZPER 38/17, Meeting of 5th February 1925, 1–20.
61. *The Railway Gazette*, July 18, 1924, 96.
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63. Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and The Marketing Revolution, 1862–1969* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 286.
64. “British Railway Advertising Problems,” *The Railway Gazette*, July 2, 1926, 16–19.
65. Oliver Green, *Underground Art: London Transport Posters 1908 to the Present* (2nd ed., London: Laurence King, 2001), 11.
66. E. S. Turner, *The Shocking History of Advertising* (London: Michael Joseph, 1952), 181.
67. More detailed information on this relationship is available in GWRM, “GWR Stationary and Printing Department,” January, 1926, 18–19. See also “The Production of Holiday Haunts,” GWRM, March, 1930, 101–04.
68. Sinclair Wood, “Using Research as Basis of a Marketing Policy,” *Advertiser's Weekly*, August 28, 1925, 355.
69. *Advertiser's Weekly*, September 24, 1936, 418.
70. TNA, RAIL 267/389, Report Upon Great Western Railway Arrangements at British Empire Exhibition, 1924, 5.
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74. Percy Bradshaw, *Art in Advertising: A Study of British and American Pictorial Publicity* (London: The Press Art School, 1925), 258.
75. TNA, RAIL 258/425, Great Western Railway Traffic Department: Annual Report 1927.
76. TNA, RAIL 258/425 Great Western Railway Traffic Department: Annual Report 1928.
77. Turner, *The Shocking History of Advertising*, 192–93; Kathy Myers, *Understains: The Sense and Seduction of Advertising* (London: Comedia Pub. Group, 1986), 22.
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83. C. Auger, “Why are the Railways Losing?,” *Railway Review*, August 2, 1928, 4.
84. *The Railway Gazette*, November 30, 1928.
85. Bonavia, *The Four Great Railways*, 35 & 72.
86. Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the Marketing Revolution*, 5; Jeff Merron, “Putting Foreign Consumers on the Map: J. Walter Thompson’s Struggle with General Motors’ International Advertising Account in the 1920s,” *The Business History Review* 73, no. 3 (1999): 479.
87. *The Railway Gazette*, March 24, 1933, 416–17.
88. Smith, *The Railway and Its Passengers*, 165–66; In 1933, for example, the railways held a joint information bureau at the national Advertising and Marketing Exhibition, *The Railway Gazette*, July 21, 1933, 112.
89. See for example *The Railway Gazette*, January 23, 1931, 105–06; June 3, 1932, 821; October 18, 1932, 499; December 16, 1932, 761.
90. “Seeing Britain by Train,” *The Railway Gazette*, August 15, 1930, 208.
91. For just a small sample of this cross-company comment, see “Printed Words,” *London, Midland and Scottish Railway Magazine*, August, 1934, 309–311; “Advertising,” *London and North Eastern Railway Magazine*, May, 1929, 231–34; “Advertisements in Carriages,” *The Railway Magazine*, October, 1939, 243–44; “Effective Publicity Coordination,” *The Railway Gazette*, August 2, 1935, 179; “High Speed—An advertising Asset,” *The Railway Gazette*, July 9, 1937, 52.
92. “Debate on Modern Advertising,” *The Railway Gazette*, March 4, 1938, 438.
93. Loftus Allen, “Printed Words,” *London, Midland and Scottish Railway Magazine*, August, 1934, 309–311.
94. TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Railway Students’ Association Proceedings of Sessions, meeting of 13th February 1936, 32–37.
95. GWRM, May, 1936, 209.
96. H.M. Bratter, *The Promotion of Tourist Travel by Foreign Countries* (Washington: USGPO, 1931), 2.
97. TNA, RAIL 250/56, Minutes of Board of Directors, Meeting 9th October 1931. Grand’s salary on promotion climbed from £650 to £800 per annum.

98. Details of Dewar's appointment can be found in the GWRM, September, 1934.
99. National Library of Wales (NLOW), GB 0210 MAXSER: F 1–150, Letter to Nicholls from Fraser 9th December 1929.
100. GWRM, October, 1936, 505.
101. GWRM, April, 1938, 148–49.
102. Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, 149–50; Stefan Schwarzkopf, "Discovering the Consumer: Market Research, Product Innovation, and the Creation of Brand Loyalty in Britain and the United States in the Interwar Years," *Journal of Macromarketing* 29, no. 1 (2009): 12–17.
103. "Planned Publicity," *The Railway Gazette*, March 18, 1938, 520–521.
104. GWRM, June, 1936, 289–90.
105. GWRM, June, 1936, 289–90.
106. GWRM, January, 1933, 8.
107. GWRM, January, 1939, 26–27.
108. TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, 32–37.
109. The LNER went to good lengths to determine efficacy, the results of which were recorded in *The Railway Gazette* on 15 August 1930. Advertising manager Cecil Dandridge remarked that 'I do not suggest ... that advertising is the panacea for all the ailments to which our transport industry is so prone; I am convinced, however, that when judiciously applied, in conjunction with efficient and attractive service, it has never yet failed to produce results which show a reasonable return on the outlay', 208.
110. In his memoir, Felix Pole recalled that jigsaw puzzles, cut by the Chad Valley company and supplied with GWR photographs, were sold at low prices by bookstalls, stations and shops, with over a million sold. Pole, *His Book*, 83.
111. GWRM, January, 1939, p. 23.
112. This phrase appears in RAIL 250/772: GWR Minutes and Reports 1936.
113. LNERM, March, 1937, 134.
114. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, 258.
115. John Taylor, "Kodak and the 'English' Market between the Wars," *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 1 (1994): 38–39.
116. Elspeth Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884–1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 188–97.
117. "JWT's Photographic Studio," *Advertiser's Weekly*, April 1, 1937, 6–7.
118. 'Photographer Muses on Models', *Advertiser's Weekly*, May 27, 1937, ii.
119. "Terrors of a Photographic Picnic," *Advertiser's Weekly*, July 14, 1932, 40.
120. GWRM, March, 1930, 101–04.

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122. See, for example, National Railway Museum (NRM), GWR B Series, Negatives 12115, 13486, 12114.
123. Helen Wilkinson, “‘The New Heraldry’: Stock Photography, Visual Literacy, and Advertising in 1930s Britain,” *Journal of Design History* 10, no. 1 (1997): 29.
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126. “Railway Holiday Handbooks,” *The Railway Gazette*, March 17, 1933, 370.
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CHAPTER 3

In the Country

Railway companies were the original adversaries of rural tranquillity, causing uproar and consternation when their locomotives first tore through the countryside in the 1830s and 1840s. The smoke, noise and, not least, the crowds of trippers which they threatened to bring created a widespread panic about the effects of industrial innovation and rural despoliation. Such agonies were reasonably swiftly forgotten, however, as railway lines entrenched themselves in the landscape and the projected, all-encompassing patchwork of iron rails failed to fully materialise. Instead, just over half a century later, the sight of a steam locomotive puffing towards the country station hardly caused a stir. It was, in fact, now viewed by many as a convenient way of exploring the countryside and one which offered a somewhat unique way to experience its visual splendour.

This opinion was endorsed and encouraged by enterprising railway companies which, from the 1880s onwards, became more heavily involved in the creation of literature and imagery which celebrated diverse rural scenes and cultivated an impression of countryside custodianship. At first, these publications and the ubiquitous carriage photographs followed the conventions of regional guidebooks, highlighting points of interest and picturesque sites, whilst illustrating the most famous ones with photographic plates. The larger, all-territory guidebooks offered the potential passenger and armchair traveller visual access to dramatic scenes as well as a plethora of secluded hideaways, and developed more expressive ways of

encouraging countryside consumption. Although retaining the impression of authoritative and knowledgeable guides, they became more narrative in their attempts to get people to seek out such places, or to fantasise about visiting them in the hope that the propensity to travel would be kindled. Later publications, such as the GWR's *Through The Carriage Window* and *The Line to Legend Land*, even encouraged passengers to see the railway compartment as an observation post, advising them not to relegate their cameras to the luggage rack. Through numerous guides, pamphlets and brochures the company addressed people 'in the know', 'concerned' and 'correct' countryside consumers, and sought to make train travel seem altogether more wholesome, traditional and bucolic, especially when faced with a new and potentially more aggressive adversary, the automobile, in the interwar years.

Even though the popularity of seaside holidays approached its zenith around this time, the railways had good reason to keep up the country connection. The 1901 census confirmed Britain as a truly metropolitan nation with over 70 per cent of the population residing in urban areas.¹ The appeal of towns and cities had intensified throughout the nineteenth century, promising employment, better living conditions and a palpable excitement and cultural ferment. But whilst bodies flocked one way, minds lingered in or returned to the countryside. Rurality's powerful allure was evinced through a pervasive interest in and nostalgia for rural culture, traditions, buildings and values. But it held additional, established attractions: first coming to prominence during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, picturesque tourism remained highly popular at the turn of the twentieth century, although by this time what constituted 'picturesque' had been somewhat diluted and popularised to mean 'that which looked good in a picture'.² Others viewed the countryside as a place to discover unspoilt regions in danger of being consumed by suburban expansion (an idealisation set against the unpleasant reality of declining rural population and a stagnant economy). Regardless of the specifics of the terrain, others viewed the countryside as a wholesome retreat from everyday urban environs and an essential escape which allowed urbanites to refresh and recharge bodies and minds. More still viewed it as a playground which promised health and vitality, a space for corporeal enjoyment and physical recreation. Although there could be a degree of overlap, there was no such thing as a typical 'countryside' holiday.

Accompanying these broad appreciations of the countryside's capacity for leisure was a marvellous range of regional variation to consider. Taking

a train westwards from the GWR's Paddington headquarters, passengers traversed the fields and pretty villages of the Home Counties en route to the bucolic Cotswolds. Branching west, they glimpsed agricultural Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, which opened into rugged Wales. Journeying south took them past the Somerset levels, through Dartmoor, Exmoor and finally to coastal Devon and Cornwall. Such variation gave the GWR a tremendous opportunity to entice customers of all tastes and backgrounds, but variety also presented significant challenges. The company's photographers and guidebook editors had to work especially hard to ensure that, when customers browsed the GWR's publications or gazed upon the company's advertising, they saw their vision of the perfect countryside. The GWR instructed potential passengers about what to see and do, but also encouraged them to make their own decisions about what was picturesque or interesting, to fill in the blanks as they became visually literate in the GWR's countryside taxonomy.

This chapter explores the diverse corporate countryside as promoted by the GWR to better understand how the company's publicists understood the appeal, branded it and sold it chiefly through photography to a heterogeneous audience. Analysing the GWR's output reveals the construction of a partitioned and flawless countryside, as well as a similarly prescribed attitude towards customers. Taking chronological steps across the first four decades of the twentieth century, the chapter considers how different passenger groups were identified, understood and appealed to, often side by side in the same guide, and how conflict and convergence of interests was managed in the company's advertising. Unravelling these promotional messages in relation to the corporate context of production and contemporary middlebrow visual culture demonstrates how the GWR drew upon and joined the contemporary protests about the value of the British countryside. With a paradoxical role of countryside custodian on the one hand and facilitator of mass consumption on the other, the GWR viewed its task as balancing reality and fantasy. The reality being, for instance, levels of rural poverty; slow but irrefutable changes such as the threat of mechanisation and urban sprawl to traditional values and practices; class tensions around 'trippers'; physical confrontations over rights of access. The fantasy, that sylvan woods, enchanted lakes and tumbledown communities all existed, and accessing them cost just the price of a GWR guide and ticket.

THE LOVER OF THE PICTURESQUE

Released in 1906, the inaugural volume of the GWR's *Holiday Haunts* proclaimed to have the interests of *lovers of the picturesque* at its heart.³ This classification was the term used by the company to group together customers it believed shared similar interests and backgrounds. These included academics, artists, historians, antiquarians and folklorists who, as the name suggested, might be interested in seeking out what were defined broadly as picturesque destinations. The company evidently sought to capitalise on the cachet of a term well understood by those looking for a more discerning form of consumption. Mid-eighteenth-century touring groups had marked out certain picturesque spots for celebration. Symonds Yat, located deep in GWR territory in Monmouthshire, was made famous by William Gilpin's 1783 work *Observations on the River Wye*. Gilpin's book represented a landmark moment in the development of tourism in the area, and he quickly achieved fame in his own right as a leading figure of the picturesque, a new theory of landscape which transformed ways of looking at the countryside. It advocated a more 'natural' way of viewing landscape and an agenda for seeing, sketching and consuming specific elements of the countryside.⁴ The concept developed further in the nineteenth century as a way of separating middle-class pleasure from working-class leisure.⁵ A modified version found favour amongst Pre-Raphaelite painters and others concerned about the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877), the Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising (1893) and the National Trust (1895) each responded to and helped entrench the desire to preserve the beauty of the outdoors in many forms.⁶ Picking and choosing, these groups, and more besides, championed their own brand of pastoral, idyllic imagery within the broad scope of the picturesque.⁷

Much of the GWR's photographic repertoire directed at 'lovers of the picturesque' focused on scenes which were well understood and marked out for picturesque veneration, including abbeys, brooks, churches, cottages, crags, crosses, farms, gables, ivy, lanes, locks, oaks, ponds, rustic bridges, stone walls, waterfalls and woods.⁸ Wales was displayed as a rougher land of craggy boulders and waterfalls, the markers traditionally associated with the sublime and indicative of the dramatic forces of awe-inspiring nature against human vulnerability.⁹ Page after page in *Holiday Haunts*, the GWR's photographic tableau showcased rough-hewn rocks, enchanted lakes and woodland. Emphasising an altogether different experience, photographs



Fig. 3.1 ‘Betws-y-Coed Fairy Glen’, *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1911). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

such as ‘Betws-y-Coed Fairy Glen’ (Fig. 3.1) and ‘Dolgelly Torrent Walk’ (1914) communicated remoteness and nature’s physical power, as well as the ‘otherness’ of a landscape which was distinctly unordered. Fairy Glen’s strange and secluded landscape, embowered by trees and foliage which provided a verdant covering to the rocky valley, would have looked very different to the landscapes on offer elsewhere in the guide. Indeed, regional variations allowed and enforced comparison. The GWR sought to show what was typical for each, be this in the Home Counties or the Cotswolds. The houses in ‘Denham Village’ (1906), located in South Buckinghamshire, featured ivy-clad frontages, rough, bowing brickwork and half timbering, the opposite of the modern urban ‘semi’. The Cotswolds had been opened up to holidaymakers in the early 1900s by the GWR’s newly constructed Cheltenham–Honeybourne line, and although initially built to serve the fruit-growing industry in the Vale of Evesham, the general manager James Inglis saw additional value in publicising it to tourists as a ‘railway through the garden of England’.¹⁰ Photographs such as 1915’s ‘Bourton-On-Water’ showed man in harmony with this garden, capturing a handful of

solitary figures amongst the trees which dwarfed them and the neatly composed man-made bridge and houses. The GWR's presentation conformed to the repetition of idealised scenes composed to emphasise elements which looked attractive within the frame of the photograph.

When the lover of the picturesque browsed the company's guides or gazed upon its posters, he or she would have been hard pressed to find images which pictured tourists consuming these picturesque landmarks and locations. This might seem unusual in guidebooks intended principally for tourists, but by concealing people, as Lenham argues for Edwardian place photography more generally, companies such as the GWR appealed to the conceit of simultaneously being a tourist yet despising the presence of others.¹¹ To picture tourists, although accurate, would have been at odds with one of the principle motivations for going (escaping crowds linked to urban hurry), and would have spoilt a carefully crafted impression of seclusion and oneness with nature. Therefore, within this tranche of GWR photographs, when those who could reasonably be identified as tourists were pictured, they were used to illustrate the scale of dramatic landscapes and human insignificance in comparison, or how to consume the landscape, chiefly through gazing or sketching. This reminded viewers that they fitted into an established tradition of appreciating such scenes.

Just like the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painters before them, the commercial artists and photographers working for Britain's twentieth-century railways helped shape a collective vision of what should be desired and what should be reviled in a rural setting. The GWR's photographs were part of a growing atmosphere which sought to link railway advertising to popular ideas about art which were also referenced in poster designs. In 1912, *The Railway and Travel Monthly* referred to the outpouring of new-look posters as the railway 'Royal Academy', praising the 'pictorial feasts' on offer. This included the 'Turneresque atmosphere' of the Lancashire and Yorkshire railway and the artistic views of Snowdon by the Ffestiniog Railway.¹² Like many other railway industry magazines, *The Railway and Travel Monthly* made poster scrutiny a regular feature, and a year later praised the London and South Western Railway's poster 'The New Forest: England's Historic playground' with its variety of sylvan scenery, 'for the foreground might well be taken from a picturesque district in the Scottish Highlands, whilst the background, of rising woodland, and the middle distance with its pastoral scene, is as essentially English as any landscape painted by Crome'.¹³

But this idea of a painterly tradition explains only one part of the GWR's appeals, and despite the terminology, the GWR viewed 'lovers of the picturesque' as a broad group united by connected but not necessarily homogeneous interests. Like many businesses seeking to sell country pleasures, when the GWR imagined its customers it thought chiefly of urban dwellers. Urbanites, it was naturally assumed, were most interested in the countryside as the obvious antithesis to their everyday environs, and the features described above were chosen to convey the requisite beauty or otherness. It was, furthermore, offered as an antidote to the malaise of city living: the company referenced this when it appealed to 'the wearied dweller in one of the larger cities'.¹⁴ The peace and order available at rural destinations was summed up in a section from 1910's *Holiday Haunts* which implored readers to 'Try a Rural Holiday by GWR':

A holiday deep in the heart of the country! For the town-dweller there is charm in the idea. And why not? Why not a holiday right away where the scented wild flowers grow, away among the green country lanes and dells dappled with sunlight, away in the quiet woods where the birds are singing? ... The reader who scans this book through, from page to page, cannot fail to find a host of suggestions for a quiet rural holiday.¹⁵

Rural vitality was offered as a remedy for urban fatigue and disillusionment. Martin Wiener has argued that the middle classes who had prospered in industry became embarrassed by their association with the built environment. To distance themselves from it, both culturally and spatially, they went in search of nature to 'cleanse' both bodies and minds.¹⁶ The interest in and fashion for a simpler rural past can be seen variously in contemporary middle-class culture, in high art and popular media throughout the first half of the twentieth century,¹⁷ and also in the flight to suburbia, Tudorbethan houses and street names such as 'Meadowside', 'Woodview' and 'Fieldsend'.¹⁸ Social class was also an important consideration; the GWR acknowledged that whilst one hundred years previously picturesque tourism had been the preserve of an elite few in a foreign clime, contemporary Britain provided these experiences for an increasing, yet, importantly, discerning number, most likely to comprise those of middle income and middle class.¹⁹ Similarly, although photographs of local hunts were included in *Holiday Haunts*, the exclusive parkland of country houses did not feature.

There was an additional depth to the company's visual vocabulary which suggests a complementary attempt to embellish landscapes and

engage in 'myth-making' to satisfy a more poeticised 'romantic gaze' which similarly offered difference from the everyday.²⁰ In this sense, rather than strict adherence to the principles of the picturesque, the GWR's corporate countryside relied in equal measure on visual narratives set around a fantasy world of imagined consumption which went beyond picturing beauty spots and toyed with popular ideas about the past. The intention in this case was to sell travel as a way of connecting not only with beautiful landscapes but also timeless practices and characters, apparently untouched by modernity, which populated them. In this vein, photography was used to help weave lavish stories about even the smaller destinations on the system, the mysteriousness of which was offered as additionally valuable. The result was GWR advertising where the landscapes, buildings and ruins were captured and re-contextualised into long visual and textual narratives, becoming part of a sign system which signified the romantic past on offer further down the railway track.

How this process was articulated is evident both in the instructions given to photographers and in the ways the company encouraged customers to interpret the published imagery. A lecture given by company photographer Harold Cooper to the GWR's Debating Society in 1909 revealed various duties encompassing photography for legal and engineering purposes as well as publicity work. However, it was the latter, producing imagery for the holiday market, which tasked Cooper most greatly, in an artistic and occupational sense. Rather than a pretty picture, so to speak, Cooper was charged with procuring interesting imagery which brought the guidebook text to life, the details of which were revealed in his description of the procurement process concerning an image of Burrington Combe. Behind this there was little artistic merit, he revealed. Rather, it was taken because the famous hymn 'Rock of Ages' was composed there by Reverend Augustus Toplady in 1763, whilst sheltering from a thunderstorm in a cave.²¹ GWR photographers were encouraged to photograph places because of 'what happened centuries ago', not just how they looked to contemporaries, necessitating a deep immersion in the drama of myth and legend. To further persuade, the photographs relied on straightforward yet interesting captions which directed the viewer in decoding the photographic messages. This was part of an overall effort to educate passengers on the photographs' deeper intended meanings in the hope that they would weave their own narratives. Revealed explicitly a number of years later, the goal was to make 'what hitherto appeared to be

a rough heap of stones upon a hilltop' as 'the ruins of a castle of great historical interest around which a deal of legend flourishes'.²²

Photographs which followed this format therefore concentrated little on the aesthetic character of these places, their climate, available amenities or activities. Instead they confirmed that holidaymakers could access a world far different from their everyday experiences, where the past lived on apparently unchanged. A 1910 photograph of Shilston Cromlech,²³ in Devon, corroborates the idea that the GWR wanted customers to, almost literally, see a 'rough heap of stones' in interesting and different ways. The stones were known locally as Spinsters' Rock, a Neolithic burial site which in 1910, despite repeated collapse and human interference, was still presented as the site of mystical practices. The GWR's photographers captured the structure in situ, the large flat table-stone resting precariously on a trio of short, upright stones. Devoid of context the image was curious but had no inherent significance and little about it that one could say was charming or typical of this or that region. Yet the GWR's advertising machine presented such photographs as being as alluring as a river scene or picturesque valley. This presentation was reliant, of course, on its operation within the wider visual and textual narratives; several images together could create a fantastical imaginary landscape with photography ascribing it tangibility, superior to the artist's sketch, which suggested that such experiences were accessible, and not just an invention of the publicist's imagination. But once the viewer was familiar with these they could be encouraged to fill in the blanks, so to speak, for other images. In this way, photography played an essential role in creating a romantic story and communicating the supposed grander appeal of previously uninteresting buildings, ruins or landmarks to potential consumers. They were encouraged to seek out and photograph for themselves these unusual remnants of bygone eras.

Although it could not enforce or guarantee such readings, the GWR hoped that the difference between contemporary urban modernity and the mysterious folk of rural fringes would come across clearly to the holidaymakers who regarded the photograph of the Cornish village of St. Veryan (Fig. 3.2). That the 'typical' roundhouses were so different to the urban dwelling needed little explaining; their unusual circular construction and rough-hewn architectural details such as the wooden lintel and thatched roof were clearly visible in this scene. But the inclusion of an unusually long textual description is revealing as regards the desire to instil a more specific interpretation: the idea that the houses discouraged evil spirits testifies the sort of message that the GWR hoped would entice the



Fig. 3.2 ‘St. Veryan – Typical Cornish Round Houses’, *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1910). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

lover of the picturesque to visit a land that was not only different in terms of the sights and scenes which could be accessed, but also in its outlook and practices. In this context, important and recognisable symbols such as the cross and the gnarled and barren tree assisted the visual narrative regarding ‘evil spirits’. The roundhouses represented a rustic fortress which guarded a rough track leading down into the valley beyond. This view of protected access epitomised the idea that passing these houses one would enter a different land. The presence of a labourer busy attending to his pony and trap confirmed this as an authentic image of place and gave prominence to one who, as suggested in the text, supposedly kept up this folkloric tradition.

Certainly, the inclusion of a supporting cast of labourers and local people, easily identifiable by their well-worn and peculiar attire, lent an additional level of curiosity and authenticity for those who had spent too long on the daily commuter train. Harmonising with the company’s vision for lovers of the picturesque, these were by far the most frequent inclusions of people in the company’s countryside photographs at this time. In one

example, an elderly lady in traditional Welsh dress, who the caption described as a ‘well-known figure’ was used to promote the small village of Betws-y-Coed in mountainous Snowdonia in 1908’s *Holiday Haunts*. The viewer intruded on her as she drank tea outside her cottage. The ‘foreignness’ exemplified in the GWR’s literature on Wales was emulated in the visual otherness of local characters such as this one. Whether in the country or at the coast, the GWR offered such locals as sights to be seen, as visually interesting as the land and seascapes. This built on the contemporary interest in such ‘folk’. Fishermen were, next to peasants, the single most popular subject in the Royal Academy’s annual exhibitions between 1880 and 1900, and coastal Cornwall was the most painted region of Britain outside London.²⁴ Fishermen were held to connote a dignified, timeless form of labour.²⁵ Harboursides and fishing vessels appeared repeatedly in Edwardian volumes of the GWR’s *The Cornish Riviera* and *Holiday Haunts*, omitting the signs of progress in the fishing industry, such as steam trawlers, in favour of quaint sailing vessels. Correspondingly, back in the countryside there was no place in the GWR’s photographic landscape for other signs of modernity such as wires, road markings, advertising or motorised vehicles other than, very occasionally, the company’s own.

Whilst no direct comment from contemporary customers allows for a measure of the success of the GWR’s photographic strategy, reviews printed in the GWR’s company magazine give some indication of how this content was being digested.²⁶ Many celebrated the company’s ‘artistic’ endeavours, and the illustrations merited special mention: ‘produced on the finest art paper and is illustrated by a series of first rate photographs, and should find a corner in the library of every tourist’ (*The King*), and ‘The delightful illustrations should induce all who are able to pay at least one visit to this romantic corner of England’ (*Madame*).²⁷ This suggests that the ploy was well-received as a whole, bearing in mind that there is little to support whether the more intricate individual compositions were consumed in the ways intended by the company.

* * *

Although the GWR described its chief countryside customers as ‘lovers of the picturesque’, and provided them with imagery which could be said to fit the picturesque pantheon, the company understood the common interest in the countryside as extending beyond this. As such, the GWR’s

corporate countryside relied on photography's function to show places and people 'true to life' as well as its ability, in the right hands and appropriately contextualised, to shape particular visions of place. This was of course assisted by the fact that the lure of suburbia was already being established and utilised by a range of companies which joined the GWR in propounding the view that whilst working in the city might have become an economic necessity, living there was regarded as hectic, stressful and unpleasant.²⁸ Reading about or planning a holiday could be just as important as the physical act of travel as they escaped, imaginatively at first, from the pressures of urban life. It was a way of extracting the most value from destinations. It offered flight to a more fantastical land, and although the language was somewhat exclusive, these images were not only meant for a cultural elite, being available for a small price, rarely more than 6d, within the reach of many.

At a time when some considered that 'art and literature as applied to advertising must always be subservient to selling power',²⁹ the GWR showed that they could be combined in mutually beneficial and powerful ways. By 1914, the GWR's publicity department had constructed a vision of the countryside which was offered as distinctively GWR, and played a role beyond Britain. Railway advertising toured as part of international exhibitions,³⁰ and at these meetings competed with the designs of other European and American railways.³¹ National companies and countrysides vied for superiority through the patchwork pictures on 'double-royal' poster scale, as well as in the guidebooks which were distributed beyond domestic borders. Operating somewhere between artists and advertisers, railways the world over played a significant role in how their landscapes, history and peoples were commodified for sale.

POST-WAR TRADITIONALISM AND ANTI-INDUSTRIALISM

Alison Light has argued that after the end of the First World War a set of social, political and economic conditions led Britain (and indeed Europe as well) to look inwards on itself.³² Documentary photography had displayed the dark realities of war to millions of ordinary people, and although the mechanised slaughter on the Western Front did not lead to an outright rejection of modernity, it stoked latent anxieties about the survival of traditional pastimes, trades and ideals, and rejuvenated concerns about rural depopulation, agricultural depression and encroaching urbanisation.³³

One outcome of this was the growing credence within middlebrow culture of preserving rural-traditional values, and for a movement towards modernity ‘within limits’ which advocated harmonising progress with the past.³⁴ The war effort had entrenched the transformation of rural Britain, and ribbon development extended the reach of suburbia.³⁵ The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) was set up in response in 1926, but the anxiety to preserve and desire to find the essence of the nation was evident too in the popular literary landscape, amongst the travelogues by the likes of H.V. Morton (*In Search of England* (1927) and *In Search of Wales* (1932)) and J.B. Priestley (*English Journey*), and in fictional works such as George Orwell’s *Coming Up For Air*.³⁶ Stanley Baldwin, prime minister from 1923 to 1929 and again from 1935 to 1937, employed similar arguments for party political purposes, thereby popularising them further.³⁷ Baldwin ‘longed to hear the tinkle of hammer on anvil in the country smithy’.³⁸ Each aspired to recapture a sense of belonging in the countryside, and was at the same time fearful of finding it irretrievably changed.³⁹ As Alex Potts argues, the vogue for celebrating England and Englishness reached a peak in the 1930s through books such as *The Landscape of England* (1932) and *The Beauty of England* (1933). Such publications were increasingly distinguished by the incorporation of high quality photographic illustrations. Potts cites the 1930s as the moment of creation for many enduring stereotypes and clichés associated with English country scenery, such as chequerboard fields and old buildings nestled comfortably in the countryside.⁴⁰ In 1932, *The Times* introduced a semi-regular feature, ‘Landscape and Letters’, about the settings used by British novelists and poets, transporting readers via photographs to Hardy Country, Brontë Country, and places such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s Swanston and Housman’s Wenlock Edge. Afterwards, *The Times* gathered twenty such photographs together in a portfolio and offered them for sale.⁴¹ The concerns within were mirrored in the popular artistic landscape, in Brian Cook’s illustrations for the Batsford Guides *The Villages of England* and *The Homes and Gardens of England*, and an interest in rural lifestyles was nourished by magazines such as *The Field* and *Country Life*, and later through radio programmes.⁴² They provided succour to people who readily bought into the dream of a quiet country cottage and peaceful village life, but for whom the reality was some way off.

This romanticised ideal was well understood by transport providers and facilitators, which became some of the chief purveyors of such imagery in the interwar period. The Metropolitan Railway company’s ‘Metro-Land’

guides and posters promoted new residential areas in rural Middlesex, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire as set in attractive and peaceful countryside yet with every modern convenience and within easy reach of London. Other railways made similar appeals: the Southern Railway's (SR) 1926 posters 'Live In Surrey Free From Worry' and 'Live In Kent And Be Content', by Ethelbert White, showcased the company's take on contented rural living amongst woodland, rustic buildings (in this case Kent's curious oast houses) and rolling hills. The 1920s witnessed the beginnings of a more democratised car culture assisted by cheaper, reliable models and a burgeoning second-hand market. Although cars and their drivers were commonly castigated for ruining the countryside with their noise, dust and irresponsible speeding, manufacturers sought to counter this impression by presenting motoring as a superior way of experiencing the countryside, allowing drivers to stop and look at whatever interested them before starting off again at their own convenience. Advertisements emphasised the coupled joys of springtime and a new car, and portrayed drivers as people who got the most out of the glorious outdoors. By removing its publicity from roadsides and onto its petrol tankers, Shell fostered an image of itself as a responsible company with strong associations with nature and rural life.⁴³ Shell was aware of its middle-class clientele's tastes, and as such presented its products as ways to experience place in more exclusive and educated ways.⁴⁴ Its poster series 'See Britain First' of the 1920s and 'British Landmarks' of the 1930s proved popular with the travelling public, and the company's *Shell Country Guide* series of the 1930s, edited by John Betjeman, offered an 'intelligent' way of seeing the countryside which instructed readers not only about what to see but how to see it.⁴⁵

The GWR was fully a part of this popular mindscape, releasing publications which dwelt on the history and traditions of minor rural destinations and offered them as holiday allurements. Several themes survived the Edwardian years to feature in the company's interwar advertising, which now also focused on allaying anxieties concerning the vitality of rural Britain. Myth and legend remained a dominant discourse, but throughout the 1920s and early 1930s the GWR's publicity department increasingly embraced the preferences amongst the middle-class market for a romantic rural, traditional presentation of Britain, idealisation of the past, and non-materialism.⁴⁶ In terms of content and sheer number of photographs a shift towards these considerations, and away from scenes of natural, physical-geographic beauty, provides evidence of a reappraisal of what

those seeking the picturesque wanted in line with popular concerns. The GWR still sought to tie itself to the prevailing culture, ensuring that its output harmonised with the desires of lovers of the picturesque (a term still used throughout the 1920s in the company's publications) and other influential groups. Yet it also shifted towards a deeper respect for and celebration of rural ways of life.

A large proportion of the GWR's encoded imagery released during the 1920s focused on the 'typical' or 'traditional' village, or rather the idealised village of the corporate eye, intended to interest an increasingly urban and suburban audience. Since the early nineteenth century the country cottage had developed into one of Britain's most enduring and appealing architectural expressions of contented country living.⁴⁷ For the suburban middle and lower middle classes in their modern, semi-detached houses, these rustic cottages suggested a more peaceful and traditional existence. The rather tumbledown appearance of Ogwell village's inn and stables (Fig. 3.3) presented a village world at odds with the modern art, film and music of the urban environment. Its winding road and close-knit,



Fig. 3.3 'Newton Abbott – Ogwell Village', *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1925). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

rough and asymmetrical houses, conveyed a sense of community. At a time when cars were increasingly common, the sight of children in the streets, and horses and carts in many other photographs, confirmed a bygone era which still thrived at odds with the increasing rush of suburbia. The only form of advertising present was the inn's sign. Similar-sized villages such as Princes Risborough and St Anthony in Roseland were minor destinations whose romantic-sounding names were thrust into the holiday spotlight. 1925's *Holiday Haunts* claimed of Porlock that 'most cottages have roses, myrtles, or geraniums over their walls. Many artists regularly make Porlock their headquarters, the scenery in the woods and hills is so beautiful'.⁴⁸ But whilst exteriors featured as part of the cultivated image of romanticism, the GWR's photographs rarely showed interiors. This obscured a more desperate reality of economic depression and an exodus of young labour.⁴⁹ Rural dwellings shown true to life would not have made for attractive sightseeing.

Such narratives extended across the company's publications. In 1929's volume of *The Cornish Riviera*, S.P.B. Mais sought to dispel the idea that the Cornish inlands were devoid of interest, whilst retaining composed, restful imagery; 'At Malpas white cottages huddle together on a hill-side full of orchards ... the cottages here are all thatched and whitewashed, and the church tower stands high amongst the trees'.⁵⁰ A supporting cast of local people again helped to complete many scenes. The centrality of a donkey-drawn cart in 'Swiss Cottage, Ilfracombe Lee' (1927), and the shire horses being led through Dunster in rural Somerset ('Dunster', 1930), reinforced the message of tranquillity and continuity with the past as well as offering visual evidence of a practice now outmoded elsewhere. Indeed, a horse and cart, or other animals, being driven through the otherwise deserted main street constituted a favourite image, repeated time and again when the GWR wanted to show the attractiveness and timelessness of smaller inland villages. In 1933's *Holiday Haunts*, 'Sheepstor Village, near Yelverton', 'Dunster', 'Blue Anchor' and 'Cockington, near Torquay' were all promoted in this way. They supported the collective vision of small, traditional communities and helped to reference familiar visual motifs reminiscent, for instance, of John Constable's 1821 painting 'The Hay Wain'. Such vignettes could be found in a range of expertly written material including *Devon: The Shire of the Sea Kings*; *South Wales: The Country of Castles*; and *The Cathedral Line of England*.

Images of rural labour more generally increased throughout the GWR's interwar guides, to bolster the constructed visions of surviving traditional

values and practices. The company keenly identified their ‘timelessness’ and ‘rural character’; photographs which showed gathering in the harvest or thatchers finishing a roof outside Evesham (*Holiday Haunts*, 1938), confirm that the romantic gaze was by this time firmly located in a set of supposedly age-old rural values. An unusual image for a holiday brochure, the inclusion of the thatchers demonstrates the GWR’s shifting ideas about how and why the countryside should be consumed. This provided a vision of rural labour similar to the fishing villages which continued to be celebrated diversely at coastal destinations served by the company. ‘A typical corner of Mevagissey’, included in 1928’s *The Cornish Riviera*, pictured a gathering of fishermen. Their rough clothes and faces were reflected in the coarse stone wall which they posed in front of, and they were meant to stand for the wider fishing community which the holidaymaker supposedly found so ‘grave’, ‘dignified’ and ‘picturesque’.⁵¹ This particular photograph included an interloper, a female child who grasped the hand of one of the fishermen but looked at the camera and not at him. The viewer is therefore left to speculate about whether this was a tourist’s child being photographed with the locals, or a local herself. The value of fisherfolk and other local labourers to contemporary holidaymakers, especially those looking for an ‘authentic’ photograph, suggests the former. A Kodak advert from 1923, which included a sketch of holidaymakers making a detailed photographic study of two hoary fisherman who posed equably, shows that other businesses agreed with the GWR about the value of ‘strange’ people and scenes to holidaymakers.⁵²

The SR, which also employed S.P.B. Mais to provide guidebook text, offered a similar message; ‘You will scarcely have crossed the border of Cornwall before you realise how utterly different in every way everything is west of the Tamar’. Mais dwelt upon the different houses, farms and people, described as ‘swarthy, black-haired, handsome, dignified men and women with eyes like glistening great pools, slow moving, courteous and kindly, with voices soft and musical as the southing of the wind through upland firs’.⁵³ The lover of the picturesque, now understood more as a lover of anything quaint and traditional, desired what could not be found in London, including people and customs. As in the national press and magazines such as *Country Life*, photographs of rural labour proved popular not because they instructed readers about certain techniques or materials (as had originally been intended), but for providing ‘living relics’ of incontrovertible interest to those planning a trip to the countryside.⁵⁴

Mais cultivated a popular audience and his wide reach reflected the GWR's change in direction.⁵⁵ He believed that many who followed his work did so to escape their daily, urban lives, and therefore wrote as a 'companionable guide' for the ordinary man as well as the more dedicated lover of the picturesque.⁵⁶ Engaging his services continued a trend, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, whereby the GWR further attempted to target the 'new' middle class—a lower middle class swelled by modern industries requiring middle management; city clerks and the white-collar offspring of the motor trade. They joined those who had traditionally searched for the picturesque, 'The professional man – the lawyer, doctor, journalist, teacher'.⁵⁷ When the GWR thought of the middle classes it concluded that it was still speaking to those who retained an interest in 'art, literature, learning, music, drama, architecture', and who appreciated 'literary merit, historic research and antiquarian knowledge'.⁵⁸ Indeed, the company recognised that to justify their place amongst the traditional middle class, newcomers also sought this kind of holiday as a mark of distinction.⁵⁹ The working classes, who, more generally, were too familiar with low levels of consumption to be seen to desire a holiday in a simpler, pastoral setting,⁶⁰ were still largely ignored in this section of the company's advertising.

However, the perception about who was consuming picturesque travel informed the GWR's conclusion that although customers outwardly desired the simple life, they were uncomfortable in totally relinquishing twentieth-century comforts. In this case, the GWR did not differ from the Southern or Metropolitan Railways' assessment when devising promotional material for suburbia. The compromise saw the GWR offer a fusion of traditional and modern; its carriages were, for instance, described as 'the best modern science and expert workmanship can produce'.⁶¹ The company's famous Tregenna Castle hotel, although 'un-modernised except for the recent addition of wings', boasted 'a well-sprung dancing floor, telephones, central heating, electric lighting and white tiled bathrooms'.⁶² Through its visual content and advertising messages the GWR was cast as a facilitator, a friendly advisor which shared the beliefs and aspirations of its customers but which could provide convenient and comfortable access to them.

THE 'SERIOUS CAMPER'

During the 1920s, GWR's outlook about who was consuming the countryside expanded in different directions. It became apparent that there were actually many who sought a more corporeal experience. In part, this

interest stemmed from the rise of physical culture stimulated by the First World War. Rather than a total rejection of military matters, hundreds of thousands joined youth organisations, their popularity enhanced by persistent concerns about a perceived decline in national prestige tied to the physical fitness of the nation.⁶³ After the war, the Ministry of National Service reported that of every nine men of military age only three were fit and healthy: two were ‘on a definitely infirm plane of health’, three could almost be described as physical wrecks and the remaining man was a ‘chronic invalid with a precarious hold on life’.⁶⁴ This damning evidence fuelled the judgement that it was unpatriotic to let one’s body deteriorate,⁶⁵ and the message found ready acceptance amongst contemporary physical culture organisations. Nevertheless, as it continued to be unpopular with the majority of middle-class holidaymakers, opportunities for more vigorous outdoors recreation did not feature prominently in mass market publications such as *Holiday Haunts*, *The Cornish Riviera* and *Glorious Devon*, or on railway posters for many years. But as campers, hikers, Scouts and Guides began to colonise the countryside, using the services and facilities supplied by the railways, the company began to recognise the need for a more tailored appeal.

In 1924, the GWR issued a specialist guide, *Camping Holidays*, to serve more serious outdoorsmen and women.⁶⁶ The company acknowledged that ‘pre-eminently camping is the joy of boys and girls and rollicking companies of Scouts and Guides’, as well as ‘scoutmasters and others who organise community holidays for young people’.⁶⁷ This perspective was reinforced by the appointment as editor of Hugh E. Page, head of the North Finchley Rambling Club and an outspoken champion of the rights of walkers.⁶⁸ The inaugural camping and hiking brochures were basic in comparison to most other GWR publications, consisting of little more than lists of sites and amenities with introductions extolling the spirit of health and hardiness amongst the ‘brotherhood’ of campers. *Camping Holidays* presented an unembellished view of outdoors recreation. It included no photographs initially, the title page for each region was illustrated with a simple line drawing of a landmark. The company was under no illusions that this was anything but a functional aid to a very specific kind of holiday performed by enthusiasts who had banded themselves into kindred movements.

Later volumes did however include photographs; not stock visions of rural landscapes but tailored content designed to emulate the understanding of these customers as part of a ‘brotherhood’, and indeed ‘sisterhood’,

who desired a rougher engagement with the countryside. The choice of often quite basic photography reflected the spartan requirements associated with this group, and illustrated the advice on setting camp, constructing shelters and organising recreation. The group pictured in ‘Camping Bridge Builders’ (Fig. 3.4) were shown exerting themselves in this practical activity, and although an intriguing image, it was far removed from the company’s overarching visual narratives about relaxing and restorative holidays. The people, though cheerful, looked more like labourers than tourists, and displayed an interest in their workmanship rather than their natural surroundings. Other photographs showed how a hiking holiday should be properly enjoyed. Despite the choice of light-hearted captions for some, such as ‘They Always Ask For More’, and ‘Where Health With Exercise and Freedom Meet’, the photography anticipated what the GWR believed Scouts and boy-groups wanted from a guide.

That these photographs offered completely different allurements to the conventional holiday advertising would not have been lost on the average



Fig. 3.4 ‘Camping Bridge Builders’, *Camping and Hiking Holidays* (London: Great Western Railway, 1933). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

holidaymaker who chanced upon them. Contemporary youth organisations were eyed with suspicion by the general public. As Matless describes, they faced ridicule from some quarters and the Scouting rhetoric of ‘catching’, ‘holding’ and ‘moulding’ young boys was the subject of vulgar jokes.⁶⁹ Yet amongst the groups which vociferously sought the protection of rural beauty, the Anti-Noise League and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, Scouts were preferable to the busloads of the ‘wrong sort’ of people invading the countryside by motor-bus. Fears about working-class groups picnicking and dancing to gramophone records were vented from various sources.⁷⁰ The photographs produced by the GWR proposed a very particular discourse on the ‘correct’ consumption of the countryside, and portrayed hikers as custodians of the land, enlisted guardians against the encroachment of undesirable elements.

* * *

After the First World War, new fashions, technologies and values threatened to efface many traditional ways of life, and even if people could see the importance of modern developments they were nonetheless troubled by the new status quo. The GWR traversed this mindscape with a foot in both camps. It was a progressive company which, although sometimes slow to respond, looked forward and embraced innovations. Yet following the railway amalgamation it was also the only railway which could draw upon a visual identity and public persona which stretched back to the earliest days of steam. This afforded it a significant cachet that could be used to support advertising campaigns which argued that traditional and durable vistas, pastimes, values and customs could be accessed via its services. Through its popular photography, the GWR contributed to ideas about Britain, where it had been and where it was going in the interwar years. But the company was also adaptable. The photographs show how the GWR managed divergence in countryside consumption. Although hikers and campers were arguably of substantial interest to the GWR, customers who would potentially use its services all year round, it risked alienating the established picturesque market by depicting people climbing in the photographs. The company therefore took the decision to create dedicated guidebooks for this side of the market initially, and ensured that the hiking depicted was ‘respectable’, to ward off fears about the massed ranks now invading the countryside.

REINVENTING THE COUNTRYSIDE

Picturesque landscapes, olde-worlde architecture and traditional labour had constituted a strong force in GWR advertising since the dawn of the twentieth century. Each retained a place amongst the chief appeals released by the company throughout the 1930s, in dedicated publications and as part of the all-territory, mass market offerings. The popularity of visiting such sites to photograph them in the style of the guides was acknowledged by the GWR, but so too were anxieties about capturing the idealised image. In 1934's *Glorious Devon*, S.P.B. Mais lamented that; 'There are some villages so often photographed and written about that one is afraid to visit them lest they should prove disappointing ... The lane leading to Cockington is often unpleasantly full of walkers'⁷¹ However, he noted that 'not even a race crowd could destroy the charm of its green contours'.

Yet from the early 1930s there was a prominent movement to picture the customer consuming the countryside, and the creation of a countryside holiday spirit which extended beyond quiet contemplation. The appearance of a new wave of photographs from the early 1930s onwards suggests that the GWR was aware of and attended to the realities of a changing and increasingly popular cadre in this decade. Within the space of a few years, the drive to exclude from the photographs those who could conceivably be identified as tourists was reversed: people were now sought out and featured prominently. This visual turn was likely influenced by the GWR's response elsewhere in its advertising to the popular holiday 'lifestyle' prominent at the time which, as outlined in Chap. 2, now had more to do with glamour and fashion than quaint fishing villages. The company had been forced to renegotiate its appeals in response to the challenge from private cars and the vogue for foreign travel amongst wealthier sections of society. The result was in some cases a dilution, and in others a reinvention of the romantic messages. As holidaymaking practices elsewhere shifted to take in more artificial entertainments, the 'bathing boom' and activities associated with the crowd, this had a discernible influence on how the GWR constructed the countryside visually.

The GWR was, however, also buoyed by the response to its early attempts to take hiking services to a mass market. Although campers and hikers had provided steady revenue on all parts of the system for several years, the GWR was surprised by the response to its first effort to entice new customers via a more jovial image. The 'Hikers' Mystery Tour', inaugurated in March of 1932, used an unknown destination as the lure, and

was advertised heavily in the daily press alongside discounted return fares. On the rear cover of the small pamphlet produced to advertise the express the company invited customers to 'Join the Great Adventure'.⁷² It proved to be an unrivalled success; the company had to call up extra carriages to meet the 2000-strong passenger demand. The popularity of this novelty resulted in a publicity coup in the national press: *The Times* claimed that the company had solved the 'insipidity' commonly associated with walking, and congratulated the GWR on getting urban dwellers out into the countryside, juxtaposing the entertainment offered by a Mystery Tour to an afternoon in the cinema, and praising a 'spirit of adventure, as rich almost as any of the second-hand stuff that is shown on the screen'.⁷³ It also hinted at a more discerning customer attracted by this service: instead of hurrying to their carriages like 'common trippers', they rushed to the engine driver to find out where the mystery destination was going to be. The hype which surrounded the Tour enabled the GWR to run further similarly-themed excursions in subsequent months, and prompted rival action from other members of the Big Four railways.⁷⁴

Concerns regarding national prestige persisted, but in the 1930s this was tempered by looking good for personal reasons as well. The 'Woman's League of Health and Beauty' boasted 170,000 members by 1939, and even more attended 'keep fit' classes run by the league.⁷⁵ The flourishing desire for spartan yet convenient recreation contributed to the formation of the Youth Hostels Association in 1930 and later a National Council of Ramblers' Federation which encouraged newcomers.⁷⁶ Amongst the hills and woods, people had to make their own arrangements for food and entertainment, but tent pitches cost a fraction of the price of a hotel room or private accommodation, and the whole experience could be couched in terms of difference and a spirit of adventure. All of which meant that whereas in 1925 hikers seen wearing rucksacks whilst walking in the countryside drew facetious remarks, in 1935 people hardly took any notice.⁷⁷

In the GWR's new offerings there was more room for playfulness, and alternate readings of 'romance' in the outdoors. For instance, photographs which pictured gathering in the harvest held a continuity of appeal, themed around ideas which still held somewhat nostalgic interest to the middle classes. As a practice threatened by the modernisation and mechanisation of agriculture from the mid-1930s onwards, photographs which showed more peaceful and traditional practices were intended to pique the interest of urbanites whilst also being used as a vehicle to forward holiday tropes common to other areas such as relaxation, healthy

bodies and family togetherness. Whilst the guides continued to show picturesque fields populated with rural labourers, the viewer was now also invited to inspect human drama and engagement with the land offered in highly composed scenes set in definitively rural contexts—rolling hills, wooden fences and woodland—the people of the photographs interacted privately with each other, with the countryside a pleasant back-drop to act out social fantasies. In ‘Haymaking’(1938), a young family picnicked against a hayrick whilst grandfather snoozed against another. Behind them, people in rural work clothes pitched their forks into the hay and continued the harvest. ‘Helping with the Harvest’ (Fig. 3.5) presented a scene of family togetherness reminiscent of those used to promote the GWR’s seaside locales. On the surface it was an attractive image: the sunlight gleaming off limbs and the freshly cut corn added to the romanticised appeal, as well as suggesting a revitalising experience. It was humorous and touching, as the littlest child lifted the corn in the guise of a willing helper, an arrangement intended to speak to aspirations about time



Fig. 3.5 ‘Helping with the Harvest’, *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1938). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

spent together outdoors and beneficial family exercise as well as strengthening familial bonds. Such examples display the GWR's attempt to offer the countryside as an alternative setting for perfect family holidays away from the bustle of the pier and for those tired of the seashore.

In *Holiday Haunts*, in the 1938 photograph 'Over the Moors', the theme of beneficial and friendly recreation is expounded as the models played out a different vision of comfortable relaxation. The three individuals depicted were young, fashionable urbanites; the women sporting smart, feminine suits, and the gentleman in relaxed attire, making only a passing nod to the outdoor conditions. The rather more active pictorial style of 'On The Breezy Downs' (1938) matched the visual conventions used to advertise seaside resorts by capturing two young women and a child, hand in hand, in full flight as they romped down a grassy hillock towards the camera. Their exertion was evident in their expressions and purposeful limb movements. This presented a vibrant depiction of the outdoors emulated in the textual message of 'breezy' downs, as their hair and clothing was caught by the wind adding to the impression of speed. Although covered up in comparison to those of the beach, the women's understated attractiveness suggested parallels with the purity and beauty of the outdoors. In 'Harvesting Good Health in Glorious Devon' (1936), bathing belles are brought firmly into the countryside, however, which further demonstrated the company moving away from the imagery conventionally associated with the countryside to experiment with adding in popular symbols of health and happiness from elsewhere in its advertising. This photograph pictured a horse pulling a cart laden with straw: one woman led the horse whilst another rode it; one reclined in the hay atop the cart and another carried a rake alongside. Each woman was dressed in a bathing cap and modern costume. This example was the only occasion that such blatant visual parallels were drawn between the women who now inhabited the beaches (see Chap. 4) and the new outdoors consumer. It suggests new ways of encouraging new kinds of consumers as well as titillating the existing ones. Allied to the examples described above, it demonstrates the GWR's change in relation to the health benefits of countryside, no longer termed recuperation but remodelled as 'vitality'.

Company photographers and publicists worked to create the ideal photographic formula to transform the outdoors, in the minds of consumers at least, from a focus on strenuous activity endured by hardy young people into one which could be enjoyed by anyone regardless of age or sex. The GWR's turn towards a wider market was epitomised in modified

terminology, from ‘hiking’ to the more relaxed ‘rambling’ in the GWR’s new guide *Camping and Rambling Holidays*, which replaced the dedicated offerings of the late 1920s and early 1930s. In such smaller, dedicated guides intended for ramblers and campers, the GWR similarly revolutionised its publicity imagery away from stoic individuals and regimented campsites to a more up-to-the-minute vision of the outdoors customer. This was informed by the idea that, fundamentally, they sought difference from their everyday existence. In *Camping and Hiking Holidays*, it was proclaimed that ‘workers leading sedentary lives feel the need of a complete change of habits and environment’.⁷⁸ But whilst the exhausted office worker or wheezing urbanite was described in text, photographs pictured consumers as the epitome of health and happiness, visual confirmation of the energising outdoors. In Fig. 3.6 ‘A Welcome Halt’, for example, the couples cast off their hiking gear to reveal more relaxed attire. It formed part of a collection of photographs which depicted various stages of a day’s riding through woodland. It showed the models preferring to unwind rather than take to their bicycles; they were in no rush. These people (most probably professional models posed by the company) retained a look of qualified commitment to the outdoors in that they wore relaxed clothing, but arduous exercise was nowhere to be seen. Where previously captions had blandly described the scene, they now

Fig. 3.6 ‘A Welcome Halt’, *Camping and Rambling Holidays* (London: Great Western Railway, 1937). National Railway Museum/ Science and Society Picture Library



attributed thoughts and feelings to the scenarios pictured, hinting at more sociable activities, and framing the reading of the content in more carefree and enjoyable tones. Other guides featured attempts to tempt people away from their usual holiday using similar ploys. *Rambles and Walking Tours in the Wye Valley* (1938) attributed the district's overlooked nature to the craze for sun-tanning and that it was too far from the sea. But, it went on to emphasise, 'it is often forgotten...that the air of the Bristol Channel nearby is noted for its ozone, and that a much more healthy and lasting tan is produced by the action of the sun and air on the gentle perspiration engendered by walking than by the unnatural burning of the skin while lying on a beach'.⁷⁹ Those who still practised the more serious outdoorsmanship were, however, unconvinced by the new appeals described above, lamenting the arrival in the countryside of 'bathing-belles who had obviously never walked further than the beach before'.⁸⁰ But the GWR was less receptive to their concerns as the 1930s wore on.

Whilst the GWR included ever more people in its advertising photographs, it did not do so completely indiscriminately. The individuals in the GWR's photographs by and large behaved themselves and consumed correctly, and in some examples they suggested where and how to look at the land, displaying an interest in nature and history. In 'Let's See Where We Are' (*Holiday Haunts*, 1938) and 'The Devil's Chimney' (*Holiday Haunts*, 1937), the GWR combined the fantastical with more measured experiences of the countryside. The people who observed the land in these photographs did so via a regimented gaze; in the former by a map, and in the latter through binoculars as they perched part way up Devil's Chimney (a peculiar, twisted rock formation atop Leckhampton Hill in Gloucestershire). Such representations connoted meaningful access to the countryside rooted in searching and seeking out. The GWR's photographs also built on and enforced an emerging and still largely informal country code. As described in the company's *Glorious Devon*: 'The average man accustomed to towns and suburbs is not accustomed to braking [sic] his way through brambles and bracken. The fear of the law is heavy on him. The word "trespass" which only makes a countryman laugh, is as awe-inspiring to him as the word 'policeman' is to a small boy'.⁸¹ The models pictured in GWR photographs followed this code, in an attempt to direct and assuage any tensions which the fearful average man might have. This suggests that the company continued to at least be sensitive to the cultural divide between consumers from the middle classes and the trippers portrayed popularly as cultural grotesques with their litter, noise, flower-picking and

‘disobedient bathing’, extended and perpetuated by organisations such as the CPRE and commentators such as John Betjeman and E.M. Joad.⁸²

For those seeking a more comfortable outdoors experience, the GWR made a new offer in 1934: camping coaches. These were railway carriages which, having served their useful existence, were refitted and repurposed as static camping facilities. Designed to lure those who wanted to try camping but were unsure about staying in the open, they attracted significant interest; 800 people in 1934 and 3000 by 1937.⁸³ The author of the first dedicated guidebook, C.J. Cutcliffe-Hyne, described the appeal; whilst it took the seasoned camper years to perfect his strategies, the camping coach allowed the ‘raw amateur’ to skip the ‘unprofitable educational period’.⁸⁴ Camping coaches were intended to entice a carefree consumer, reflected in the light-hearted sales pitch, ‘Dismal Jane or Doleful Jimmie can put a sour into the sweetest party that ever ran together ... they should be firmly directed to take the downward path on another line’.⁸⁵ The accompanying advertising photographs did not depict Jane or Jimmie, but rather the happy, youthful adventurer which the GWR tried to make synonymous with the new outdoors. The company deployed models and studio imagery to suggest camping, and the novel, unfamiliar and expensive option of the camping coach, as a more aspirational option. The photographs throughout the brochure were organised in a storyboard layout which showed people enjoying the coach, using it as a base to explore the surrounding countryside, preparing and eating meals, and chatting as the party readied for bed. The tagline ‘camping in comfort at selected beauty spots’ captured this aspect of the GWR’s modern countryside message.

The GWR’s particular modernisation of the rural appeal is further evident in the interactions underpinning the annual revisions to *Holiday Haunts*. In 1929, Maxwell Fraser was brought in as the GWR’s chief guidebook editor. The appointment outwardly followed a traditional path; Fraser was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, esteemed author and, like Mais, a keen believer in the intellectually beneficial elements of travel for the masses.⁸⁶ As the 1930s progressed, her take on the picturesque romantic worldview was challenged by a more modern, mass interaction with place. The newly appointed chief publicity officer in 1934, John Dewar, advised Fraser that the superlative and flowery language which had long been a marker of the company’s guides was no longer appropriate. Fraser, brought in to reinvent the guide, found herself at odds with the prevailing trend and how consumption of the countryside, at least amongst the mass audience imagined to read *Holiday Haunts*, was

interpreted within the GWR. In the summer of 1939, regarding the preparations for the subsequent volume, Dewar confronted Fraser on the specific descriptions:

it is of course not desired to increase the amount of descriptive matter ... I think you can very well go through the existing book and revise quite a large number of the paragraphs avoiding as much as you can superlative and over-flowery language ... although this is quite a charmingly written piece, I feel that the present day holidaymaker would really like something more definitely informative.⁸⁷

In line with Dewar's recommendations, Fraser revised the piece for Newton Ferrers from, 'the charm of the twin villages is too intimate to be conveyed in mere words – it is compounded of shady lanes and thatched cottages, gardens gay with flowers, and rich pasturage where sleek cows graze contentedly...'⁸⁸ to 'Newton Ferrers and Noss Mayo are so closely linked with Plymouth by bus that they are rapidly developing as residential suburbs of that city ... there are innumerable beautiful walks and drives in the neighbourhood'.⁸⁹ This perhaps reflected not that the modern consumer was thought no longer to be interested in lyrical descriptions of history and beauty, but that such was their ability to decode pictorial messages that the photographic content could now achieve this in place of text. Another interpretation, as confirmed in the photographic content examined above, was an overarching desire for a more peopled aesthetic. One might say they acted rashly, but one must remember the climate of the time and the pressure to deal with not only the challenge from the road but the fact that the holiday industry was now a multi-million pound business where one could not risk being left behind.

CONCLUSIONS

*If you want to sell Fairy Stories or non-existent Castles in Spain – use sketches. If you want to sell brass tacks – concrete things that people want to walk round and examine before handing over their money – use photographs ... For every photograph is a record of what was in front of the camera – of something actual and concrete.*⁹⁰

The GWR communicated its vision of the countryside year on year to hundreds of thousands through its myriad guides. The chief agenda was not primarily political but to sell travel and holidays. Nevertheless, it most

likely played a significant role in reinforcing attitudes and propagating ideas to middlebrow Britain throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century. The GWR diversely presented a timeless landscape where ancient and mysterious practices still thrived, a traditional village world untroubled by the anxieties of modern living and in which urbanites could ease back the pace of life, a vigorous and healthy space in which to exercise minds and bodies (in the correct fashion and to dispel concerns about national decay), and the picturesque bedrock of British values and traditions which was worth fighting and dying for in an era of strained international tensions.

The quotation above, from K. Witherington, owner of the eponymous photographic studio, reproduced in *Advertiser's Weekly* in 1936, captured a common assumption about photography's appropriateness for selling different commodities and services. But, as this chapter has demonstrated, the GWR viewed and used photography differently. Realism was used to try to convince potential customers that beautiful scenery and traditional labour and beliefs existed unmolested, whilst a supplementary tranche created a fantasy land of historic and mythical destinations where predominantly urban holidaymakers could reconnect with the land spiritually whilst escaping their urban environs. Imagery did not just show destinations in visually pleasing ways, but through symbolic content sought to enforce specific understandings and interpretations about history and nature which the GWR hoped would translate into increased consumption. The company periodically reassessed its customers, reworking its appeals to engage a more popular market not so interested in a strictly antiquarian or artistic appreciation of the land. From the mid-1920s, and increasingly in the same publications, the GWR showed hikers the way to corporeal consumption, where health and vitality were the main watchwords. This was again reshaped in the 1930s when rambling replaced hiking as a more popular, relaxed way of engaging with the countryside. The photographs reveal how changing tastes and fashions were viewed within the company's hierarchy: hiking, for example, was transformed from a pseudo-military activity popular with those committed to self-betterment to 'rambling', which emphasised a more jovial atmosphere which was more inclusive and open to new members. The GWR was also not afraid to court controversy in the pursuit of more passengers; appreciating the pull of the seaside, in the 1930s it showed bathing belles invading the rural idylls.

As Lash and Urry have concluded of place marketers operating at the end of the twentieth century, the ideas and meanings connected to the countryside by travel promoters were not designed to sell place per se, but ‘something else’, a packaged place image.⁹¹ Before 1939, Britain’s countryside took on a varied character in the minds of consumers, which was interpreted and rendered visible by the actions of the GWR’s publicists, photographers and guidebook editors. The GWR’s photography created what have been termed habits of ‘vision’ and corresponding habits of ‘blindness’.⁹² The company tried to corporatise the countryside by encouraging customers to think and feel certain ways about it. The GWR’s narrative of contented rurality, the absence of the real condition of rural Britain, as well as varying levels of human intrusion, at least until the 1930s, testifies to the constructed nature of the profoundly idealised image. The GWR engaged in a ‘selective nostalgia’,⁹³ which was used to sell even its more desperate destinations.

The GWR’s response to the many claims on the countryside in the first half of the twentieth century was not to sell a commonplace countryside but different visions intended to hold particular resonance with certain interest groups. In this case, it joined a collection of organisations and businesses which manipulated the vision of the countryside to sell homes, cars, petrol and holidays. Examining the role of interwar motoring, Matless points to a middle-class discovery of rural England, a more intellectual appreciation of the land, a ‘motoring pastoral’.⁹⁴ Yet Morton’s ‘discovery’ of Britain by car took place in the late 1920s and 1930s, and Shell’s first *Country Guide* was released in 1934. It is quite possible that, for many, motoring did not create habits of vision anew but simply allowed a different way of accessing the things which had been venerated for decades by the GWR.

NOTES

1. Alun Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England: A Social History 1850–1925* (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1991), 2.
2. John Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist’s Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 17–18.
3. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1906), 1.
4. Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671–1831* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 19.

5. Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), 4; Taylor, *A Dream of England*, 90–120; Cara Aitchison, Nicola MacLeod and Stephen Shaw, *Leisure and Tourism Landscapes: Social and Cultural Geographies* (London: Routledge, 2000), 74–75; John Gold and George Revill, *Representing the Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 133–34.
6. David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 25.
7. Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England, 1880–1914* (London: Faber, 2010), 7.
8. John Taylor, “The Alphanumeric Universe: Photography and the Picturesque Landscape,” in *Reading Landscape: Country-City-Capital*, ed. Simon Pugh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 181.
9. Aitchison, MacLeod, and Shaw, *Leisure and Tourism Landscapes*, 74.
10. *Great Western Railway Magazine*, October 1904, 167–70. (GWRM hereafter).
11. Robin Lenham, “British Photographers and Tourism in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Visual Culture and Tourism*, ed. David Crouch and Nina Lübben (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 94.
12. *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, July, 1912, 8–14.
13. *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, July, 1913, 1–8.
14. “Do Railways Believe in Advertising?,” GWRM, April, 1913, 102–03.
15. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1910).
16. Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (2nd edn., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5–6.
17. Fred Inglis, “Landscape as Popular Culture,” in *Reading Landscape: Country-City-Capital*, ed. Simon Pugh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 197–213.
18. Gold and Revill, *Representing the Environment*, 201; Alan Jackson, *Semi-detached London; Suburban Development, Life and Transport, 1900–39* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 170; Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, 97.
19. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1906).
20. The modern concept of the romantic gaze is closely associated with John Urry’s influential work, *The Tourist Gaze*, which addresses the ways that tourists perceive their surroundings and how this attention is directed by resort advertisers. Amongst a taxonomy of appeals, Urry argues that the ‘romantic gaze’ describes visual imagery used to communicate a destination’s solitude, privacy and a semi-spirituality. See John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure Travel in Contemporary Societies* (1st edn., London, 1990); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (2nd edn., London, 2002), 45.

21. The National Archives, ZPER 38/6, Great Western Railway (London): Lecture and Debating Society Proceedings 1908–1909, meeting of 5th November 1908 ‘Experiences of Railway Photography’ by Harold Cooper, 1–10. The poem was published in 1775.
22. GWRM, December, 1924, 468.
23. Meaning burial chamber.
24. Nina Lübbren, “Toilers of the Sea: Fisherfolk and the Geographies of Tourism in England 1880–1900,” in *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880–1940*, ed. David Corbett, Ysanne Holt, and Fiona Russell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 31–46.
25. Peter Howard, “Artists as Drivers of the Tour Bus: Landscape Painting as a Spur to Tourism,” in *Visual Culture and Tourism*, ed. David Crouch and Nina Lübbren (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 115.
26. Keeping in mind, of course, that the company likely reproduced the better reviews.
27. GWRM, April, 1904, 49.
28. Gold and Revill, *Representing the Environment*, 201.
29. “Photography as Applied to Advertising,” *The Advertising World*, November, 1906, 538.
30. *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, April, 1913, 310–11.
31. *The Advertising World*, December, 1905, 76–78; October 1906, 450; *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, April, 1913, 310–11.
32. Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), 8.
33. Jeremy Burchardt, “Rurality, Modernity and National Identity between the Wars,” *Rural History* 21, no. 2 (2010): 147; Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, 2.
34. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 26.
35. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 25.
36. See Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith, *Cinema, Literature & Society: Elite and Mass Culture in Interwar Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 40–56.
37. Baldwin was closely associated with the GWR. His father, Alfred, had been a director of the company from 1901 to 1905 and chairman from 1905 to 1908, and Stanley himself held a directorship from 1908 to 1917: Alan Bennett, ‘The Great Western Railway and the Celebration of Englishness’, (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of York, 2000), viii.
38. Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010), 173.
39. Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 174.

40. Alex Potts, "'Constable Country' between the wars," in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity: National Fictions Vol 3*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1989), 161–66.
41. "Landscape and Letters," *The Times*, November 16, 1933, 17.
42. Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, 2; Jackson, *Semi-detached London*, 170.
43. Michael Heller, "Corporate Brand Building: Shell-Mex Ltd. In the Interwar Period," in *Trademark, Branding and Competitiveness*, ed. Teresa Da Silva Lopes and Paul Duguid (New York, 2010), 202–09.
44. Sean O'Connell, *The Car in British Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 150–58.
45. Karin Hiscock, "Modernity and 'English' Tradition: Betjeman at the Architectural Review," *Journal of Design History* 13, no. 3 (2000): 204–08.
46. Gold and Revill, *Representing the Environment*, 138–40.
47. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, 7.
48. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1925), 633.
49. Howkins, *Reshaping Rural England*, 8–26.
50. S.P.B. Mais, *The Cornish Riviera* (London: Great Western Railway, 1927), 52.
51. S.P.B. Mais, *The Cornish Riviera* (London: Great Western Railway, 1928), 5.
52. "Take a "Kodak" with you," *The Daily Mirror*, June, 23, 1923.
53. S.P.B. Mais, *Do you know North Cornwall?: My Finest Holiday* (London: Southern Railway, 1927), 3–4.
54. Christopher Bailey, "Rural Industries and the Image of the Countryside," in *The English Countryside Between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline?*, ed. Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt, and Lynne Thompson (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2006), 136.
55. Mais provided material for *Holiday Haunts*, books on Devon and Cornwall, and numerous press announcements: Roger Wilson, *Go Great Western: A History of GWR Publicity* (Newton Abbott: David St John Thomas, 1987), 30.
56. Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 208.
57. *Cardigan Bay Resorts: Aberystwyth to Pwllheli* (London: Great Western Railway, c.1920s).
58. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1927), 25 & 197.
59. Jeffrey Hill, *Sport Leisure and Culture in Twentieth-Century Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 77–79.
60. Marsh, *Back to the Land*, 6.
61. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1909).
62. *The Great Western Railway: Hotels and Catering* (London: Great Western Railway, 1925).
63. Allen Warren, "Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the Scout Movement and Citizen Training in Great Britain, 1900–1920," *The English Historical Review* 101, no. 399 (1986): 377.

64. Charles Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars, 1918–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 512.
65. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (2006): 596.
66. *Camping Holidays* (London: Great Western Railway, 1924).
67. GWRM, May, 1927, 204.
68. Wilson, *Go Great Western*, 99.
69. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 98.
70. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 69.
71. S.P.B. Mais, *Glorious Devon* (London: Great Western Railway, 1934), 40.
72. *The Hiker’s Mystery Express No 1* (London: Great Western Railway, 1932).
73. “The ‘Hikers’ Train,” *The Times*, March 26, 1932, 7.
74. In July 1932, the Southern Railway attracted 1400 ramblers to its ‘Southern Railway Moonlight Walk’ at Chanctonbury Ring: Alan Tomlinson and Helen Walker, “Holidays for All: Popular Movements, Collective Leisure, and the Pleasure Industry,” in *Consumption, Identity, and Style: Marketing, Meanings, and the Packaging of Pleasure*, ed. Alan Tomlinson (London: Routledge, 1990), 234. In its sales publication, the SR advertised ‘Conducted Rambles by the Southern Railway’ at a special fare. The SR also recognised that rambling was increasing popular, ‘no doubt as a reaction to the mechanical age’; *Hints for Holidays* (London: Southern Railway, 1939), 943.
75. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “The Making of a Modern Female Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Interwar Britain,” *Women’s History Review* 20, no. 2 (2011): 300–01; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “The Body and Consumer Culture,” in *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 188.
76. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 70–73.
77. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 71.
78. *Camping and Hiking Holidays* (London: Great Western Railway, 1933).
79. Hugh E. Page, *Rambles and Walking Tours in the Wye Valley* (London: Great Western Railway, 1938), 7.
80. Alfred J. Brown, *Moorland Tramping in West Yorkshire* (London, 1931), 2.
81. GWR, *Glorious Devon* (London: Great Western Railway, 1934), 5.
82. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 66–68; Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900* (London: Routledge, 2003), 72–73.
83. Andrew McRae, *British Railway Camping Coach Holidays: The 1930s and British Railways* (Stockport: Foxline Publishing, 1997), 28.
84. *Camp-Coach Holidays: Novel and Economical Camping in Comfort* (London: Great Western Railway, 1934), 1.

85. *Camp-Coach Holidays: Novel and Economical Camping in Comfort* (London: Great Western Railway, 1934), 5.
86. Wilson, *Go Great Western*, 101; Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and the Celebration of Englishness', 15.
87. National Library of Wales (NLOW) GB 0210 MAXSER, F 151–300, Letter from Dewar to Fraser, 14th June 1939.
88. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1939).
89. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1940).
90. "Photo or sketch?," *Advertiser's Weekly*, July 16, 1936, 104.
91. Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994), 138.
92. Ian Ousby, *The Englishman's England: Taste, Travel, and the Rise of Tourism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 5.
93. Raymond Williams, "Between Country and City," in *Reading Landscape: Country-City-Capital*, ed. Simon Pugh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 7.
94. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 64–66.

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CHAPTER 4

By the Seaside

Whilst the GWR's countryside destinations were customarily presented as traditional, bucolic, quiet and relaxing, the seaside was principally offered in totally antithetical terms. Although coastal areas featured the dramatic beauty of the picturesque, and were certainly sold this way in some guides and individual advertisements, throughout the twentieth century seaside pleasures were pejoratively linked to vitality and high-spiritedness. Seaside towns were presented variously as populous, luxurious, à la mode and forward-looking. They were places for people to recreate themselves in an entirely different fashion, where they could ignore the usual constraints of everyday life, reconnect with family and friends, and participate in new experiences. Fantasising about such opportunities was not restricted to the summer months but happened all year round, helping to entrench a pervasive imaginary seaside landscape. Each season, hotels, town councils and railway companies added to this with their own imagery about what a day, week or longer stay at the seaside could and should mean. Circulated in their thousands at stations and in railway carriages, on postcards and in guidebooks and newspapers, the photographic output of Britain's railways sought to influence and direct contemporary perceptions of the seaside. Together, companies fashioned a prominent visual reference point about what the seaside meant to British holidaymakers.

Photography was inextricably linked to the popularisation of the seaside. As ever more people travelled there, they sought visual mementos of

their time away to share with family and friends. These were provided by itinerant beach photographers, studios and latterly by personal cameras. Since the late nineteenth century, the seaside holiday has consistently been one of the most photographed events in family life. The GWR's extensive commercial photography affords an opportunity to better understand how seaside landscapes and experiences were captured, packaged and made available en masse from a commercial point of view. In their practical role, advertising photographs helped people to imagine seaside destinations more readily and realistically, but the sheer scope of the narratives conjured by the GWR demonstrates how individual resorts and attendant seaside imagery were invented and reinvented between 1900 and 1939. Some visions looked very modern, focusing on avant-garde architecture and the latest bathing suit designs, but others recalled a much longer history of holidaymaking. Seaside resorts had, after all, existed in different guises since the eighteenth century, gaining popularity firstly as spa towns and health resorts where social and leisure services grew naturally in response to the seasonal influx.¹ As new resorts, such as Blackpool, centred on unbridled pleasure gained popularity from the 1850s onwards, they became destinations for the day-tripping workers of nearby industrial towns. There were only a handful of such large and established resorts by the late nineteenth century, but around this time many more of Britain's coastal towns began promotional activities in response to the growing demands of middle-class holidaymakers who took advantage of the ability to travel further afield in greater comfort and at competitive prices.² Whilst increased demand provoked action on the one hand, mounting competition, which increasingly operated on a national as well as a regional basis, entrenched the value of promotional guidebooks and advertisements. These factors necessitated that previously ad hoc resort promotion become a more systematic and thoughtful process for those wishing to grow their market.

Although the handful of resorts large enough to attract attention on their own were frequently feted as examples of promotional success, the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a progressive and distinctive remodelling of commonplace images and identities, taking in such diverse sights as jolly fishermen, cherubic infants, populous promenades, health-giving air and water, and bathing belles. Although these themes were popular, and in some cases were revisited time and again, there was no set formula. Promoters were caught between the need to showcase the availability of quintessential seaside experiences, and to distinguish certain

resorts and regions from competitors. As many resorts lacked the requisite skills and finances to best recommend themselves, they relied on railway companies to advertise on their behalf.³ The railways were in theory better placed to advertise nationally and internationally, and were responsible for creating enduring regional brands and resort identities. Just as they had fostered the initial development of seaside villages by reaching out to them in the nineteenth century, railways continued to shape their character, composition and reputation for many decades afterwards.

This chapter joins the flourishing academic interest in the construction and negotiation of visual identity at the British seaside, a body of work which has examined social tone, seaside design and architecture, mementos of holiday time, as well as the conflict between resort promoters and local populations.⁴ War, rights for women, the declining influence of the Sabbatarian lobby, economic depression, health and fitness fashions, and the Holidays with Pay Act all impacted on how the seaside was consumed and represented visually across the first four decades of the twentieth century. In considering the GWR's photographs as displayed through its chief guides, this chapter assesses how the company negotiated these factors, and how it engaged with and departed from the main seaside themes and visions via a rich cast of seaside characters, amenities and environments.

YE BACKWARD, DYING TOWNS, LOOK AT BLACKPOOL, AND PONDER!

Buoyed by the potential of a growing market, and in certain cases benefiting from an inherited popularity, the beginning of the twentieth century engendered the rise of many new seaside resorts and the considerable expansion of others the length of the British coastline. Despite this popularity, questions regarding how best to promote such destinations, retain customers and attract others, featured in railway journals, local council discussions and national advertising publications. Many different opinions were voiced: a chief criticism was that holiday resort committees failed to recognise that the typical character of the holiday public had changed since the days when they had first made their reputations, and that only a dwindling minority of holidaymakers were content to transfer their everyday routines to the seaside, or find sufficient diversion in studying the wonders of the seashore.⁵ Certain resorts, by dint of tradition or their proximity to large population centres, believed themselves to possess a fairly clear idea of the type of customer they attracted. Although each

aspired to a wealthy, respectable clientele, the realities of the market necessitated some reach further down the social scale. Furthermore, it was widely held that tradition and recommendation by word of mouth influenced seaside patronage year-on-year, and that breaking this cycle was difficult. The problem was billed as one which advertisers could help to solve, since it was generally held that the majority of holidaymakers returned to the same destination not because they lacked any desire for change or because they were attached to one in particular, but that they did not have the time, the means or the inclination to find out the suitability of new places. Summed up in a contemporary issue of *The Advertising World*, the holidaymaker, 'knows exactly what he will get by going to it – where to stay, what it will cost him, and all the rest of it'.⁶ Various solutions were proposed to alter established patterns, some of which were simply fanciful and out of the scope of many. Considering what the public wanted may have gained importance in the run up to the First World War, but understanding the precise nature of this, and how to change engrained habits and assumptions was, in reality, far from simple.

A cost-effective way of managing this issue was therefore to compete at the level of image. As Borsay notes, seaside resorts had long been engineered to be looked at, via the construction of piers and promenades for instance,⁷ but considerable attention was also devoted to resort 'identity' and 'image', which went beyond the traditional practice of preparing for a new season by adding fresh coats of paint or new street furniture. It was important to get the look right, firstly to distinguish a resort from its competitors, but also to blend tradition with uniqueness to satisfy visitors and local residents who greeted the seasonal influx less enthusiastically. Residents and town councils were known to clash not only over the desire to encourage more visitors, but also over the character of the resulting imagery. The great diversity of output confirms the Edwardian years as a period of experimentation as more towns augmented their promotional activities. Pictorial poster designs offered key views which aligned around certain themes. The benefit to health was consistently prominent: posters emphasised healthy airs in a variety of ways, even as a bottled tonic.⁸ This notion of the seaside as a restorative environment in comparison to the everyday urban environs of the railways' target markets relied on the parallel representation of urban areas as crowded, dirty, stressful and oppressive. The health benefit to children was conspicuous within this overarching appeal, but child-centred narratives more generally were plentiful and helped to suggest destinations as family-friendly. The presence of groups and couples on some designs

indicated the more sociable opportunities offered by resorts, and an array of whimsical characters stood for jolly, carefree times. These joined more conventional views of well-known landscape features, points of interest, beaches and boating, often combined in individual cameos on the same design. Especially around the spring and summer months when the new season's posters were most prevalent, commentators debated the efficacy and attractiveness of the designs, but there was little consensus. Some proclaimed that ubiquity and unoriginality dominated, that not one town raised itself above 'mediocrity' and 'commonplace effort'.⁹

Although posters were prominent fixtures it was not recommended that they be used in isolation: 'they are merely the artillery of advertising. No general would think of winning a campaign with this section of an army alone'.¹⁰ Even Blackpool Town Council, considered by many to set the standard for resort promotion, sought to determine whether the annual £2000 spent on posters represented good value, or if this expenditure might be better directed.¹¹ The discussion on the best medium for the message naturally extended to guidebooks, press advertisements and posters, with each seen to offer different opportunities and options to suit different budgets and capabilities. The railways' own guidebooks afforded ample means through which to combine textual and visual ploys, at the same time as presenting customers with unprecedented choice both in terms of destination particulars, and enticing views. A comparatively new advertising medium, photographs were used to entrench popular notions about what the seaside could offer, as well creating new habits of vision.

SEASIDE PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography had been an essential part of recording and remembering life at the coast since the mid-nineteenth century. Holidaymakers desired souvenirs and keepsakes of their time away, which photo booths, itinerant photographers and photographic studio businesses satisfied. Borsary gives an indication of the scale of this demand in different areas: eight professional photographers operated in late nineteenth century Tenby (excluding peripatetic photographers), and thirty-two in Brighton.¹² Roving photographers who took pictures of holidaymakers as they walked along the promenade or beach were perceived by some as nuisances and by others as part of the quintessential seaside experience.¹³ Edwardian holidaymakers could also collect or send to friends photographs of their chosen destination on cheap and plentiful postcards. Whilst picturesque

views and civic monuments tended to dominate, postcards offered a tremendous range of designs.¹⁴ The growth of inexpensive personal photography around 1900, spurred on by the introduction of the mass-produced Box Brownie camera and user-friendly Kodak film, allowed families to record for posterity their own cherished moments.¹⁵ Holidaymakers were therefore well-versed in appreciating as well as constructing a photographic vocabulary of seaside pleasures.

The GWR's promotional photographs framed the seaside in very particular ways. Resorts possessed a plethora of natural and man-made features which photographers could work with as part of this process. One noticeable type captured the town as seen from a promontory several miles back, giving the impression of arrival at the destination as well as helping to situate it in its fuller context. The key idea of escape from urban areas, so noticeable in many companies' poster advertising, was also supported as photographers focused on open skies and seas, thereby creating an impression of brightness and airiness. The direction and height of the camera, which commonly followed the curve of the beach until it disappeared off into the distance, exaggerated the suggestion of openness and liminality. If a resort was principally famous for a particular feature or landmark, such as piers, promenades or gardens, then some views concentrated on these, whilst the appeal could be expanded upon in textual entries further into the guides. Photographs which dwelt on such elements presented true to life visions intended to entice customers with anticipated spectacles, as well as serving as inspiration for would-be photographers.

In addition, scores of photographs which focused on crowded beach scenes portrayed the availability and popularity of such places. The beach as a space between the town and sea provided a centre-ground on which to showcase an array of holiday pastimes. In the GWR's inaugural *Holiday Haunts*, one such photograph, captioned simply 'Aberystwyth', displayed the beach as a lively playground between the drama provided by the sea and the normality of the town. Situated mid-way up the beach between sea and sea wall, this photograph enabled viewers to scan between intimate family groups, promenading couples, and the queue of passengers waiting to board a sailing boat, framed by the beach-side guesthouses and nestled under Aberystwyth's imposing Constitution Hill. In some cases, populous photographs supported textual descriptions where popularity was referenced as a mark of quality: *Holiday Haunts* referred to Weston-super-Mare as a 'prosperous and favourite watering place' with a 'tastefully adorned promenade with gardens'; Burnham as a 'favourite little seaside

resort’, and Minehead as a ‘seaside resort of great popularity’. In *The Cornish Riviera*, the company noted that the popularity of Newquay had increased ‘leaps and bounds’ owing to its high-class accommodation, excellent bathing and hard sands, ‘generally compared either to a billiard table or a ball-room floor’ which allowed hockey and other games to be played with ease.¹⁶ The accompanying photograph confirmed this popularity, showing bathing huts lined up along the beach, mothers with children paddling in the sea, and an assortment of umbrellas owned by groups who sequestered themselves in the surrounding rocks. The same guide speculated as to which other destinations would soon achieve such popularity: ‘Perranporth in the near future is likely to become a favourite health and pleasure resort, possessing as it does a succession of golden sands, with curiously arched cliffs, the ruins of some vast cathedral of the past ... bewildering chaos of crags, caves, coves and chasms’.¹⁷ Such indicators of a good resort were well marked out in both text and image.

Some photographers investigated the potential of different perspectives; in ‘Bournemouth, from Pier End’ (Fig. 4.1), included in 1911’s



Fig. 4.1 ‘Bournemouth, from Pier End’, *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1911). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

Holiday Haunts, the town was captured from an elevated position looking back towards the beach and across the crowds who strolled beneath the bunting or paused to take in the view. This panoramic view facilitated the display of many vaunted characteristics, the golden sands, grand promenade and accompanying carnival atmosphere, together in one image. Other photographs, taken from the sea wall or on the beach itself, captured people close to, making their activities and relationships more discernible and interpretable. Some exhibited a more intimate focus on the happy holidaymakers and were clearly staged: adults relaxing against the sea wall as well as each other, and children shown preoccupied with great excavations in the sand (sometimes burying their siblings), demonstrate attempts to weave more private elements into the general high-spiritedness. As acknowledged places of spectatorship, beaches, piers and promenades provided ample opportunities not only to be seen but also to view the crowds and watch seaside life unfold. The GWR's guidebook photography provided a new take on this transient spectatorship at the resort as pleasure was captured, held in time and presented to an even greater audience.

As indicators of a lively, populous environment such photographs bring to the fore questions about social tone and the target audiences of the GWR. How did the company intend these photogravures to be interpreted, and how does one account for their presence in what was ostensibly a publication intended for the middle classes who, it has generally been understood, disliked what has been termed the 'collective gaze'?¹⁸ For instance, and as seen above, even *The Cornish Riviera*, which endeavoured to 'combine literary merit, historic research and antiquarian knowledge', included scenes of well-populated beaches at Falmouth, St Ives and Newquay, apparently viewing this as an essential part in the makeup of what was termed 'our national health and pleasure resort'.¹⁹ Some historians have identified different gazes in railway advertisements, particularly on pictorial posters, drawing similar conclusions about the social status of the customers targeted in each case.²⁰ Views such as those described above could quite easily have been omitted by taking photographs earlier or later in the day when the beach was quieter, and their inclusion and repetition therefore suggests a perceived value to the GWR in propounding this people and popular aesthetic. Scrutinising the photographs closely for more detailed indicators in support of this, such as clothing, is problematic because people tended to wear their best clothes on holiday,²¹ and this level of scrutiny was probably not intended by photographers and advertising staff who could, and did, provide more detailed close-ups, as examples later in this chapter confirm.

Such a strict reasoning is predicated on an assumption that working-class consumers were united in their attraction to amusement and activity whilst middle-class consumers were united in their aversion to it. This point is hard to substantiate concretely and unanimously; there were many occasions when the middle classes consumed in an unexpected manner, and many justifications for doing so. Walton warns against easy stereotyping; middle-class holidaymakers were no strangers to the big, popular resorts, and were generally not put off visiting the beach even if it was heavily populated.²² As Feigel argues, the seaside ‘mob’ also had the advantage of being on holiday, and was therefore less threatening than the crowds of the urban environment.²³ Some resorts were capacious enough to satisfy a range of tastes, for example through the presence of ‘high’ and ‘low’ sands.²⁴ Finally, it is a reasonable possibility that there may have been additional levels to the interpretation of crowded scenes on the part of potential customers, possibly operating subconsciously, which went beyond a binary distinction between the peopled and unpeopled. Some photographs may not have been recognised as depicting ‘the crowd’, but may have been interpreted as ‘too crowded’ or ‘not crowded enough’ depending on individual taste. It is impossible to substantiate this, on the part of the GWR as the creator of this imagery, or the myriad consumers of holiday literature. Nor is it possible to discern from the available records whether the GWR intended a class-based reading. The GWR’s business was, after all, reliant on encouraging all traffic, no matter what the class, and in this case its efforts may have met with disagreement from the resorts it promoted. Class tensions were explicitly avoided in that the GWR sought to be inclusive without drawing attention to the demarcations between high and low sands, for instance, or going into great detail about who would be comfortable where. Rather, such photographs were used to confirm the presence at destinations of sufficiently attractive activities to sustain a joyful holiday, and fitted in to commonly held expectations of what holiday time represented.

In guides intended to be consulted time and again, where a fleeting glimpse was less important, the possibility of multiple readings which were subject to negotiation, and possibly discussion, and which went beyond steadfast interpretations, cannot be discounted. The wider consumer culture operating at the seaside does, however, offer clues as to how such photographs might have been approached. As mentioned above, in light of the popularity of stereoscope images of seaside views, and the holiday studios and beach photographers who supplied souvenirs to holidaymakers, the GWR’s publications operated in a climate already aware of the

deeper sign value surrounding a day at the beach. These also provided the staged rather than spontaneous look which was valued for sentimental and commemorative reasons. Both anticipating and remembering holiday times were qualitatively different experiences to actually being there, and part of the appeal of these images lay in conjuring memories of holiday time many months or years after the event. This was the benefit of replicating commonly understood imagery in railway guides, which were released several months before peak holiday periods. Creating a sense of anticipation became ever more important in railway advertising strategies. Customers were also able to control how they consumed the guides, if not what the GWR placed before them. If they disliked some of the imagery, they could quickly look for something more to their taste in the extensive catalogue which the larger guides like *Holiday Haunts* provided.

The GWR's ideas about the kind of views people wanted were most likely arrived at via a combination of receptiveness to the wider culture of holidaymaking, personal experience, but also enquiries conducted amongst the company's employees and their families. The company ran children's competitions which required them to write an essay on their 'best holiday'. Although essays presented idealised visions of the holiday, intended to win a prize, this was no less useful as the GWR was actively engaged in selling the ideal. In 1912, the winning entry by a ten-year-old girl rejoiced in

nice sands and blue sea, where you can paddle and bathe without danger when the tide is out as well as when it is in ... a lot of us went building sand-castles and made them look pretty with shells ... we went on the pier and got into a steamer which took us out ... we fed the swans and ducks in the gardens ... the boys played cricket ... we sat on the seats and listened to the band playing ... at night we could see the light of the Berry Head lighthouse and the Torquay lights across the sea.²⁵

Such a list reflected both the importance of health, sport and outdoor pursuits to middle-class families—activities different to the gaudier seaside attractions of lower-class resorts.²⁶ The same structure was applied to competitions aimed at a wider audience and advertised in national newspapers, such as the popular Cornish essay competition.²⁷ As a different means of creating excitement about the company's services such competitions were invaluable, but they also placed before the GWR a tangible means of reconstructing holidaymaking practices and perceptions. This was by no means market research, because it generated for the GWR only the most

superficial idea of what an ideal family holiday might look like. Yet it no doubt helped inform opinions about what holidaymakers wanted and likely assisted the company's communications back towards the popular market.

TAKE YOUR CHILDREN ALONG THE HOLIDAY LINE THIS SUMMER

In the Edwardian era, innumerable mass-produced products and services targeted the sentimental appeal of families, and childhood especially.²⁸ Those intended for or available at the seaside were no different. Improvements in the standard of living and the tendency towards smaller families meant that more were able to take a holiday by 1900.²⁹ Families offered tremendous potential to railways, and individual posters carrying what might be described as a family appeal are not hard to identify. As symbols of gentleness and innocence, the sight of children playing happily and safely indicated the opportunities available to parents to provide experiences which would help their children to flourish. This was reinforced by, for instance, the recommendations of Dr. Caleb Saleeby, chair of both the National Birth-Rate Commission and the Sunlight League, and others who championed seaside air as a preventative measure against ailments such as tuberculosis and rickets.³⁰ The South Eastern and Chatham Railway proclaimed sunny Broadstairs for instance 'The Children's Elysium', and the Great Northern emphasised that the bracing air on its East Coast resorts was 'The Medicine for Children'.³¹ The frequency of their appearance in railway advertising suggests a promotional culture which understood the benefits of using children, even if stylistically the outcomes varied. Happiness and health were key holiday themes which required advertisers to think creatively about how to represent them visually.

A significant proportion of the GWR's seaside photography was family-centred, and the pages of its chief guides were scattered with small children in pairs or groups, playing on the beach in various arrangements, sometimes looking directly at the camera or otherwise absorbed in beach games, riding donkeys, paddling, building sandcastles or playing with small boats. Figure 4.2, 'On Weston Sands' from 1908's *Holiday Haunts*, typified the focus on happy children who engaged the viewer directly. It offered a vision of juvenile elation as the girls, in their swimming paraphernalia, posed hand in hand in the breakers. Owing to the photographer's distance and relative height in relation to the children, this referenced a parental gaze, a convention which was frequently repeated and, from time



Fig. 4.2 'On Weston Sands', *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1908). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

to time, buttressed by persuasive text. Elsewhere in *Holiday Haunts*, 'Newquay – The Sands' (1914) focused on four girls who, feet poised atop spades and smiling gleefully for the camera, excavated the beach at low tide. 'On the Sands at Teignmouth' (1908) and 'Riding on The Sands' (1909) showed groups of children taking the much-anticipated donkey rides. 'Bigbury-on-Sea – The Beach' (1912) represented an unusual departure in that it displayed the parental gaze rather than inciting it. In this photograph, mother and father watched their children digging sand and carrying buckets from their perch on the nearby rocks. The GWR's extensive photographic pool enabled different variations to be included year-on-year, with different activities brought to the fore as fashions changed or resorts updated their amenities.

That these were meant to appeal to the fond parent was emphasised in photographs which featured accompanying short panels of text. They reinforced the point that a holiday should be child-centred, and that good parents took their children on GWR holidays. Below a photograph of two children peacefully playing with a toy yacht in the breakers, the GWR observed;

How they love to be ‘off for the holidays’ ... every turn of the line reveals new wonders to the child travelers ... take YOUR children along the Holiday Line this summer – ensure for them a Happy Healthy Holiday.³²

The emphasis on ‘YOUR’ children in this example indicates how the company hoped parents would interpret the photographs, chiefly by drawing parallels between their own children and those pictured in the photographs. An alternative reading is that ‘YOUR children’ may have been a challenge to make one’s children as happy as those depicted or risk disappointment. Elsewhere in commodity culture, the parent’s position was associated with a high degree of risk: unless they consumed in certain ways, advertisers warned that they risked upsetting their children, or worse, harming their development.³³ Whilst the GWR’s appeal was not so sensationalised, the equation of children’s happiness with holiday time confirms the company’s understanding of the potential of this plea to stimulate parental anxiety and target deeper social desires.

The GWR’s central argument, however, was similar to that of Kodak, a contemporary company whose advertisements sold film or camera equipment not based on technical capabilities but on how the charm of childhood could be made permanent. Both Kodak and the GWR counselled that family time was precious and should not be left to slip by. Kodak used the rhetoric of the idealised family and smiling, cherub-like infants when it encouraged consumers to ‘Kodak your Children’.³⁴ Although eagerly anticipated, the fin de siècle family holiday constituted a major operation which necessitated detailed planning, packing and sending luggage away in advance. Departure day might demand long journeys along rural lines to reach the final destination, all the time keeping the children amused.³⁵ Both GWR and Kodak encouraged mothers and fathers to overlook these considerations and instead focus on the pleasure to be had on arrival.³⁶ The GWR’s photographs also represent an important marker in using a tighter focus on peopled content to encourage reflection on the intangible benefits of a seaside holiday, in this case fulfilling deeper aspirations for family togetherness and happiness, as much as actual activities.

THE PRETTY GIRL PICTURE

Although undoubtedly popular in certain quarters, photographs of women at the seaside occupied a contested place and represented a more veiled aspect of seaside culture. In an article on the possibilities and limitations of

photographic advertising published in *The Advertising World* in 1911, the “‘pretty girl” picture’ was acknowledged as ‘the most popular bit of photographic decoration among advertisers’, because ‘a charming face is sure to catch the eye’.³⁷ Yet it was almost totally absent from railway advertising in Britain during this period, despite the fact that the trope was well represented elsewhere at the seaside, albeit produced for those who sought it or who were in on the joke. Featured on viewing slides, machines of the ‘what-the-butler-saw’ type or erotic postcards, the women were presented as synonymous with the seaside and its associated notions of relaxation and pleasure. But for the majority, risqué pictures available in penny-in-the-slot machines, especially prevalent on the esplanades and piers, were denounced as a ‘new source of evil’ at popular watering places.³⁸ Their contested nature therefore made them wholly unsuitable for advertising to the respectable mass market and families.

The strictures and anxieties surrounding mixed bathing, manifested in segregated bathing zones and cumbersome changing contraptions found on British beaches as late as the 1930s,³⁹ also prevented pretty girl pictures, or any photographs of women at the beach for that matter, from appearing more frequently in the GWR’s advertising. As an example of the company’s reserve, only one ladies’ beach was included in *Holiday Haunts* before the First World War, and it was shown without the ladies. Continental railways, by contrast, did use attractive women, sparingly clothed, to advertise their holiday lines: the *Railway Magazine* reproduced a suggestive poster, by a French railway, which showed an illustrated sea-scene with half a dozen bobbing male heads admiring a swimming siren.⁴⁰ Yet it is believed that Britain’s railways shunned the practice in fear that it would alienate the family market.⁴¹ The evidence certainly supports this: women did appear slightly more frequently on railway posters, and on these occasions they were most probably still intended to appeal to the male gaze, albeit in less overt ways. Ubiquitous as local inhabitants, they served to illustrate the romantic characteristics of destinations, with the female form used to connote qualities such as the mysteriousness (represented in their strange attire) and beauty, appearing as rosy-cheeked young maidens. Reviewing the GWR’s advertising for Ireland in 1915, in which the company pictured a young Irish ‘colleen’, the *Railway and Travel Monthly* wrote that the poster should ‘appeal to anyone who has an eye for the beauty of England’s sister Isle, or a sympathy with its romantic figures’.⁴² They were portrayed as holiday allurements, and these ‘natural beauties’ were meant to be observed in a similar

fashion to the land or seascapes. In another case, on a poster by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, advertising the Isle of Wight (c.1900), a sailor looked down a telescope towards two women who waved gaily from the shoreline. The inference, that one could observe and meet members of the opposite sex at the seaside, would have been obvious to those in the know, but would have protected the sensibilities of those who viewed such a suggestion as morally dubious.

Guided by a male-dominated management which harboured particular ideas about women and travel, Britain's railway companies were seemingly slow to recognise female consumption, and in all likelihood an appeal to male rather than female travellers was behind the majority of designs. Nevertheless, the inclusion of photographs of women would, in the minds of some at least, have placed railway advertising as too akin to erotic photographs, immediately more salacious and readily associated with ill morals and voyeurism, had even relatively tame images been included in the guidebooks. It would have conjured implicit associations with the battles concerning seaside dress, mixed bathing and the unseemly visual culture of racy imagery. Artistic renderings, less immoral by comparison, still required that the railways exercise caution. In the event, by shunning this content the railways shaped the image of the seaside in a different way, through active restriction, and further marginalised it when they included more veiled references.

* * *

Resort identities were still very much in flux before the First World War, as the destinations and the numbers visiting them continued to grow. In response to this, a good deal of experimentation characterised the production of promotional imagery, as resorts came to be distinguished from competitors by variety, but they were cautious on the whole about departing from certain agreed upon attractions. A sense of spectacle which focused on human interaction en masse was honed in this period, commonly promising conviviality in addition to enhanced familial relationships. As well as making a plea to look inwards on one's own happiness and that of children, the GWR's photographs also served as inspiration, showing the ample opportunities for holidaymakers to acquire their own interesting photographs for the family album. But whilst railway companies opened up and experimented with the view, they also participated in a corresponding restriction. Forgoing an engagement with prevalent

imagery for fear of alienating their chief markets meant that railways enforced moral considerations about what was appropriate at the seaside. Above all, packaging the seaside was a process which went far beyond periodically visiting destinations to update content; it meant engaging with widely held joys and anxieties surrounding the seaside experience.

BACK TO THE BEACHES: SEASIDE VISIONS IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

Long years of war meant dark days along Britain's coastline. Seaside pleasures were discouraged as holidaymakers of all classes were reminded of the need to forgo the idea of a general holiday until victory was secured.⁴³ Travel restrictions deprived resorts of considerable holiday revenue, and the coast's vulnerability was brought into sharp relief by the German navy's surprise raids on Yarmouth, Whitby and Scarborough. Afterwards, a very different kind of seaside poster encouraged men to 'Remember Scarborough!' as a call to enlist. Yet the seaside remained a bright beacon of hope in the popular consciousness, symbolic of and optimistic about a return to better times when the distant artillery of the Western Front could no longer be heard along the southern coast. Indeed, the first bank holiday after the war represented a collective outpouring of emotion, with newspapers describing the tumult up and down the land, the crush at principal stations as huge swells of passengers waited with eager anticipation. Afterwards, a correspondent in *The Times* testified that, despite heat and discomfort, 'we have refreshed ourselves'.⁴⁴

As consumers sought to leave the tragedy of war behind them, the interwar years witnessed a progressive revolution in popular holidaymaking practices which necessitated that resorts, railway companies and manufacturers of all kinds of holiday paraphernalia reconsider and remodel their promotional messages in response. The dominant shifts were felt diversely. The cult of sunlight, health and fitness regimens and relaxation of bathing strictures aligned to make tanning, bathing and bodily display key features of the seaside holiday, popular amongst many sections of society. Ideas about what the seaside could offer continued to change: whilst still appreciated for the opportunities for physical vigour, it was also held to confer vitality and modernity on visitors. Aligned to à la mode bathing fashions and architectural designs, it was looked upon as a place that was forward thinking, and which crackled with an energy absent from the everyday lives of many. Engaging with these understandings, advertisers helped to

entrench and shape a new seaside visual culture. Their connection to this not only afforded the war-beleaguered railways much-needed respite in terms of increased discretionary travel, but also enabled the newly amalgamated companies to reinvent themselves in a much happier image. They created deep and profitable connections in the minds of consumers with services such as ‘The Cornish Riviera Limited’, ‘Torbay Express’ and ‘Brighton Belle’. Nevertheless, the railways continued to be conspicuously absent from much of their advertising. Likely considered to be too mundane, risking detracting from the messages of a relaxing or fantastic break, travel was overlooked along with other staid and potentially disappointing holiday fundamentals such as accommodation, inclement weather and family disagreements.

Instead, Britain’s railway companies increasingly emulated the styles and subjects propounded in popular seaside photography in an effort not only to entice but also encourage budding photographers to participate in the holiday spirit. Such was the popularity of seaside views that many magazines and newspapers resorted to holiday snaps competitions to increase sales.⁴⁵ Handbooks and guides instructed people about the best ways of capturing subjects for competitions or albums. In 1939’s *On Holiday with a Camera: At The Seaside, In The Country*, Robert Goodsall instructed readers on how to use a camera as well as what shots to take. He suggested ways to capture the spirit of the holiday in ‘snaps’, be this in groups (don’t let it be obvious that you are going to take a photograph of your models); photographs of children (of course we must record their happiness, their fun, their games ... children romping with Rover the dog, building sand castles, bathing, sailing boats and sitting astride the beach donkeys), action photographs (human, appealing, joyful); and bathing (lithe figures scampering over wet sands, slim graceful forms diving into limpid water, gay revellers tumbling into rough breakers).⁴⁶ Although there was endless scope for experimentation, popular visions continued to align around certain icons.

This chapter’s remaining sections consider how the GWR reinvented its seaside imagery, chiefly by supplementing the enduring wide-angled shots of populous beaches with individuals drawn from its own staff, holiday-makers and model agencies. This allowed a much closer focus on facial expressions, gestures, costumes and placement, which were all carefully staged in order to illustrate more detailed and suggestive stories about the seaside experience.⁴⁷ These reworked visions unfolded in various scenarios and against different backdrops, taking place in the sea, on the beach and

in relation to the built environment. Captions also evolved to reinforce the new focus; whereas before they had served predominantly to identify the location, in the late 1920s and 1930s they became more elaborate, describing the activities and emotions on show. This was used by the GWR to condition customers and encourage them to approach the photography in the 'correct' corporate way, which now centred on the availability and desirability of things like 'happiness', 'high spirits', 'togetherness' and 'modernity'.

However, photographs which outwardly conveyed a hopeful and decadent narrative obscured a more complex reality, still influenced by age-old tensions and divisions. Persistent debates about, for instance, the relationship between railways and resort councils rumbled on: some argued for greater control of resort promotion by railways who could distribute nationally and draw on skillful professionals compared to the sometimes 'tragic results' of locally designed brochures.⁴⁸ The influence of locals continued to be felt: *Advertiser's Weekly* reported on Penzance Town Council's decision to reduce its advertising budget because there were 'quite a number of people in the borough to whom additional visitors meant nothing at all, and to whom an extra penny on the rates would mean something'.⁴⁹ Whereas in several cases photographic content was used to obscure this reality, its prevalence and the perceived desirability of its messages encouraged resorts to invest in construction projects and gimmicks which proved to be of only transient value, all in the aim of participating in and living up to a certain image of seaside pleasure. The enduring popularity of the imagery arguably also influenced the culture within the advertising departments, which ultimately became unwilling or unable to depart significantly from standard narratives. In this sense, in a new era heavy with optimism, seaside imagery, how it was shaped and who produced it, not only remained highly contested but also impacted in unintended ways.

SUN, SEA AND SAND

It is well known that the 1920s experienced a gradual relaxation of morals surrounding sea bathing, the display of flesh and, to an extent, class divisions at the seaside. But this was by no means universal: well into the decade it remained difficult in places even for children to bathe without their parents incurring the wrath of watchful locals.⁵⁰ The GWR must therefore have seemed very radical upon the release of one of its first photographic posters in April 1923. The design called attention to the delights

of Cornwall in February, when cold temperatures prevailed throughout the rest of the country. More is known about the models featured on this poster than most who appeared in the GWR's advertising. Snapped at St Agnes, Eileen and Peggy Nolan were allegedly seasoned bathers. The poster included the sisters in five vignettes, in arrangements which would later become de rigueur; immersed almost fully in the water, capering and waving to the camera with bathing dresses in full view, and posing in sea-shore caves which served as improvised dressing rooms. The photographs originally appeared in the 12 February 1923 issue of the *Daily Mirror* and, evidently not possessing anything like this in the company's files, the GWR most likely purchased them for quick reuse on the poster. The GWR's publicity department called the poster 'happy, unconventional and arresting',⁵¹ yet nothing else like it appeared, in poster form or in guidebooks, for another half a decade, suggesting that it was in fact considered too unconventional for general or long-term display. For the most part, the more populous resorts continued to be presented, in *Holiday Haunts*, *The Cornish Riviera* and *Glorious Devon*, in rather straightforward and traditional shots which alternatively focused on life at the beach or views of town, sands and sea together.

By the late 1920s, reports of bathing transgressions still hit the newspaper headlines, but increasingly these stories mocked or dismissed the strict reprimands of watchful locals.⁵² Owing to the influence of interconnected factors, such as the public interest in women who swam the English Channel and the interest in Hollywood films about swimming contests,⁵³ bathing became not only popular but fashionable. As public opinion changed, Britain's railway began to feature play in the sea in their advertising, in styles and arrangements reminiscent of the Nolan sisters. Whereas in the photographs released before the First World War the sea featured more as a boundary, something to look at but not to engage with other than paddling in the breakers, in the interwar years it was increasingly offered as a powerful symbol of the invigorating seaside experience, a place to socialise and court away from onlookers, as well as the stage for novel sports and activities. Crashing waves and spray were pictured on the illustrated covers of many guides and posters, as people cavorted in the water. Photographs repeated similar views of predominantly young women who skipped between rocks as they were showered with spray, or who lay down in the surf as waves rolled over them. This made for an active and spontaneous style, allied to a closer focus on the facial expressions of these bathers. The change was typified in the frontispieces to the regional

sections of 1931's 'all new' *Holiday Haunts*. The photograph selected to represent 'Glorious Devon' displayed a bathing suit-clad woman atop a rock on the foreshore, just before a rearing wave broke against her. For 'South Wales and Monmouthshire', two female swimmers reclined in the surf which splashed their legs and, in an more unusual reworking of the same kind of image, for 'The Cornish Riviera', the chosen belle hailed the viewer from atop a rocky outcrop whilst her free hand held the leash of six dogs. The presence of myriad individuals, groups and locations over the subsequent pages and years afforded immense variety to these commonplace themes.

In *Holiday Haunts*, attractive yet straightforward photographs of play in the sea were supplemented by a range of novel pastimes, the presence of which held an interest factor even if, in reality, they would have been enjoyed by relatively few. In 1936, the GWR captured the fashion for surfing in Cornwall with an intriguing image of people riding their boards as they lay on their stomachs. The company's photographs also featured an array of motor boats, launches and yachts: 1935's 'Keeping Cool' pictured two flirtatious young women in a double-pontoon kayak, oars dipped into the water, and in the same volume a much bigger boat carried a group of young women who set sail for a 'Joy Ride'. A similar picture in 1936, "Speeding" Round Torbay', showed two boats cutting through the water at pace. Their passengers looked the epitome of excitement and waved, gestured or beckoned towards the camera. The company again toyed with different perspectives and activities, and 1938's 'Looe' placed the viewer within a boat looking back past two waving female companions towards a water-skier being towed by the craft. Boating extended the appeal of the open water and offered organised thrills in comparison to the quainter, spontaneous paddling. It may also have been designed to appeal to those who were more reticent about displaying their bodies to take part and experience the sea in a similarly exhilarating way. Viewers may have also enjoyed the candid and chaotic shots of people who fell overboard: in the LNER's 'East Coast Bathers' (*Holiday Handbook*, 1932), the bathers frothed the foam around the boat as they upturned their companion's dinghy, and in the GWR's 'What Fun!' (1938), another group forced their chum into the surf.

The photographic subjects of the other members of the Big Four railways converged around these themes: the 1930 edition of *Holidays By LMS* included 'Happy Bathers on the Caernarvonshire Coast', which comprised three young ladies, in two-piece bathing suits and caps, arms clasped around each other, who braced themselves against the sea. The

same company's 'Isle of Man, the Bather's Mecca' (1930) pictured a more serious study of a young lady, viewed from the side, with arms raised, poised as if about to dive into the water. But there was equally a depth and experimentation to the visual narratives, such as outright whimsical interpretations; one woman tussled with a dog in the shallow surf in 'Not A Sea Dog' (*Holidays By LMS*, 1930), and on the same page two more were pictured after bathing, fixing their hair and makeup in 'After the Bathe – The Toilet'. Sitting on a large flat rock, legs stretched out towards the sand, they spoke to the more fashionable, social element of display which accompanied bathing. In an unusual departure, the Southern Railway (SR) showed 'Floodlight Bathing by the Palace Pier' (*Hints for Holidays*, 1935) at Brighton where the bathers were illuminated by lights rigged along the pier. Each company investigated creative ways of making the sea an enticing and sometimes even adventurous proposition even if, for the majority of customers, it may have only been looked at or paddled in.

Moving out of the water, beaches continued to provide a key setting for the majority of photographs, but here too the companies developed much more active styles. This was especially evident in the variety of beach games which were a strong feature of many compositions every year. The coast was, after all, 'the country's natural playground',⁵⁴ and leapfrogging became a favourite and oft-repeated subject in each company's guides. It made for a visually stylish and impressive image which also conveyed fun, vitality and more subtle suggestions about contact with the opposite sex. Another reoccurring image pictured groups who ran towards the camera hand in hand. In *Holiday Haunts*, the GWR's 'Channel Islands Off for a Dip' (1933) and 'Bathing Belles at Weymouth' (1938), the women were photographed mid-flight as their momentum lifted them off the ground. This enabled connected ideas about high spirits, freedom and athleticism to be connoted visually. Ball and racquet games of all kinds were well represented, and the playful imagery was reinforced with suggestive and humorous captions which hinted that others might pursue a different reading. 'Leg Theory on Somerset Sands', in the SR's *Hints for Holidays* (1935) showed a game of beach cricket whilst making a veiled reference to women's bathing dress which now finished higher up the leg. Unconventional camera angles placed viewers in the heart of such activities, looking up from the sand at a game of beach volleyball or as part of a family game. The GWR's 'Fun on the Sands' (*Holiday Haunts*, 1933) adopted a similar perspective to capture a group of men and women who vied with each other to catch an inflatable ball. It is interesting to speculate whether such images, which at

first might appear to be crudely composed, taken from behind and below the participants, actually reflected the photographer's attempts to give a sense of spontaneity and situate the viewer more authentically as part of the scene, rather than simply observing it from afar.

The ubiquity of this imagery necessitated that the railways experiment with different arrangements, as well as ways of structuring the viewer's perspective, to keep the look of the guidebooks fresh. The beach was one of the only subjects that provided railway photographers an opportunity for avant-garde experimentation. The LMS's 1939 photograph 'Beachscape' (*Holidays By LMS*), for instance, represented a marked departure from the more commonplace narratives. The camera followed a young lady as she strolled into the sea, seen from behind billowing deck-chairs. Against the conviviality of so many other photographs, its suggestion of quiet intimacy with the elements, and a relationship which was contemplative rather than overtly sexualised, mark it out. How much of this was desired by the company or reflected artistry on the part of the photographer is however unclear, and whilst this example made the final cut for that year it ultimately represented a minority viewpoint.

The vogue for sun tanning also came to be well represented. Previously associated with working-class roughness, by the 1930s a sun tan was widely desired as it suggested sufficient wealth and leisure time to afford a holiday in more distant climes.⁵⁵ This interest was heightened by the popularity of health and fitness regimens, which also advocated the benefits of sunshine and the outdoors. The influence of the sun could be found in structural design at resorts around the country, and the GWR even went as far as to install and promote 'vita-glass' in its carriages, promising that one no longer had to wait to get to the resort to feel the sun's benefits.⁵⁶ By ensuring that photographs were well-lit, the GWR emphasised claims that its destinations enjoyed good weather, as well as showing its models in, quite literally, the best possible light. Attention paid to light and shadow on limbs and hair gave a revitalising impression, but also suggested, symbolically, that customers could access a better and brighter life. The use of sunlight to ascribe models a 'heavenly' or favoured quality was a well-used technique in both artistic and photographic advertising.⁵⁷ Many individual photographs highlighted the possibilities for tanning and sun bathing. The 1936 edition of *Holidays By LMS* included a photograph with the simple caption 'Sun-tan', which pictured two young women, in sun visors and open-backed bathing suits, one applying tanning cream to the other, in what for some may have been viewed as quite a suggestive

image. In the 1935 volume of the SR's *Hints for Holidays*, three young women were photographed on the harbourside, a picture of health as the sun glinted off the 'Bronzed bathers'. The GWR's 'Up for a Sun Bathe', which appeared in *Holiday Haunts* in 1937, referenced the practice explicitly, but also represented an intriguing departure as the subject in question was pictured as seen through the slats in a wooden walkway. The woman herself appeared to be unaware of the photographer's presence as she looked away, and the result is a slightly voyeuristic image, almost akin to the risqué imagery which was reproached in the Edwardian era. Like many other photographs which showed revealing bathing attire, it may have appealed, and been intended to appeal, to those who liked to go to the seaside to watch the people sunbathing but perhaps felt a little guilty about doing so.⁵⁸

A final photograph from the GWR's collection illustrates not only the difficulties of composing beach scenes, but also the challenges and possibilities posed by staged and spontaneous imagery. On the beach, photographers had to contend with many nuisances: the angle of the sun, gusts of wind which blew hair and sand, and the unanticipated people or animals who wandered into shot. Whilst in some cases an animated background cast would have added realism to the scene, or made for interesting and natural compositions, in the GWR's case it would have meant that many would have been consigned to the cutting room floor. But in the case of 1935's 'Borth Sands', even as they upset the photographer's narrative the people in the background looked more arresting and realistic than their posed counterparts in the foreground. Having evidently spotted the photographer and his equipment, a group of young women posed for their own version of the photograph, their presence apparently unbeknown to the photographer or those in the scene before them. The result was a scene of genuine joy in contrast to the demure, posed family scene. This photograph was one of a number of variants used in *Holiday Haunts* throughout the years, but one can only wonder whether its ultimate appearance in the volume was down to the fact that a GWR official overlooked the interlopers when refreshing the content, or whether they were sufficiently amused by the unusual configuration that it was included unaltered.

THE BATHING BELLE

Whilst on advertising posters attractive woman had been an ever increasing presence since the later Edwardian years,⁵⁹ the place and role of women in railway photography changed fundamentally in the 1930s. Prospective

holidaymakers could not have failed to notice their now frequent appearance on the cover of many guides or the pages inside, and the variety of ways in which they were related to the seaside environment. This increase was again encouraged by the relaxation of seaside morals as described above, which allowed Britain's railways to picture the fashion for more revealing bathing dress for the first time. This was further assisted by the fact that the sportswoman and swimmer also became a dominant image in British advertisements, magazines and films, and bathing fashions appeared all year round in a range of publications popularising the look further.⁶⁰ As mentioned earlier, the Women's League of Health and Beauty, established in 1930, boasted 170,000 members by 1939.⁶¹ For both sexes, the seaside was not only a place to sculpt and take care of bodies, but to display them as well. This took on a more analytical and competitive element in the form of beauty pageants, which became a mainstay at popular resorts with the results often reported in local and even national newspapers. Billy Butlin made such 'Perfect Figure' contests central activities at his newly established holiday camps,⁶² and even the GWR ran beauty competitions and voted for its own railway queen to further incite the holiday spirit.⁶³ These factors entwined to make the bathing suit-clad female form an icon of seaside consumption, to be enjoyed by men but also seen as aspirational for young women who chose to holiday alone or in all-female groups.⁶⁴

The 'bathing belle' or 'bathing beauty' was the common, overarching term given to advertising imagery which featured women captured in a definitively seaside environment, but not necessarily on the beach or in the sea. Although oft-repeated and criticised for hackneyed poses, there were in fact many visions and variations. The focus on lone individuals stands out. These were likely intended as female archetypes who were young, confident, outside of male control, and whose qualities of beauty and spirit aligned with the natural environment. Different framing devices were used: the camera commonly looked up to these women thus further marking them out as people to be admired. Others appeared to float above the landscape: a favoured pose for GWR photographers was to capture these women atop cliffs or coastal paths, quietly contemplating their surroundings. Others depicted women three-quarters on to the camera, looking out over the sea. They demonstrate that the GWR did not persistently fall back on the stereotypical disempowered bathing belle. Other photographs referenced the new interest, amongst both sexes, in athletic women. Such compositions pictured women whose proportions conformed to conventional beauty ideals which had changed since the 1920s, embodied in a

move away from the androgynous look and towards longer hair, and fuller breasts and thighs.⁶⁵ Concentration on bodies was heightened by portraiture-style photographs where the pose, more common to the fashion pages of magazines, was used to equate beautiful femininity with the coast. 'A Belle of Aberdovey' (1937) was typical (Fig. 4.3), portrayed as being at home in the seaside environment, connoted in her placement amongst the dunes, hand grasping the grasses, sporting her modern, rubberised bathing suit. Most of the models in the GWR's photographs wore the more expensive, manufactured bathing suits, a fact which would likely have been noticed and admired by those who had to make do with fashioning homemade copies. This belle was svelte and toned, radiating the vitality linked in the minds of many to the coastal environment. An aspirational reading was further enforced by the camera's angle which looked upwards and captured this 'belle' against the skyline, although others may have viewed this epitome of contemporary feminine beauty simply with desire. In this case, the fact that she faces the camera, but looks away from it, emphasises her as one to be looked at and commodified rather than engaged with.

Fig. 4.3 'A belle of Aberdovey', *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1937). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library



Whereas groups of women did not appear regularly in railway poster art,⁶⁶ they were exceptionally prominent in the new guidebook photography. Where local women or holidaymakers were used instead of professional models, this also helped achieve a different aesthetic. In the interwar years more generally, advertising to the mass market moved away from the Parisian model of the Edwardian period and looked to the ‘ordinary girl’ who was meant to appear friendly and familiar.⁶⁷ Oftentimes, the GWR referred to these women as ‘nymphs’: in classical art the nymphs of painterly tradition inhabited riverside locales, connoted sexual freedom and were outside of male control. The GWR developed this understanding to support key promotional narratives centred on friendliness and fun, and youth and beauty at the seaside. Commonly photographed on rocks or in the sea, the GWR’s nymphs also suggested ideas about sirens and mermaids, whilst others chased and capered along the beach. From time to time, they also interacted with the more conventional elements of the seaside environment, implying that amusement could be found even in unexpected corners, such as a sea tractor in ‘In Tow on Bigbury Sands’ (1936), carrying lobster pots in the guise of ‘Willing Helpers’ (1934), or by taking the place of children riding donkeys (‘Glamorganshire bathers enjoy a donkey ride’, 1933) (all *Holiday Haunts*). Playing with a porter’s trolley, clad in the ubiquitous bathing suits which were worn at all areas of the seaside, the women of 1934’s ‘Enjoying Life at Jersey’ (Fig. 4.4) offered both unbridled joy and sisterhood. Only one looked to the cameraman, the rest were caught up in their own performance. Their uninhibited pleasure was contrasted with the relaxed posture of the couple in the middle-distance, who read a newspaper against the backdrop of the bay. In such cases, the nymphs contributed to an overt remodelling of the seaside image as more traditional seaside paraphernalia was inspected and enjoyed in a carefree fashion. Deployed by the GWR and a host of other advertisers, these photographs were more likely thought to appeal to women by showing an idealised yet commonplace femininity. They were presented as confident and independent, and the captions which emphasised things like ‘enjoying life’, rather than exclusively drawing attention to bodies or beauty, support this reading. The nymphs and belles were the railway version of the ‘Kodak girl’, the advertising icon presented as a female archetype who was young, self-reliant and who enjoyed life to its fullest extent.⁶⁸

However, many more examples across the Big Four companies’ publications continued the specific focus on feminine beauty linked to destinations. In *Hints for Holidays*, the SR released conventional content such as

Fig. 4.4 ‘Enjoying Life at Jersey’, *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1934). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library



‘A bevy of Bournemouth’s beautiful bathers!’ (1939), a photograph which pictured ten women in bathing suits relaxing on a terrace under a parasol, as well as more unusual variants including ‘Beauty on the Bowspit’ (1939), which showed a blonde in summer dress reclining amongst the rigging of a ship, apparently in the style of a figurehead. The LMS included similarly glamorous imagery in its all-line offering *Holidays By LMS*. A photograph in 1938’s volume, titled simply ‘Come to Kent’, advocated the region using a young woman who reclined alluringly atop a sea wall. The railways aligned themselves with other businesses which trusted in the beautiful female image to encourage both men and women to consume.

In light of the overabundance of bathing belles, there were many who castigated the railways for using photographs of women in this way, especially those who clung to the idea of moral decline, and denigrated the chief aim of many holidaymakers as being to pose for the cameraman.⁶⁹ Criticism also came from within, however: Tom Purvis, the respected poster artist who worked with the LNER, was reported to dislike what he termed the ‘goo-goo girls’ of railway advertising. Purvis detested the ‘eternal smirk of the “g-g-g”’, the ‘carefully brushed bloom on her cheek

and her impossible eyes', declaring its advertising value 'very poor nowadays'.⁷⁰ Yet even Purvis admitted that the attraction value of the pretty girl picture would always be important for advertisers, and it seems that the railways simply followed what was popular as well as emulating the output of their competitors. A contributor to *Advertiser's Weekly* summarised the problem: 'The face would not be used to the extent it is if the advertiser did not get results. The rejoinder is that he might get even better results ... if he left the face out and devoted the space to something less hackneyed'.⁷¹ It is impossible to answer whether the focus on the bathing belle ultimately stunted any real innovation, because even Purvis knew that for the majority, images of beautiful women on the pier would sell a destination better than the those of, say, the botanical gardens. Their popularity and ubiquity probably made this a moot point for railway companies.

PAVILIONS, LIDOS AND SUN PARLOURS

Alongside new ideas about leisure and display, the bathing boom also stimulated the frenetic construction of cinemas, concert halls, swimming pools and sun parlours, whilst existing facilities were updated and modernised. Grand and excessive designs were the most desirable: the LMS requested designer Oliver Hill build a hotel of 'international quality in the modern style' at Morecambe. Upon completion it was declared 'an extravagant gesture of hope at a time of great depression'.⁷² The De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill, completed in 1934, combined 'pleasing suggestions of the yacht, the pier and the lighthouse', and was commended by *The Times*' architectural correspondent as 'by far the most civilized thing that has been done on the South Coast since the days of the Regency'.⁷³ A vast structure, the pavilion contained a restaurant, library and auditorium for 1300 patrons. But even small towns boasted miniature versions of such extravagance, the presence of which had become popularly venerated and therefore eagerly anticipated and expected. On the GWR's territory, in 1934 alone Aberystwyth spent £25,000 on a pavilion and palm court. Burnham set aside £20,000 for improvements to the promenade, re-equipping its marine lake, improving facilities for sunbathing, and constructing a new pavilion and grandstand. Minehead expended £50,000 on new assembly rooms, which included a concert hall, ballroom and shopping arcade, and Penzance spent £14,000 on an open-air bathing pool, new putting green and children's playground. At Weymouth, eight new lawn tennis courts appeared and an entertainments manager was specially

appointed. Weston-super-Mare commissioned six sunbathing platforms as well as diving stages and water chutes.⁷⁴ Designed to evoke a fantastical environment of unbridled pleasure, the architecture, amenities and gardens sought to deliver a carnivalesque atmosphere.⁷⁵

Railway companies used their guidebooks and brochures to keep these developments in the public eye. Photography provided visual proof that the promised amenities not only existed but lived up to their billing, helping to emphasise the modern designs via unconventional photographic perspectives. 1933's *Holiday Haunts* included two photographs of Rhyl: the paddling pool being enjoyed by small children, and below it the 'New Bathing Pool' where a larger crowd sat beneath the waving flags to cheer on the swimming race which unfolded before them. The Southern Railway's *Hints for Holidays* (1935) showed 'The new open-air swimming baths at Exmouth', in a long sweeping perspective suggesting an elongated pool. Space was, however, not just reserved for new or extravagant developments. In *Holiday Haunts*, 'Swimming Pool, Newton Abbot' (1937), despite the unusually lacklustre caption, presented a visually interesting composition made up of people standing atop three levels of diving boards, arms outstretched, as if seconds before the dive. This was most likely the photographer's inspiration: such synchronisation would have been difficult to capture spontaneously. The LMS pictured a conversation taking place at the lido in 1939's 'Gossip' (Fig. 4.5) which continued that company's preference for more narrative imagery. Providing a departure from the images described above, the unusual perspective allowed the viewer to intrude on the exchange and imagine the discussion. Such photographs emphasised different ideas of display at the seaside, viewing and recording holidaymakers from unusual angles. Whereas the physical force of the sea was accentuated in much of the seaside imagery, the calmer ripples of the pool provided a contrasting picture of indolence. 'Gossip' highlighted the social scene of the lido, showing that it offered much more than honing robust bodies or engaging in energetic contests. Whilst the guidebooks described the provision of a plethora of amusements should the weather worsen, the photographs within suggested a vision of relentless sunshine where the majority of the holiday was spent outside.

Behind such composed scenes was an interesting backstory which sheds light both on the railway representation of seaside resorts and the struggles in creating and living with the promotional image. Concerned with the annual compilation and updating of *Holiday Haunts*, the correspondence on Maxwell Fraser's archive intermittently reveals how resorts

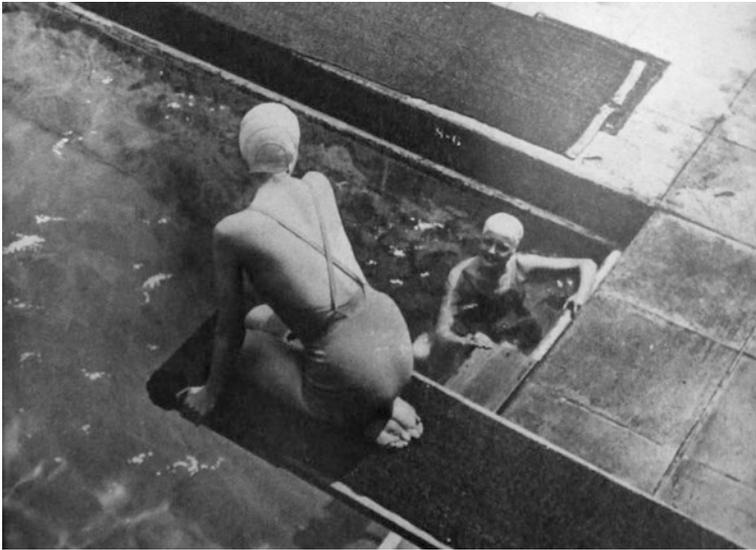


Fig. 4.5 ‘Gossip’, *Holidays By LMS* (London: Midland and Scottish Railway, 1939). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

wanted to appear to the public, what they thought should be highlighted, and how they appealed to the GWR to do so. Notions of modernity pre-occupied certain resorts. A letter from the Newquay Advertising Committee requested Fraser remove the reference to ‘jingles’—a traditional pony-and-trap ride—in favour of information on a growing attraction, surfing. In a series of letters in June 1936, Minehead’s committee requested that photographs of the town’s swimming pool feature in the following year’s *Holiday Haunts*, and sent examples.⁷⁶ But the requirements of constructing the guide meant that such requests were sometimes disappointed. Letters came from customers too, and show the difficulty of satisfying different tastes in single guides. One who congratulated Fraser on the quality of *Holiday Haunts* also cautioned her: as a family man, he found the descriptions of what happened centuries ago interesting but said he would prefer to know ‘first is the beach sandy and is the bathing good?’⁷⁷ The letters emphasise that the GWR had to tread a fine line in its image management and satisfy the expectations of many actors.

But the correspondence also suggests where simply adding modern facilities did not necessarily translate into improved business. In a letter

dated 1 August 1934, Fred Pickett, general manager of the Weston-super-Mare Advertising and Entertainment Association, responded to Fraser's request for updated material to feature in the coming *Holiday Haunts*. He wrote that little had been done in the way of developments since the last season other than the provision of the sunbathing lido on the south beach. However, he advised against highlighting it because, confidentially, it represented a 'white elephant', being too far from the sea and doing 'very badly indeed'.⁷⁸ Keeping up to the image was an essential task, but applying it haphazardly, threatened to be financially ruinous.

THE GWR'S UPDATED FAMILY ALBUM

During the interwar years, ever more resorts clamoured for the lucrative family market. But established favourites faced fresh competition from the arrival of new, family-friendly holiday camps mid-way through the 1930s, which offered all the requisite holiday amusements conveniently located on one site.⁷⁹ The automobile eroded numbers further, and caravanning worried hoteliers sufficiently to conduct research into exactly how many customers were being lost.⁸⁰ Manufacturers of inexpensive, mid-sized cars, such as Hillman, Austin and Morris promoted a family image in their illustrated advertisements. The tyre manufacturer Dunlop pictured a family picnic in one of its press advertisements and proclaimed, 'You get more out of life if you own a car!'⁸¹

Unlike much of the GWR's interwar advertising, which underwent an abrupt change in character, appeals to the family continued the more intimate focus on children, parents and family units together. The techniques of the Edwardian era were, however, polished and supplemented by professional photographers' models. Furthermore, whereas previously the GWR had shown the children as part of the beach environment, the focus was broadened to include the whole family in increasingly diverse arrangements. The GWR encouraged families to search for the perfect versions of themselves on holiday, with even holiday selection presented as a warm, family-centred process, not the sole responsibility of either parent:

Holidays! Every year, for months ahead, the favourite topic on thousands of family debates is 'Holidays'; there is some magic in the very word that can call up bright visions of sea and sunshine even on the gloomiest day. How light-heartedly the debate proceeds, as each member of the family offers suggestions and propounds plans!⁸²

The company was cast in the role of family friend, declaring that ‘the family man deserves something special and gets it’, by allowing children to travel at reduced fares and carrying prams and cots for free.⁸³ ‘Family’ services such as the ‘Kiddies expresses’ proved to be popular innovations, and the surprise trips run on Whit Monday conveyed over 1500 passengers.⁸⁴ As well as trying to win families with rational arguments based on price, the company released sundry items such as books, games and jigsaws, which targeted children and brought what was ostensibly GWR advertising into the home.

Both parents’ gazes were well catered for in *Holiday Haunts*. In 1936’s ‘His First Paddle’, mother and father were shown together, father supporting his young son as he inched towards his mother in the surf. The GWR suggested that one would not lose face by playing games on the beach or acting ‘childishly’; it was rather a desirable way to let go of everyday strains.⁸⁵ For fathers who might not see children as frequently during the working week, the holiday was presented as a time to revel in togetherness. ‘Happy Holiday Makers’ (1939) showed father’s attention focused inwards on his children, as they in turn looked back, regarding him not as a disciplinarian but as one of their own: the older daughter and son revealed a blushing admiration. A heart-warming and humorous moment came in the realisation that father winced as his young boy emptied sand into his shirt. Such interactions were celebrated by Goodsall who advised to have the camera ready when ‘Little Johnny did not approve of Dad’s ‘forty winks’.⁸⁶ Mother’s role was also featured prominently. Photographs such as ‘Sun bathers’ (1938) achieved this in a manner similar to ‘Happy Holiday-makers’; the children were presented as well-behaved and content, and mother took care of them, assuring that their needs, in terms of food and attention, were taken care of as well as their enjoyment needs, represented by the beach ball. ‘After the Dip’ (1933) pictured the bond between mother and daughter as mother helped the girl dry off on the beach. Versions of this particular photograph were used in different years, albeit arranged differently at varying parts of the beach, and the overarching argument, that holiday time strengthened family bonds, remained the same. The photographs contributed to the call to seize opportunities to enjoy a stage of life that would not endure as children aged.

Children, in groups or alone, remained amongst the most frequent and recurrent actors in the GWR’s seaside narrative. The photographs were filled with personality, and examples such as ‘A would be surf Rider’ (1936), ‘King of the Castle’ (1937 and 1939), ‘Off for a Trot’ (1938) and

'Happiness in Industry' (1939) all sentimentalised popular seaside activities. This bucket and spade imagery was instantly recognisable, if unoriginal, and appeared time and again in various guises. Dozens more adopted arrangements now common and socially vaunted through their inclusion in the family album. Children of all ages clustered together and engaged the camera directly, such as 1937's 'We Love The Cambrian Coast' (Fig. 4.6). This centred on providing inspiration about the kind of commodified memories which parents could hope to capture for themselves, with the beach and bathing clothing providing a relaxed memory of the family on holiday. The GWR's photographs encouraged viewers to remain unconscious of any intervention or mediation on the company's part, asking viewers instead to place themselves in the image.

The utility of this kind of image, and the perceived value of children for advertising purposes, was well established in advertising texts of the time. Following trends from the United States, in interwar Britain parental guilt became an increasingly popular advertising technique for domestic goods, especially targeting mothers.⁸⁷ Testimonials from housewives recounted how their families' health had improved after using certain brands.⁸⁸ Furthermore, from making the initial arrangements to packing and making sure the family was at the station at the right time, to organising activities, repacking and the journey home, the holiday often might have been

Fig. 4.6 'We Love The Cambrian Coast', *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1937). National Railway Museum/ Science and Society Picture Library



approached with a degree of anxiety, especially by mothers concerned that they would simply be transferring their everyday roles and responsibilities to the seaside. To promote holidays successfully, these aspects were subverted by the GWR in attractive, if unoriginal, imagery.

CONCLUSIONS

The GWR's holiday guides continued an enthusiastic tradition of looking and display at the seaside which, by the beginning of the twentieth century, was very much rooted in photography. In seeking to persuade people to consume, the GWR provided them with a picture of British people on holiday, distilling what it considered to be key motivations and aspirations. The vision was rooted in certain ideas about customers; that they wanted a 'modern' experience and 'progressive spirit' which matched their own outlook and reflected their sensibilities; that they were interested in all forms of sport, not only for exercising bodies but also building a socially vaunted sub-bronzed look; and that families valued the seaside as an unconventional place in which to recreate themselves and strengthen their familial bonds. It is rather more difficult to discern exactly how the GWR arrived at these perceptions, although it most likely looked to a palpable middlebrow culture which thought about the seaside all year long.

The GWR's idea of the seaside became less rooted in its availability as a somewhat unique space in contrast to the urban environment, and more concerned with the social interactions which unfolded there, which were however charged and energised by the spirit of holiday time. Similarly, the GWR was typical of what has come to be defined as a modern look at the seaside. The emphasis on play in the sun, bathing suits, tanning and new buildings put forward a very particular narrative about time at the seaside. As such, by the end of the 1930s the destinations became almost interchangeable when viewed across the pages of the larger guides. The cast of holidaymakers, families, siblings, all-female groups and larger parties of companions who capered in various arrangements were instantly recognisable. Having switched to this kind of imagery to interest and excite the viewer, it is an irony that certain narratives came to dominate, repeated across the railways year after year. Whilst individual charms were still picked out, the reliance on modern architecture, climate and friendly society created a sense of interchangeability, not only of the destinations but the people one could find there. For some, this seaside vision was an expensive one to live up to, which did not necessarily guarantee good

results. This suggests a different facet to the relationship between railway companies and resorts in this period.

Taking the analysis beyond the poster has provided insights into how realism and fantasy at the seaside were constructed and made pervasive. It reveals different narratives beyond bathing belles and cherubic children, as well as how these prominent ones differed as a result of their photographic representation. Display and looking, features of the seaside from its earliest days, took on a new character in the GWR's guides which captured and held views to be scrutinised by people at their leisure and in the comfort of their own home. But it could be said that the reliance on this image worked against resorts when people's tastes and expectations shifted in the 1950s and the image, so ardently advocated in the decades before, became hard to dispel and rework. Philip Larkin's 1962 poem 'Sunny Prestatyn', centred on a bathing belle-type poster for the town, for example, provides a different take on how such imagery could be viewed, 'consumed' and in this case reworked by miscreants who made obscene additions.

NOTES

1. Peter Borsay, "A Room with a View: Visualising the Seaside c. 1750–1914," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (2013): 180.
2. Nigel J. Morgan and Annette Pritchard, *Power And Politics At The Seaside: The Development of Devon's Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 101.
3. Despite a number of governmental acts about levying rates to advertising, resorts still needed to get creative to maximise the potential of these sometimes meagre resources.
4. Morgan and Pritchard, *Power and Politics at the Seaside*; John Walton, "The Seaside and the Holiday Crowd," in *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film*, ed. Vanessa Toulmin, Patrick Russell, and Simon Popple (London: British Film Institute, 2004); Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris, ed., *Modernism on Sea: Art and Culture at the British Seaside* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009); Borsay, "A Room With A View," 175–201.
5. "English Holiday Resorts," *The Times*, August 28, 1909, 9.
6. "Where to go for the holidays: the advertising of health resorts: how it is and how it might be done," *The Advertising World*, May, 1906, 639–41.
7. Borsay, "A Room with a View," 193.
8. John Beckerson and John Walton, "Selling Air: Marketing the Intangible at British Resorts," in *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity, and Conflict*, ed. John Walton (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2005), 55–70.

9. "Holiday Resort Advertising," *The Advertising World*, October, 1905, 433–34.
10. "Holiday Advertising," *The Advertising World*, May, 1907, 624.
11. *The Advertising World*, October, 1905, 450.
12. Borsay, "A Room With A View," 184–85.
13. R. Ball and K.J. Shepherdson (eds.), Introduction to *Beyond the View (New) Perspectives on Seaside Photography*, (Burton Press, 2014), <http://www.karenshepherdson.com/blog/>.
14. Annebella Pollen, "Sweet Nothings: Suggestive Brighton Postcard Inscriptions," *Photography and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2009), 79.
15. Malcolm Smith, "The War and British Culture," in *The First World War in British History*, ed. Stephen Constantine, M. W. Kirby, and Mary Rose (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 169.
16. *The Cornish Riviera* (London: Great Western Railway, 1905), 51.
17. *The Cornish Riviera* (London: Great Western Railway, 1905), 49–51.
18. Working in opposition to the 'romantic' gaze of the unpeopled countryside, the collective gaze is generally understood to be that which engages a mass, usually taken to mean working-class, gaze which is supposed to have discouraged wealthier holidaymakers whose seaside sensibilities differed: John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, (2nd edn., London: Sage Publications, 2002), 150.
19. *The Cornish Riviera* (London: Great Western Railway, 1914), 6.
20. John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Alan Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness' (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of York, 2000), 146.
21. Walton, "The Seaside and the Holiday Crowd," 158–68.
22. Walton, *The British Seaside*, 51.
23. Lara Feigel, "Kiss me Quick: The Aesthetics of Excess in 1930s Literature and Film," in *Modernism on Sea: Art and Culture at the British Seaside*, ed. Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 19.
24. Walton, *The British Seaside*, 98–99.
25. Great Western Railway Magazine, June 1912, 171. (GWRM hereafter).
26. Walton, *The British Seaside*, 54.
27. GWRM, December, 1904, 205.
28. Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1985), 3. Daniel Cook, "The Rise Of 'The Toddler' As Subject and As Merchandising Category In The 1930s," in *New Forms Of Consumption: Consumers, Culture, and Commodification*, ed. Mark Gottdiener (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 116.
29. Walton, *The British Seaside*, 54.

30. Walton, *The British Seaside*, 100.
31. *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, July, 1912, 11.
32. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1908 and 1911).
33. Lori-Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 114–15.
34. *The Advertising World*, August 1911, 140.
35. Several reminiscences about the demands of such trips appear in Phillip Unwin, *By Train In The Edwardian Age* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 24–26 and 59–60.
36. “How Big Railways Advertise,” *The Railway Magazine*, June 1902.
37. *The Advertising World*, November, 1911, 580.
38. “Incentives to Vice,” *The Times*, June 1, 1901, 5.
39. Catherine Horwood, “‘Girls Who Arouse Dangerous Passions’: Women and Bathing, 1900–39,” *Women’s History Review* 9, no. 4 (2000): 656–58.
40. *The Railway Magazine*, November, 1900, 423.
41. Ralph Harrington, “Beyond The Bathing Belle: Images Of Women In Interwar Railway Publicity,” *Journal of Transport History* 25, no. 1 (2004): 31; Julia Wigg, *Bon voyage!: Travel Posters of the Edwardian Era* (London: HMSO), 5–6.
42. *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, August, 1913, 177.
43. “Deferred Holidays,” *The Times*, July 31, 1916, 3.
44. “After the Holiday,” *The Times*, June 10, 1919, 13.
45. Peter Twaites, “Circles of Confusion and Sharp Vision: British News Photography 1919–39,” in *Northcliffe’s Legacy: Aspects of the British Popular Press, 1896–1996*, ed. Peter Catterall, Colin Seymour-Ure, and Adrian Smith (London: Macmillan, 2000), 105.
46. Robert Goodsall, *On Holiday with a Camera: At The Seaside, In The Country* (London: Fountain Press, 1939), 24–28.
47. As seen in Chap. 2, the GWR participated in an altered advertising mindset, requesting the public to think less about functionality and more about lifestyle.
48. “How Blackpool Advertises,” *Advertiser’s Weekly*, May 29, 1925, 370; “Should the Railways Control Resort Advertising,” *Advertiser’s Weekly*, July 21, 1922, 81.
49. *Advertiser’s Weekly*, March 3, 1922, 260.
50. Catherine Horwood cites another example of Councillor Donald Clark of Tonbridge, who contended that ‘by making girls look like wet Scotch terriers, mixed bathing stops more marriages than any other cause [and] much of the unrest in the country is due to the barbarous licence in women’s dress’. Horwood, “‘Girls Who Arouse Dangerous Passions,’” 659.
51. GWRM, April, 1923, 428.

52. *The Western Times* reported a family dispute, where an eighteen-year-old had assaulted his hotel manager father. The manager's fifteen-year-old daughter was in the habit of going to mixed bathing at Chiswick and after returning home at one o'clock in the morning this had caused trouble between mother and father, hence the son had intervened. *The Western Times*, July 28, 1920, 4.
53. Marilyn Morgan, "Aesthetic Athletics: Advertising and Eroticizing Women Swimmers," in *Consuming Modernity: Gendered Behaviour and Consumerism Before the Baby Boom*, ed., Cheryl Krasnick Warsh and Dan Malleck (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 136–60.
54. *The Times*, May 8, 1937, 10.
55. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (2006): 596; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "The Making of a Modern Female Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Interwar Britain," *Women's History Review* 20, no. 2 (2011): 300–01.
56. *The Cornish Riviera Express, 1904–1929: A Silver Anniversary* (London: Great Western Railway, 1929).
57. John Gold and Margaret Gold, "'Home at Last!': Building Societies, Home Ownership and the Imagery of English Suburban Promotion in the Interwar Years," in *Place Promotion: The Use of Publicity and Marketing to Sell Towns and Regions*, ed. John Gold and Stephen Ward (New York: Wiley, 1994), 88–89; Roland Marchand, *Advertising The American Dream: Making Way For Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 276.
58. Fred Gray, "1930s Architecture and the Cult of the Sun," in *Modernism on Sea: Art and Culture at the British Seaside*, ed. Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 165.
59. Harrington, "Beyond The Bathing Belle," 22–44.
60. Morgan, "Aesthetic Athletics," 136–149.
61. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "The Making of a Modern Female Body," 188.
62. Sandra Trudgen Dawson, *Holiday Camps in Twentieth Century Britain: Packaging Pleasure* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 100–02.
63. GWRM, October, 1933, 432.
64. Harrington, "Beyond The Bathing Belle," 27; Jane Lewis, *Women in England, 1870–1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1984), 146–51; David Fowler, *The First Teenagers: The Lifestyle of Young Wage-earners in Interwar Britain* (London: Woburn Press, 1995), 1–10; Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, *Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin de Siècle to the Present* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 87.

65. Buckley and Fawcett, *Fashioning the Feminine*, 113–14.
66. Harrington, “Beyond The Bathing Belle,” 41.
67. See, for example, *The Daily Mirror*, May 2, 1936; *Advertiser’s Weekly*, March 2, 1933; Marchand, *Advertising The American Dream*, 14.
68. Alison Nordström, “Lovely, Smart, Modern: Women with Cameras in a Changing World,” in *Kodak Girl: From the Martha Cooper Collection*, ed., John Jacob (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), 68.
69. *The Times*, October 22, 1934, 10.
70. *The Railway Gazette*, June 12, 1931, 853–54.
71. “I prefer crocodiles to doll-face chorus girls, professional models and stupid sub-debs,” *Advertiser’s Weekly*, February 27, 1936, 312.
72. Michael Bracewell, “Morecambe: The Sunset Coast,” in *Modernism on Sea: Art and Culture at the British Seaside*, ed. Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 39.
73. *The Times*, December 14, 1935, 17.
74. “Western Holiday Resorts,” *The Times*, February 26, 1934, 11.
75. Bracewell, “Morecambe: The Sunset Coast,” 39.
76. National Library of Wales (NLOW), GB 0210 MAXSER, F 1-150, Letters to Maxwell Fraser, dated Tuesday 23rd and 27th June 1936.
77. NLOW, GB 0210 MAXSER, F 1-150, Letter to Maxwell Fraser, 27th May 1935.
78. NLOW, GB 0210 MAXSER, F 1-150, Letter to Maxwell Fraser, 1st August 1934.
79. Dawson, *Holiday Camps in Twentieth Century Britain*, 1–10.
80. Whilst cost excluded many, there were nevertheless 3500 private caravans in use in 1933, with the rental market allowing around 150,000 families to experience this novel holiday in 1935: Sean O’Connell, *The Car In British Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 89–90.
81. *The Autocar*, June 23, 1925.
82. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1939).
83. GWRM, May, 1936, 212.
84. GWRM, June, 1932, 229.
85. John Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: A History of Myth and Ritual in Family Life* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1996), 105.
86. Goodsall, *On Holiday with a Camera* 28.
87. Sue Bowden, ‘Consumption and Consumer Behaviour’, in *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Wrigley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 366–68.
88. See, for example, the case of Rowntree in Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and The Marketing Revolution, 1862–1969* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 295.

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CHAPTER 5

Around Town

Britain's pre-nationalisation railway companies are best remembered for their efforts to advertise England, Scotland and Wales' myriad seaside resorts and their dramatic countryside scenery. Perceiving the market for discretionary travel as comprising principally urban-based customers, the companies designed promotional materials which emphasised departure and the benefits of accessing *different* spaces and experiences. Those who could do so got away, and in support of this railway advertising departments called upon customers to leave their 'unhealthy', 'dull' and mentally taxing everyday urban roles.

It is therefore unsurprising that the railways' efforts to promote British towns and cities as destinations for holidaymakers have received little scholarly attention.¹ Advertisements which contained cityscapes, prominent urban buildings and industrial locations did feature, but were often more closely associated with the promotion of the freight business and British industry more generally. Designs which pictured smokestacks, factories, furnaces and sooty locomotives evoked aspirations of progress and modernity, as well as Britain's place on the world stage. At an advertising convention in Philadelphia, the LNER's advertising manager, William Teasdale, revealed why the company advertised docklands on its posters: 'the issue of these etching posters was merely with the idea of creating goodwill amongst an important, influential and wealthy class of people... They have probably never since noticed the far cleverer pictorial posters

that have been issued, but have remembered these and consequently bear the company goodwill'.² Whilst they may have been interesting to some amongst the market for discretionary travel, these depictions would have been unlikely to entice holidaymakers to reconsider their travel plans, and nor were they intended as such.

One can, however, find ready, if not abundant, evidence of attempts to promote urban areas within the more general railway advertising released to the mass passenger market. Central London and the large towns of the Midlands were, for instance, well represented in the GWR's main annual guide, *Holiday Haunts*, even if, at times, this was done so a little apologetically, recognising that they lacked the conventional holiday trappings desired by prospective customers. Other towns were the subject of dedicated publications which placed potential customers in the heart of the city, explained the provenance of these places, and presented a range of famous and historically important sites to visit. In response to economic fluctuations, the GWR also attempted periodically to change the impression of destinations which were much more famous for their industrial heritage than their potential as holiday centres. Finally, the company and its competitor railways also acknowledged the popularity of inland destinations as traditional stopping points on the itineraries of foreign tourists. This offered a further, potentially very lucrative, avenue for increasing discretionary travel, which became ever more important as Britain looked beyond domestic borders for customers. There were, therefore, many reasons for picturing urban regions, even if the bulk of resources were dedicated to luring people in the opposite direction.

The inclusion of large towns and cities within railway advertising cannot be passed off as interesting oddities. They raise key questions about the railways' representation of place across the period under consideration, the popularity of urban excursions and holidays amongst leisure passengers, and the value of this market to the wider railway business. But it also calls into question the suitability of photographs as an advertising medium. Those that have analysed the visual representation of urban areas in guidebooks issued throughout the first half of the twentieth century have identified a number of common challenges which tasked editors and photographers differently. These included attempting to condense the essence of the city into a small number of representational images, and in the case of London, the struggle to translate the city's 'global pre-eminence into an adequate visual spectacle on a par with other European capitals such as Paris, Vienna, and Berlin'.³ Many advertisements and guidebooks

made reference to the long and grand histories of towns and cities, yet the best means of communicating this, through key historic sites which acted as ‘fixing points’,⁴ or through characters and imagined scenes, was similarly undecided. To borrow Barczewski’s phrasing, did those responsible for the acquiring and selecting of the imagery simply admire the longevity of history, or did they seek to shape and create it anew?⁵ In contrast, with cities generally considered to be modern and forward-thinking places, how did the railways align modernity and traditionalism in advertising photography? In each case there were supplementary choices to consider, such as whether to capture cities from the rooftop or at street level, include crowded street scenes as authentic images of hustle and bustle, or eliminate them to placate those for whom crowds raised too many negative connotations.

Whilst this volume has so far argued that photographs offered the railways a different and sometimes superior way of communicating with customers in comparison to posters, as established in Chap. 2 the railways relied on many different mediums and advocated an integrated approach to promotional work. This chapter considers whether the challenges in representing towns in particular heightened the appeal of this approach. For instance, in the interwar years the GWR made the decision to invest more heavily in its poster designs, not only to better compete with the other members of the Big Four railways, but also in recognition of the different ways and means of approaching customers. It could even be argued in this case that artistic posters aligned more succinctly with guidebook narratives, which dwelt on historical provenance and famous characters because they could bring these to life in a way unavailable to the photographer. Analysing the frequency and character of photographs and pictorial posters, the narratives and visual experiences provided by each, as well as how this changed in the light of periodically shifting tastes in advertising and popular photography, this chapter considers how far imagery and text combined to offer cities as different and attractive spaces to contemporary holidaymakers.

A HOLIDAY AT HOME

Britain’s railway companies supported the growth of towns and cities, guiding the location of industry and commerce, influencing their spatial development and fostering expansion into the suburbs by providing swift links between the centre and the periphery. Whilst the railways brought

recognition and prosperity, just as they had been castigated for disturbing the peace and beauty of the countryside, the companies were also judged to have made sections of the urban environment unwholesome and unwelcoming. The construction of new lines and stations uprooted communities, scarred the cityscape with viaducts and embankments, and polluted the neighbouring vicinities with smoke, soot and noise.⁶ The elevated perspective of the carriage window afforded passengers a prominent view of such problems. Gustave Doré's 1872 engraving 'Over London-by Rail' captured the contemporary anxiety, picturing a train steaming atop a viaduct above uniform rows of soot-blackened back-to-back houses. Doré's was one voice amongst many concerned that cities represented objectionable and unsanitary places in need of reformation.⁷

Paradoxically, the railway companies courted this popular impression in their own advertising strategies around the turn of the century. In striving to make their country destinations and seaside resorts as attractive as possible, advertisements diversely described and pictured cities as dour, dirty, unwholesome and responsible for the stress, unhappiness and ill-health synonymous with modern living. The aim was not only to make customers long for holiday time, but also encourage them to rationalise the expenditure as providing an essential, restorative respite. Whilst pictorial posters displayed coastal and countryside locales as bright, clean and airy, towns were characterised by smoking chimneys and identical houses, illustrated in dismal, grimy tones. The Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway advertised its services as a route to the south coast on the 1912 poster 'From Gloom to Sunshine': the impression of transition was supported by an illustration of sullied roofs and smokestacks at the top of the design, juxtaposed to the sunny south coast at the bottom.⁸ A poster released by the Great Eastern Railway for the 1913 summer season communicated the contrast via the figure of a well-dressed man who left the murky dullness of London to emerge into the golden sunshine of the sunny east coast by taking a 'step in the bright direction'.⁹ This message was reflected in many guidebook introductions as editors asked potential customers to consider how wearying and unhealthy life in the great cities was, how uncondusive to any proper degree of rest and recuperation.¹⁰ The modern advances and lifestyles which had initially attracted people to cities were presented as an artificial way of living, in opposition to the richer and more emotionally fulfilling reality available at the end of the railway track. Britain's railways cast themselves in the positive role of helping millions of

holidaymakers escape this everyday existence. The value of advertising urban areas in encouraging discretionary travel was therefore very much in their negative implications. Any contrary appeal to take a trip in the opposite direction therefore meant challenging the companies' own carefully crafted rhetoric.

Certainly, in the numerous debates and discussions on the nature of railway and destination advertising in the period, the movement of leisure seekers was considered very much to be one way.¹¹ At the GWR, no detailed accounts were given concerning the particular requirements in advertising urban areas to the discretionary market. This was despite the fact that the GWR's inaugural volume of *Holiday Haunts* contained a considerable number of large towns and cities, many of which also received accompanying photographs. Unlike the poster views which dwelt on unspecified street scenes and anonymous skylines, the photographs predominantly displayed the essence of cities as located in key buildings, famous streets and historic monuments. They were most likely intended to encourage viewers to overlook their assumptions about a town's uniformity or supposed capacity to excite, and find value in markers of British history. In this sense, the GWR's appeal aligned with other contemporary publications sold as city guides. Photographs in the Ward and Lock pictorial guides, for example, presented single buildings cropped from their urban context. Although this served to celebrate the buildings as unique and important sights, it was also partly done out of the necessity, to play down comparatively unattractive sights. Gilbert describes how the 1898 edition of *Pictorial and Descriptive Guide to London* even included comments on the challenges of capturing appealing imagery amongst London's vast cityscape.¹² What to photograph, and what could be considered representative, were more perplexing considerations in comparison to seaside resorts which could be captured from the cliff or beach, or the rural retreat photographed from a nearby hill.

Many guidebooks explored the history of towns and cities through these buildings, but this idea of the past was qualitatively different to that which characterised the treatment of the countryside. Whereas in rural locations the GWR focused on the timeless practices of village labourers and the survival of local customs, urban imagery was concerned more with famous landmarks, seats of power and exceptional structures. The city of Chester, towards the far extremity of the GWR's northern reach, represents a case in point. In the 1906 edition of *Holiday Haunts* a photograph of Chester's Bridge Street was presented for the viewer's inspection



Fig. 5.1 'Chester, Bridge Street', *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1906). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

(Fig. 5.1). Although it featured recognisable elements of a city thoroughfare, it was presented as no ordinary street scene. The photograph focused on the timber-built, covered walkways known as Rows, which were unique to the city. The accompanying text sought to educate the viewer about the curiosity of the Rows which, with their origins in the medieval period, were said to mark the 'great gulf between the present and the times that have passed away'.¹³ The scene was sparsely populated by a handful of shoppers and shopkeepers who peered out from doorways, and represented an attempt to display this particular section of the Rows in its fuller context. Showing the elevated Rows set against a modern street scene nevertheless emphasised the curiosity of this feature as an ancient survivor. Its everydayness to local inhabitants might also have been interpreted by contemporary tourists as an opportunity to experience the Rows in an authentic manner. It is impossible to tell for certain whether, by just showing the exterior, GWR publicists sought to encourage the potential

holidaymakers to want to go inside and explore the Rows for themselves. However, in 1910's *Holiday Haunts* the view was completed as the company offered a detailed photograph taken from the inside in 'Chester – The New Rows'.

Chester's key attractions were also listed as comprising its grand cathedral, gabled and timbered houses and Roman walls, and similar inventories were specified for other cities which were presented as the locus of British history. Oxford was claimed to rank alongside Rome as a city of palaces, and Bath was praised for its 'unusually grand and imposing' churches, monuments, gardens and 'stately thoroughfares', which afforded it a proud position amongst the cities of Europe. Such proclamations were doubtless made with a view to enticing those amongst the domestic market who were sufficiently wealthy to contemplate visiting Europe's historic capitals, but interest could also be found in less famous locales. As in the countryside, photographs containing interesting and unusual elements, such as the large timber frames of the Rows, relied on a degree of cross-referencing between destinations so that readers unfamiliar with the landmark could appreciate its significance. Shrewsbury was described in 1912's *Holiday Haunts* as 'a very picturesque old-world town, of great historical and antiquarian interest, with narrow irregular streets, medieval timber-built dwellings, and the remains of an old Benedictine Abbey'¹⁴ The photograph selected to embody this interest showed the timber facades of Ireland's mansions, built in the sixteenth century for the wool merchant John Ireland. Rising high above the sparsely populated street scene below, the stately appearance of this structure was meant to encapsulate the 'old-world'. However, unlike Chester, in this case the guide did not elaborate upon the provenance of the building or its significance to the tourist who ventured there. As in the countryside, certain photographs were intended to be understood as representative of the old and grand, and speak for the town as a whole. In Shrewsbury's case, this was enhanced as the photographer captured the building in full and also buildings further down the street which featured a similar construction. Equally, however, this could also have represented an attempt to encourage would-be travellers to seek out things they found interesting and find out more about them, as opposed to satisfying this curiosity entirely through the guide. The GWR after all believed its customers to be inquisitive and educated, and by leaving some things to the imagination GWR publicists probably considered that they could better engender the spirit of travel.

London was not included as a destination in the inaugural *Holiday Haunts*, either in text or image, which is further indicative of who the GWR saw as this guide's chief market around this time. However, the capital swiftly came to feature prominently: indeed, 1910's volume claimed that 'No Holiday Guide would be complete without mention of London – in some respects the foremost holiday haunt of the whole world'.¹⁵ Unlike the other photogravure sections in this volume, which displayed one large or two smaller photographs to a page, the photographs of London's landmarks were cropped to enable three, and on the next page four, views to be accommodated. This enabled the GWR to include more of the important scenes and buildings described in the text and anticipated by tourists, to match the assertion that 'London contains as much that is vitally interesting as any half-dozen cities put together'.¹⁶ This exclusive layout also served to create a busier visual experience reminiscent of exploring the sights of a major city. The views themselves were, however, very straightforward and typical of the styles present in earlier viewbooks. They showed Hyde Park Corner, Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, the Houses of Parliament, the National Gallery and Trafalgar Square, and a photograph looking out across the Thames towards Tower Bridge. A photograph of the Great Western Royal Hotel at Paddington station completed the set, an attempt to raise the company's own landmark amongst the more venerable structures. The two-view-per-page format was returned to in subsequent years, but the chief subjects remained, being rotated to accommodate other notable points of interest. *Holiday Haunts* offered a revolving gallery of world-renowned monuments intended to illustrate the capital's pre-eminence, presenting the sort of views that tourists should endeavour to capture for themselves to prove that they had 'done' the city.

The shots and layout of views such as those described above were characterised by their orderliness. The GWR's photographic strategy relied on rigorous selection of sites and sights, but also parallel processes of restriction and concealment. As with the photographs intended for lovers of the picturesque, the GWR's advertising staff worked to minimise the viewer's exposure to what they perceived to be the more contested elements of the built environment, for instance by eschewing crowds and traffic in street scenes. The presence of these elements, though accurate and authentic, was likely to have been deemed too disorganised and chaotic in contrast with the GWR's carefully arranged parade of structures. The company also resisted focusing closely on the sorts of characters who could be encountered in and around these locations. As with the guides of Murray and

Baedeker, which even warned readers against engaging with such people who could well turn out to be pick-pockets, imposters or tricksters,¹⁷ the GWR was likely worried about generating negative connotations associated with crowds. Visual markers with the potential to evoke memories of the everyday were largely obscured in the GWR's vision unless they were unavoidable, but so too were popular and prestigious city attractions such as department stores, theatres and orchestras, which were instead relegated to a mention in the accompanying text. Informing the gaze by reducing it to a number of key representations which should be seen, photographic content was arranged to speak of a higher value and purpose to the city, to which the whole was supposed to conform by extension.

Yet there was a disconnect between such orderliness as seen through the photographs and the atmosphere remarked upon in the introduction. In the 1910 edition of *Holiday Haunts*, London was described as possessing a beauty of its own: 'Its parks and palaces, its leafy boulevards, and the gaiety and colour of its street life all combine to make it one of the most pleasant cities. Without the ordered symmetry of Berlin, lacking the arranged attractiveness of Paris, our wonderful capital yet possesses a beauty which is ever changing, elusive and delightful'.¹⁸ Although the photographs could be judged to have been ever changing, if the same customer purchased the guide in consecutive years, the visual content provided the antithesis to these statements in its arranged sights offered as the accessible essence of the capital. The GWR grappled with the widely-felt challenge of deciding upon universally accepted photographic representations of the city, and arguably struggled to match the romantic and luminous descriptions of the guidebook text with the reality offered by photographs.

Showcased together in the same guide, the key city buildings and streets were instead used to build up an imagined visual vocabulary of city life which was rooted more in history, ceremony and commemoration than contemporary everyday living. The GWR encouraged potential travellers to look beyond their assumptions, and find value in a past which to the everyday citizen remained invisible but was nonetheless presented to speak of the enduring character of the place. In doing so, company publicists fell back on tried and tested techniques, drawing on the popularity of its existing narratives and established trends in guidebook literature from the previous century, which included cities as part of Grand Tours. Further indication as to how the GWR hoped such guides would be used can be gleaned from the additional services offered by the company. In 1907, the

GWR inaugurated a 30hp sightseeing motor car, which ran from Paddington station on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Sightseers were accompanied by a lecturer who pointed out principal objects of interest along the route,¹⁹ and similar tours were subsequently offered in the Midlands. Such messages would likely have found a ready interest amongst those engrossed by a very particular contemporary fashion; a veritable ‘pageantitis’, as described by Deborah Ryan. Pageants told the story of a town through its environment, and were usually performed in the vicinity of the most significant local landmark. These were popular events, not just amongst the local population who participated in their planning and performance, but also the large crowds of outsiders who came to watch.²⁰ The craze reached its height with the 1911 Festival of Empire and its key feature, the Pageant of London. The GWR’s guides contributed to this popular sense of ceremony in the presentation of key buildings as apparent witnesses to history.

Whilst a domestic audience keen on fulfilling their desire for pageantry was one potential target market for the GWR, the company also began to reconsider its appeals to customers abroad. Before 1900, the foreign market was largely untapped by the GWR; word of mouth and the presence of some exported publications constituted the limit of the company’s efforts to grow demand. However, the turn of the century marked a reassessment of these efforts as specific calls became more elaborate and persuasive, with dedicated sections as part of the main guidebook as well as the release of *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* in 1905. One group stood out in particular: the GWR was especially vociferous in its appeals to American tourists. In 1907, the GWR established publicity offices in New York and Toronto to field enquiries, arrange tickets and distribute literature, including 1905’s *Places of Pilgrimage for American Travellers*, a small guide which married lyrical prose with ‘old-fashioned’ imagery.²¹ As the name suggested, potential tourists were cast as pilgrims who were offered the opportunity to reconnect with their ancestral homes.²² ‘Ancestors’ could be felt at many places, be this in Shakespearean Stratford, amongst the Royal Palaces or in the charming and historic street scenes. Oxford was described in *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* as a ‘stately metropolis of British letters, a ‘formidable rival to London itself’. The accompanying photographs looked out across the city’s spires and towers before taking the reader on a ‘tour’ of specific sites including Oriel College, Christ Church, Magdalen College and, further afield, Blenheim Palace. It made suggestions of additional books on Oxford’s colleges and churches to undertake a ‘profitable and pleasurable

exploration of the sites and scenes of this wonderful city'.²³ Bath was introduced in a similar fashion, although in this case historic illustrations of the baths and theatre rounded out the visual component. In appealing to this group, the GWR would no doubt have valued photography's ability to offer realism and proof that what was sought by these pilgrims could be found on their travels. In this sense, the guidebooks operated like the grand tour guides, inspirational rather than aspirational by providing a concise list of sights to see. With their often extensive commentaries, the guides would also likely have served a purpose beyond simply selecting the place or region to visit but being useful on the holiday as well.

Yet the fact that these guides presented readers with engravings, maps and reproductions of historic paintings in addition to the photographic focus on structures is additionally revealing. *Historic Sites* (1905), for example, opened with an illustration of 'Beaufort Buildings' on an off-shoot of the Strand, 'as they appeared in the days of Pope and Addison (1704)',²⁴ and contained an illustration of General Oglethorpe, founder of the State of Georgia and Oxford alumnus, and paintings of the Old Bath Theatre and the King's Bath as it appeared around 1770. Their inclusion and, in the case of Bath, dominance in terms of visual content, suggests that photographs were considered insufficient tools alone through which to construct the sort of place narratives which the GWR thought necessary to entice and compete. The provision of relics and scenes from past centuries was likely seen to better bring the textual narratives to life and give them colour. Although buildings could serve as the significant markers and cornerstones of history, photographs of their exteriors were insufficient to illustrate what went on in and around these buildings. Indeed, elsewhere in the GWR's rhetoric place was offered as more than the sum total of its physical features: local characters buttressed the company's countryside claims, but the potential customer could read about these and see them, whereas in the case of towns and cities Roman, Tudor and Elizabethan ancestors were left to the imagination.

The GWR was not unique in its appeals beyond the domestic market, and many of the other railways with termini connecting significant ports constructed their own appeals. As early as 1890, the LNWR's *Greetings to Ye American Voyagers* was presented in a medieval pastiche and featured Shakespearean quotations on the cover. It offered the inspiration to travel as well as more practical considerations, which included educating the traveller in some of the more immediate and quirky differences which Americans would notice after they had landed. This was replicated in the company's

other publications, such as the more prosaic, ‘Information for Ocean Passengers’, which combined some historic imagery with information about how to navigate the island and secure accommodation. In neither this nor the GWR’s offerings were the messages confined to the urban landscape: as in Chap. 3, there was a mysterious charm about venturing into moorland or rugged Wales. But urban areas were offered as possessing the right balance of amenities, historical attractions and travel links. They would have been an important stopping-off point to fill photograph albums with shots of a different kind geared to collection and veneration of the past.

* * *

In some cases, the popularity of Britain amongst foreign tourists was even used to ask domestic customers to reconsider their holiday plans, displaying a presence of mind and intricacy of overlap which characterised the forward-thinking mentalities in this era (as well as perhaps an ingrained railway attitude of efficiency and value for money). Certainly, such an aspiration was made explicit in the work of the London and North Western Railway, which released *The British Isles for British Tourists* in 1909. The foreword to this guide mused as to whether ‘the practical testimony of swarms of visitors from elsewhere may well convince the British public that the said Isles are worth seeing – even by those who live in them’.²⁵ GWR publicists also included photographs of American passengers arriving in Britain in *Holiday Haunts*, and it cannot be discounted that these were selected to help lend a sense of grandeur to taking a holiday in Britain rather than venturing abroad.

‘THE MOST FASCINATING HOLIDAY CENTRE IN THE WORLD’

The First World War enforced a reconsideration of the city’s opportunities for diversion and relaxation. Travel restrictions meant that people were instead invited to explore locales closer to home as a substitute for holidays further afield. Articles in the daily press offered a light-hearted take on the disappointing situation, drawing upon the potential positives of not having to deal with packing, travel anxieties or the customary melancholy of returning home.²⁶ Others reported on the growing craze for spending time in gardens and allotments, and the Londoners discovering their city in ‘new ways’ whilst enjoying afternoon ‘Dickens rambles’.²⁷

War also altered the conception that the urban environment had to be dour and stressful, as the desire to remedy persistent urban problems and create homes fit for war heroes took hold. The 1918 Tudor Walters Report gave government approval to the enduring calls for open spaces and garden suburbs.²⁸ Elsewhere, urban regions, like their coastal counterparts, experienced the incursion of modern architecture as investment in cities brought avant-garde buildings and exhibitions which were feted as beacons of modernity. The inexorable rise of the motor car helped to alter urban landscapes in different ways, requiring the addition of new street furniture and engendering the spatial segregation of city zones. Motor cars also provided a new way to experience the city at speed, and added to the characteristic urban hurry.²⁹ The 1930s marked a blossoming of town and city promotion as the 1931 Local Authorities (Publicity) Act gave general municipal advertising powers to non-resort towns and cities for the first time, although this only applied to overseas publicity, and was channelled through the Travel and Development Association.³⁰ Nevertheless, this provided a fillip to promotional mindsets as regional publicity bodies were created and the issue of fashioning particular urban and regional identities was considered more prominently.

The number of guidebooks to British cities, and especially London, increased during the interwar years, as did the ways of representing them photographically. Deriu has noted the swelling variety of genres, subjects and viewpoints, including scenes of work, street traffic, night scenes and aerial views in addition to the traditional focus on monuments and buildings.³¹ New tastes altered the view: Gilbert suggests that guidebook editors by and large heeded trends in popular photography, moving to include scenes which emulated the snapshots taken by tourists. Panoramas taken from rooftop level were, for instance, replaced by scenes of hustle and bustle which had appeared infrequently in earlier guides.³² In an interview in *Advertiser's Weekly*, the photographer Geoffrey Gilbert explained his methods for acquiring visual material for the Batsford photo-guides to European cities. Gilbert spent on average ten days photographing each city and, far from facing a difficulty of achieving good shots, struggled to decide what to leave out. For him there were many 'scoops' to be had in the everyday life of a large city. Gilbert believed that the travel photograph should make the viewer feel like they had been there, and to lend a sense of proximity and spontaneity he endeavoured to 'take city and citizens together', until his subjects realised that they were being photographed and the effect was ruined.³³ The availability of aircraft after the First World

War gave rise to a vogue for aerial photography, which offered an entirely new impression of the city from a hitherto unappreciated vantage point. Aerial views represented an onward step in the drive to make the cityscape legible as a whole.³⁴ *London from Aloft* (1928) was one of the first guide-books to be composed primarily of aerial photographs, but through the work of specialist companies such as Aerofilms, many other publishers, including some members of the Big Four railways, were able to make use of this fresh and different perspective.³⁵

The GWR incorporated such new visions tentatively and sporadically at first. On the whole, promoting cities and towns visually in the guides of the 1920s continued their ‘museumification’,³⁶ acting as a catalogue for touring the city and ‘curating’ it in David Michalski’s words.³⁷ Urban scenes continued to rely on photography’s ability to record clearly and precisely the interesting sites as inspiration for prospective travellers. These were to be admired and revered, a reading assisted by the inclusion, for example, of London’s landmarks amongst the first pages of the annual *Holiday Haunts*. The GWR continued to offer straightforward tourist scenes; in London, of Westminster Abbey, Hampton Court and Somerset House and the Embankment; in Birmingham, a profile view of Birmingham’s Romanesque City Hall; and for Oxford, an elevated panorama of the city’s spires and steeples.³⁸ The company’s efforts in this regard were roughly comparable to those of its competitors for, as suggested in Chap. 2, the railways largely agreed upon the sort of sights which would appeal to potential customers, as well as the best ways to present them. The 1927 edition of *Holiday By LMS* included a photograph of the Houses of Parliament captured from across the Thames, the stately grandeur of the landmark being contrasted to the simple wooden rowing boats below the bank where the photographer stood. ‘London, Tower of London and Tower Bridge’ captured both structures, but whilst the detail of the former could be picked out in the middle distance, a blurred and shadowy rendering of Tower Bridge gave it a contrasting ethereal presence. The Southern Railway’s (SR) 1927 edition of *Hints for Holidays* provided an almost identical collection of subjects and perspectives, including the Tate Gallery, the Houses of Parliament again photographed from the opposite bank of the Thames, the Tower of London (once more looking towards Tower Bridge in the distance), St Pauls Cathedral and the British Museum. Each illustrated a section of text which provided background details to the principle buildings, as well as information about a

variety of minor sites, including churches, museums and parks, which might satisfy the curious traveller set on venturing deeper into the city.

The 1931 edition of *Holiday Haunts* was proclaimed the ‘new’ version for several reasons,³⁹ and it included an entirely different vision of London life which would have been appreciated by Geoffrey Gilbert. That year’s section for the capital began with the full-page photograph ‘Feeding the Sparrows in Hyde Park’ (Fig. 5.2). It captured a range of characters and focused on their reactions as they witnessed the scene, rather than the sparrows or parkland. Young and old leaned in, mesmerised by the display; a boy and a bespectacled businessman paused further back to watch, and in the centre of the photograph an elderly man, bearded and with well-worn coat and hat, stood with his arm outstretched as a bird alighted on his hand. Their relaxed posture, and the fact that none of the participants

Fig. 5.2 ‘Feeding the Sparrows in Hyde Park’, *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway 1931). National Railway Museum/ Science and Society Picture Library



regarded the photographer, creates a sense of proximity and unstructured spectacle which suggested an authentic view of citizens enjoying the city. Although this commonplace and unordered scene of human interest represented a complete departure from the ‘museumification’ of former years, on the opposite page the reader was nevertheless treated to the more traditional views of Tower Bridge and Admiralty Arch.

But in time, even the more standard visions developed to offer viewers a different, vicarious experience of the city. The 1933 edition of *Holiday Haunts* displayed ‘Big Ben’, but this time its quotidian context remained uncropped. With the photographer placed on the opposite bank of the Thames, the scene included a bustling view of trams, charabancs, cars and pedestrians crossing Westminster Bridge. The iconic monument was therefore contrasted with the everydayness of the city passing below. The 1936 edition of *Holiday Haunts* forwarded a similar impression but from a different perspective. The guide opened with an aerial view looking down on Tower Bridge as the traffic processed across it in orderly lines and a small flotilla of boats passed underneath. Providing a view which opened out to reveal the local vicinity, the photograph showed, on one side of the Thames, the Tower of London and, on the other side closest to the viewer, the smoking chimney of a riverside factory. This suggestion of a city of contrasts was a prominent theme in both text and image in these later years. The introductory text to London and the Southern Counties section in 1938’s *Holiday Haunts* proclaimed the great virtue of London to be its ‘combination of liveliness with homeliness’, where the visitor would spend nights in the West End sampling entertainments without peer except for perhaps New York, and their days piecing together London’s history.⁴⁰ The same volume included a photograph of Mansion House, the official residence of the Lord Mayor of London, viewed from across the top of a traffic jam of double decker buses seen at a busy intersection. The imposing Palladian architecture clashed with the curved superstructure of the 1930s’ vehicles, and this was further emphasised by the layout and framing of photographs which, by this time, has been modernised. ‘The Mansion House’ was tilted through 40 degrees along with the other views on the page, showing a distinctly contemporary framing of this historic building.

As was customary, most of the Big Four railways updated their appeals within a few years of each other. The LNER experimented with a busier aesthetic in some of its London photographs: The short guide *London* (1930) featured populous views taken at Charing Cross, Aldwych and

Piccadilly Circus, supplied by the Photochrom company and the Topical Press Agency. The company's all-line publication *The Holiday Handbook* of 1932 also featured several aerial shots, mainly of cathedrals, credited to Aerofilms Ltd, including an atmospheric view of Edinburgh from the air, credited to the photographer and pilot Alfred George Buckham. The scene was broken up into three sections with Edinburgh castle in the foreground, surrounded by the sprawling cityscape which extended out to the distant hills. The middle section captured an expanse of sky, in which a biplane wheeled high above the city. Further above lay a bank of glowering clouds, and the effect was to capture the city in its geographical context whilst also giving a sense of scale. The SR, by contrast, offered an interesting interpretation of these busier images and who might be interested in them: the company quoted the old English proverb that 'Change is as good as a holiday', stating that many whose lives were spent for the greater part in rural surroundings would find London a pleasant alternative so essential for the maintenance of health.⁴¹

Whilst earlier GWR guides were characterised by buildings in a parade of orderliness, there appears to have been a movement towards letting viewers make up their own mind about their significance. 'The Empire's Timepiece' (1938) represents an interesting case (Fig. 5.3). In this example, the photographer adopted an unusual perspective, looking up to the Houses of Parliament clock tower at an extreme angle to capture it juxtaposed to the bronze statue of Boadicea and Her Daughters. The First World War had not led to the death of imperialism, but had helped to change the face of it. Popular imperialism aligned around a pride in the nation and its connections with empire.⁴² In many guides, London was presented as the 'home' of empire.⁴³ In this context, 'The Empire's Timepiece' might be read as addressing imperial concerns in the popular market, an attempt to inspire pride in the nation or reference militaristic conquest via the inclusion of the war chariot. However, the introductions to London in the annual volumes of *Holiday Haunts* throughout the 1930s argued that it was 'more than the hub of the greatest Empire that has ever been: it is the concentrated essence of the centuries, and epitome of British history'.⁴⁴ It is therefore impossible to conclude for certain whether the focus on empire was GWR's paramount consideration in this photograph. Indeed, interpreted in light of the text, it may have represented an attempt to capture together ancient and modern symbols of the nation's history, a novel, for the GWR at least, way of representing the 'essence of centuries' by including prominent visual references from the

Fig. 5.3 ‘The Empire’s Timepiece’, *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1938). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library



nation’s past and present. The drive to inspire contrasting and all-encompassing readings more generally is discussed with reference to guidebook text below. Whilst the GWR commonly expected viewers to draw particular conclusions, faced with the struggle to effectively represent the city visually the company moved to more ambiguous compositions which nevertheless continued to draw on symbols which already held established cultural connotations, but were framed in different ways.

Whilst updated guidebook content encouraged readers to regard the towns and cities depicted in new ways, historic and ceremonial visions remained prominent, likely in recognition of the escalating importance of the foreign market. The 1933 edition of *Holiday Haunts* contained a wide-angled view of Buckingham Palace and the changing of the guard. The ceremony of this military duty was a popular sight to behold for visitors to the capital of all backgrounds, and 1936’s edition confirmed

this popularity with an even wider cut of the shot, which incorporated the crowds assembled to witness this spectacle. That edition also featured the GWR's take on the coveted tourist view of the mounted 'Sentry at Whitehall'. Each was a unique part of London's spectacle, and by the end of the 1920s the GWR's New York office was distributing examples of this pageantry to a list of over 1000 agents.⁴⁵ In 1930, it dealt with some 8000 public enquiries per month in the high season.⁴⁶ The *Great Western Railway Magazine* gave periodic updates on the importance of this foreign business for the company and the British economy as a whole. By 1935, it was noted that there had been a particular increase in the number of foreign visitors to Great Britain. The official returns showed that during July, the peak period, Britain received 54,362 holiday and 7337 business visitors, making a total of 61,699 as against 53,594 for the corresponding month the year before. These figures did not include the numerous week-end visitors from France and Belgium, who travelled without passports. Of special interest to the GWR was the fact that American visitors landing at Plymouth in July totalled 3400, an increase of 821 over the previous year. It reported the Board of Trade's estimate that the average expenditure of business and holiday visitors was £30 per head; therefore, up to the end of July the value of Britain's foreign visitors amounted to £5,645,370.⁴⁷ Tourists were seen to want particular impressions, summed up in an open letter to American visitors published in *The Times*:

*Great Britain sends you an open invitation to come and
see her infinite variety of scenery, her ancient cities,
and her literary and historic shrines.*⁴⁸

The Big Four railways competed fiercely for this market, and although the appeals in the guidebooks operated along similar lines, the companies each claimed to give access to the most interesting scenes. The historic towns and cities along the GWR's system, including Shrewsbury, Leamington Spa, Bath and Chester, were well represented. The GWR also updated and re-released *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* in 1924. It even used the impact of war to argue for the superiority of Britain as a destination for American travellers compared to France: the revised introduction noted that the world conflict had given rise to new sites and scenes of historic interest 'but not in England, which, with the exception of air-raids and some minor bombardments from the sea, suffered little from shot and shell'.⁴⁹ It continued to term American visitors 'pilgrims', and

cast their search as very much embedded in looking: 'As you pass through the streets of modern Exeter, there's something which meets the eye at every turn which enables you to conjure up visions of the age in which the Pilgrim Fathers set out on the voyage from Plymouth to lay the foundations of the New England States'.⁵⁰

But despite the presence of updated views, when browsing the guides the contemporary reader may still have been aware of a disjuncture between the photographic narratives and those propounded in the text. Although it is impossible to reconstruct the viewing experience, or the contrasting impressions which the myriad purchasers of these guides may have taken from their visual material, those who gave the guides more than a cursory glance may have been aware of this disconnect at a number of places. As above, the colour and vibrancy of the city had long been referenced as something to behold, over and above its more staid reputation for dullness and uniformity. In *Enjoying England: A Book about an Enchanted Island*, published by the LNER in 1931, B.L. Warde reflected on this explicitly when describing the 'crimson-cloaked Guardsmen, crimson buses, crimson pillar-boxes for your post cards'.⁵¹ Such a vivid picture was one which the accompanying photographs could not help but fail to live up to.⁵² Warde, who cast himself as 'an American in London', deemed it to be 'a fantastic world, full of brave echoes of the past. Full of unbelievable castles and cathedrals, of inns and lanes and villages that seem as brightly unreal as a romantic stage-setting ... where the scarlet pageant of Romance sweeps so unashamedly through the smart procession of modern fashionable life'.⁵³ By comparison with the photographs, the guidebook text sought to be as all-encompassing as possible, directing the viewer towards certain topics and points of interest, but ultimately allowing them to make up their own minds about what they wanted to see or do. Like Warde, *Holiday Haunts* described a similar coming together of history and contemporary living. In 1936, its introduction to London claimed that it was: 'Full of beauty, life, colour, and interest, with the ever enthralling ebb and flow of humanity against its vast background of history and legend ... the most fascinating holiday centre in the world'.⁵⁴ As seen above, an attempt was made to show modern life against the 'background' of history, but this was still comparatively distanced in the reliance on traffic and faceless throngs of pedestrians. Although well-noted in the text, the cast of historic and modern people who populated the great cities, other than those who silently watched the changing of the guard or appeared fleetingly to feed sparrows, were rarely engaged with visually.

Unique views and experiences were referenced by guidebook editors. *Holiday Haunts* gave such views as ‘at sunset when the great dome of St Paul’s seems to hang in the air over a veritable fairyland of spires and turrets’, and ‘the gilt of the early morning when the great palaces of industry are veiled in a thin mist roseated by the mounting sun’.⁵⁵ Despite the traditional views offered in 1927’s *Holiday By LMS*, the introduction to London creatively placed it as a ‘mental health resort’, ‘instead of mineral springs, sea-air and sea-water, cornfields and meadows, woods and forests, hills and dales, we have all that is best in music, drama, opera, painting, sculpture, literature. London will do for the mind what a change of air at an ordinary health resort effects for the body’.⁵⁶ *Holiday Haunts* also reflected on how elusive London was: ‘There is nothing more alluring to the human race than the unattainable, and it is this characteristic which makes London the most enduringly beloved city in the world ... No one can ever wholly grasp all of its treasures’.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, in an attempt to help potential customers do just that, or believe that they could, the railways increasingly turned to the artist’s brush in conjunction with the photographer’s lens.

‘THE PART THE POSTER PLAYS IN ADVERTISING’

In 1927, the LMS released a list of its most popular posters, ranked in terms of numbers sold to the general public. The results, reported in *The Times*, are somewhat surprising. Although Paul Henry’s ‘Connemara’ was the clear leader, second and third place were occupied by Maurice Greiffenhahn’s poster ‘Carlisle’ and Mr A. Talmage’s ‘Aberdeen’ respectively. Amongst the designs to have sold over two hundred copies were posters of Edinburgh, by George Henry, Stirling, by Sir D.Y. Cameron, and Grangemouth Docks, by Norman Wilkinson.⁵⁸ Whilst one might have expected landscapes or even popular resorts to have been the most desirable, the list was instead dominated by industrial and urban subjects. However, this does not tell the whole story. Each of the artists had reworked the conventional city image in these pictorial posters. ‘Carlisle, the gateway to Scotland’, showed nothing of the town itself and was instead represented by a portcullised gateway looking out towards a rough road which led to distant mountains. In the foreground, a resplendent knight of old mounted on a white steed paused ready to make this journey. ‘Aberdeen’ showed the city nestled neatly in hilly countryside, and ‘Stirling’ focused on the castle. We must, however, treat the result with a further

degree of caution: a relatively small number makes it an imperfect indicator, and it does not reveal whether these designs were purchased for their unusual subject matter, or simply because, produced by Royal Academicians, they were highly prized as works of art in their own right. Nevertheless, an unusual and unusually precise quantification of poster popularity, taken together, the views and the list reveal more about that particular company's ideas regarding how famous towns should be represented, and also what the public thought of these designs.

As argued in Chap. 2, the poster's suitability as a railway advertising mechanism had begun to be challenged by some companies in the interwar years. Cuthbert Grasemann, the SR's public relations and advertising officer, held that whilst it had a definitive part to play in every advertising campaign, he would hesitate before advising anyone to put all his advertising appropriation into a campaign where only posters were used.⁵⁹ However, for the majority it remained an important means through which to make services known and communicate the spirit of travel to customers, and the GWR, recognising that it lagged some way behind, sought to better compete in this area by employing well regarded designers such as Frank Newbould.⁶⁰ George Orton appreciated the potential benefits, but also the work needed to make a successful appeal: for a poster to 'go over' it had to be extraordinarily original, as the competition was so keen and the number of posters so numerous.⁶¹ Posters offered appreciable advantages over photographs, chiefly centred on the preference for art over life-likeness: whilst advertising photographers experimented with photomontage and deception in this period, they still faced some challenges which the poster artist's brush could overcome much more easily. Like photographs, poster artists played down the more contested and quotidian elements of the urban environment through their omission, but they were arguably better placed to rework these negative elements into more attractive and positive appeals. Although customers were more discerning than ever, they remained open to persuasion, and could grasp the nature of an intended reading even if they did not appreciate or accept the message.

This was the case for the representation of city characters who were, by contrast, almost entirely avoided in railway advertising photography. During the interwar years, expressive and detailed images of crowds appeared more frequently on railway posters, and these depictions commonly focused in on the individual characters and the way they interacted with one another. Some companies used them to suggest the city's

vibrancy over and above any topographical features: 'London by LNER' by Anna Katrina Zinkeisen (1933) was foregrounded by an assortment of individuals including horse riders, soldiers, nannies with prams, and families. Not only did their diversity attract the eye, but they were also presented in a riot of colour. Zinkeisen's work for the LNER and the SR comprised similarly peopled views of Harrogate, Dover and Southampton Docks where the crowd was the predominant focus. London Transport celebrated the exciting variety on offer in London, encouraging potential passengers to overlook their assumptions about the drab urban environment by offering a counterpoint to the more staid city imagery. It too presented the capital in a rich colour palette; the underground was heralded as showcasing 'Brightest London' via the clothing worn by an assortment of people who used the system. By using people, the GWR combined modernity and traditional perspectives more readily in its posters than in its photographs. Chester by W. Russell Flint (c. 1920s) focused on the city's famous Rows, but populated them with local inhabitants and artisans who blended into the shadows. The poster's bright centre, however, comprised two female tourists, in colourful dresses and cloche hats, who admired the bustle from the street. A similar point was made in the combination of locals and tourists who ascended the main street towards the East Gate in Claude Buckle's 'Historic Totnes' (c. 1930s). In such posters, the GWR ventured into picturing what consuming historic cities might actually look like, as well as the sort of characters one might meet there.

The LMS poster 'London by LMS', designed by Maurice Greiffenhagen (1926), displayed a crowded yet vibrant view of Piccadilly Circus. It was a claustrophobic image of the city, but one which the poster's main characters, the smartly dressed couple on their way to or from an evening engagement, evidently enjoyed. The unusual feature of this poster was that it showed the city by night. The evening setting made for an unusual departure, yet one which allowed for considerable visual interest as well as to suggest the presence of ample, exciting activities and experiences which were either not available or were veiled during the day. The LNER's poster 'London by Night', by Fred Taylor, gave similar prominence to urban hurry, picturing traffic and crowds underneath buildings which were lit up in neon. A disappearing perspective was further suggestive of the 'endless sights' described in the poster's simple text, but this also made a claim about the significance of seeing the city after dark. As well as night views, posters also offered aerial perspectives. The SR's 'Londres' poster, which promoted rail services between Paris St Lazare and London, utilised an

elevated perspective to capture bridges, Big Ben's clock tower and built-up districts. The GWR combined night-time and aerial perspectives in 'London', which captured the famous view looking over the Tower of London towards Tower Bridge. The height of the viewer's perspective made it reminiscent of the scenes captured from aeroplanes, but the artist's brush meant that more intricate details could be worked with and highlighted to the viewer. The GWR's 1936 poster 'London' by Ernest Coffin showed a panorama of key sights, massed ranks of buildings and the snaking Thames, but whilst the buildings were uniformly light grey, green tree-lined avenues, yellow thoroughfares, colourful traffic and the azure Thames made for a curious arrangement between dignified old elements and the colourful and ever changing lifeblood of the city.

Like its photographs, the GWR's poster designs commonly dwelt on particular visions of the past rooted in pageantry and romance. 'Historic Romantic Exeter', by Leslie Carr, exemplifies how the poster artist was more able to bring this history to life and align it closely to the characters and scenes picked out in the text of many guidebooks. Like its photographic counterparts, the poster pictured Exeter's fine medieval buildings, but here they served as a background to a platoon of cavaliers who processed beneath them. The colours were vibrant, the cavaliers' ceremonial dress contrasting with the more muted tones of the buildings. The value of such posters to the GWR can be appreciated in a comparison back to a photograph of the same street. *Holiday Haunts* presented Exeter's Guildhall, both in 1933 and 1936, when this historic building was shown in an unadorned street scene. It lacked the romantic appeal of the poster; further comparison between the two shows that as well as the supporting cast of cavaliers the poster took the street scene back to an earlier time. Whereas in the photograph the adjacent buildings were more modern and featured a flat roof, in the poster some buildings with a pitched roof more evoking a popular idea of Stuart England were included instead. The LNER also became heavily involved in this type of aesthetic, and was praised for its creativity and inventiveness. 'Durham', by Doris Zinkeisen (sister of Anna Katrina) was 'in tenth century style' and six posters by Austin Cooper depicted 'Old World Market Places' in the style of coloured woodcuts.⁶²

CONCLUSIONS

In all reality a holiday which took place in towns and cities would have appealed to a smaller proportion of the domestic market, perhaps those wishing to take a trip to the capital for sightseeing, shopping or visiting the theatre. It is also quite possible that, aside from the extra custom this advertising would bring to their services, the railways viewed the representation of town and cities predominantly in terms of prestige. Certainly in relation to the foreign market each company made claims about which network incorporated the most significant concentration of sites and shrines, and the GWR named a class of locomotives after prominent cities on its system. History, industry and famous cities connoted a permanence and grandeur which could be co-opted for the railways' own publicity purposes.

But for the discretionary market, the GWR put forward a highly selective image of the urban environment across the first half of the twentieth century. The vast proportion of the company's photographic content dwelt almost exclusively on cities' prominent role in British history. This was a facet which could be used to mark them out both from the countryside and seaside destinations, but also recognised the significant interest from foreign customers in experiencing for themselves this storied land. Whilst the photographs were arguably used principally to 'admire the longevity of history', the posters released in the interwar years sought to shape it and bring it to life.⁶³ Whether showing modern-day townspeople interacting with their environment or a supposed scene taken from history, the posters crafted a story about the value of this consumption, and what they lacked in tangibility, they sought to put back in colour and romance. The same is true as the GWR turned to incorporate some of the modern ways of seeing the city, drawing upon contemporary attempts to direct and admire the tourist's point of view. The company's city imagery was far less narrative than its photography elsewhere, but it sought to give customers different perspectives and allowed them somewhat to make up their own mind, something which was emulated in the text which presented myriad places, activities and scenes. Poster content however was more experimental, demonstrating greater attempts to compose cities as a legible whole, as well as providing vignettes which were meant to 'speak' for the city's character.

This chapter has questioned whether the railways perceived photography to be less capable of representing the kinds of scenes and ideas which they thought would be most attractive, in comparison to posters. Although explicit comment to this end is not represented, the example nonetheless demonstrates the importance of linked campaigns and an integrated approach to

promotions which, as Chap. 2 demonstrated, was gaining credence in the 1930s. It is impossible to tell which customers viewed what first, and what was considered the most important means of selling: although the railways had their assumptions and convictions, they likely did not know explicitly. Different mediums offered different tools with which to approach and convince customers and therefore railwaymen were reluctant to rely on one medium alone. The combination of these mediums however built up a rich tapestry of imagery, and in relation to towns and cities served different needs to make them tangible and fantastical. Nonetheless, poster designers, photographers and those responsible for advertising campaigns appear to have agreed upon the central tenets as they attempted to align modernity with history. They aligned around similar subjects, but offered different visual propositions.

NOTES

1. A distinction is made at the outset: this chapter will focus chiefly on inland centres, and the largest in terms of population. In the GWR's case, this meant chiefly London's urban areas, the towns and cities of the Midlands, and the significant ones in Wales. Towns and cities located along the coast offered a different proposition, as did rural centres which operated as gateways to the countryside.
2. *The Railway Gazette*, July 2, 1926, 19.
3. Davide Deriu. "Capital Views: Interwar London in the Photographs of Aerofilms Ltd," *The London Journal* 35, no. 3 (2010): 260.
4. David Gilbert and Fiona Henderson, "London and the Tourist Imagination," in *Imagined Londons*, ed. Pamela Gilbert (Albany, N.Y., 2002), 123.
5. Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth Century Britain: the Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.
6. John Armstrong, "Transport," in *The English Urban Landscape*, ed. Philip Waller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 214–19.
7. Such concerns prompted ideas such as *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, published in 1902, to modify the urban experience. See Robert Kargon and Arthur Molella, *Invented Edens: techno-cities of the twentieth century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 7–21.
8. "The Railway 'Royal Academy,'" *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, July, 1912, 8–10.
9. *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, July, 1913, 5–6.
10. "Do Railways Believe In Advertising?," *Great Western Railway Magazine* (GWRM), April, 1913, 102–03. GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1906), 5.

11. See for instance, "Popularising a week-end resort," *The Advertising World*, February, 1906, 318–22.
12. David Gilbert, "'London in all its glory—or how to enjoy London': guidebook representations of imperial London," *Journal of Historical Geography* 25, no. 3 (1999): 291.
13. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1906), 55.
14. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1912), 429.
15. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1910), 19.
16. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1910), 19.
17. Gilbert, "Guidebook Representations of Imperial London," 288.
18. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1910), 19.
19. "How to See London," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, October 19, 1907, 8.
20. Deborah Ryan, "Staging the imperial city: The Pageant of London, 1911," in *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity*, ed. Felix Driver and David Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 117–133.
21. GWRM, September, 1907, 246.
22. The Introduction to 1905's *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* described, 'Year after years the numbers of Americans of all classes who visit our shores with the object of exploring, with feelings of deep interest and veneration, the historic sites of that eventful past of which they are today the co-heirs and living representatives, is steadily increasing', 5–6.
23. *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* (London: Great Western Railway, 1905), 27.
24. *Historic Sites and Scenes of England*, iv.
25. *The British Isles for British Tourists* (London: London and North Western Railway, 1909), 2.
26. "A Holiday at Home," *The Times*, March 27, 1915, 9.
27. "Holiday At Home," *The Times*, April 5, 1917, 3; "Londoner's Holiday In London," *The Times*, August 16, 1921, 5.
28. J.W.R.Whitehand and Christine Carr, "England's Interwar Suburban Landscapes: Myth and Reality," *Journal of Historical Geography* 25, no. 4 (1999): 483.
29. Michael John Law, "'The Flashy Strings of Neon Lights Unravelling'—Motoring Leisure and the Potential for Technological Sublimity on the Great West Road," *The London Journal* 39, no. 3 (2014): 281–94.
30. Stephen Ward, "Time and Place: Key Themes in Place Promotion in the USA, Canada and Britain Since 1870," in *Place Promotion: The Use of Publicity and Marketing to Sell Towns and Regions*, ed. John Gold and Stephen Ward (Chichester: Wiley, 1994), 64.
31. Deriu, "Capital Views," 260–61.

32. Gilbert, "Guidebook Representations of Imperial London," 291–92.
33. "New Effect is Photographer's Permanent Quest," *Advertiser's Weekly*, June 25, 1936, vi.
34. Deriu, "Capital Views," 260.
35. Deriu, "Capital Views," 261–62.
36. David Michalski, "Portals to Metropolis: 19th-century Guidebooks and the Asemblage of Urban Experience," *Tourist Studies* 4, no. 3 (2004): 203–04.
37. Michalski, "Portals to Metropolis," 204.
38. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1925).
39. See Chap. 2.
40. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1938), 49.
41. *Hints for Holidays* (London: Southern Railway, 1927), 551.
42. John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 8–11.
43. Gilbert, "Guidebook Representations of Imperial London," 279–97.
44. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1931), 44.
45. GWRM, October, 1929, 414.
46. GWRM, June, 1930, 249.
47. GWRM, October, 1935, 560.
48. "American Visitors To Britain," *The Times*, March 18, 1930, 18.
49. *Historic Sites and Scenes of England* (London: Great Western Railway, 1924), 3.
50. *Devon: The Lovely Land of the Mayflower* (London, Great Western Railway, 1923), 1 & 13.
51. B.L. Warde, *Enjoying England: A Book about an Enchanted Island* (London: London and North Eastern Railway, 1931), 9.
52. The LNER did experiment with colour in *The Holiday Handbook*, but almost exclusively in relation to cathedrals, which appeared in a separate photogravure section.
53. Warde, *Enjoying England*, 1.
54. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1936), 44.
55. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1925), 26.
56. *Holiday By LMS* (London: London, Midland and Scottish Railway, 1927), 339.
57. *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1936), 41.
58. "Popular Railway Posters," *The Times*, August 17, 1927, 8.
59. "The Part the Poster Plays in Advertising", *The Railway Gazette*, June 28, 1935, 1271.
60. On GWR interwar poster development see Wilson, *Go Great Western*, 68–76.

61. "Railway Publicity," *The Railway Gazette*, February 14, 1936, 311.
62. "Railway Posters," *The Times*, March 12, 1932, 9.
63. Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth Century Britain: the Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.

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CHAPTER 6

On the Train

Our grandfathers, when they wanted to advertise railway-travel, used the picture of a locomotive. This, to modern eyes, does not seem a very effective way to arouse in the bosom of an observer the desire to be conveyed ... the real subject of every advertisement is not the product but the service that it gives.

(“Picturing the Product,” *The Advertising World*,
September 1924, 550)

For most of the first three decades of the twentieth century, railway advertising to the popular market avoided too-prominent references to operational aspects such as carriages, stations and indeed passengers. During this time, even the locomotive in full flight, for many the iconic image of railway travel, featured relatively sparsely in general holiday advertisements as, in most cases, companies preferred to depict destinations rather than journeys. The reason for this exclusion was commercial, rooted in an impression of customer attitudes. As suggested by an article in *The Advertising World* in September 1924, quoted above, it was felt that pictures of locomotives were tediously familiar. Companies wanted customers to overlook commonly held assumptions or everyday experiences when considering a leisure journey. Furthermore, as the railways still enjoyed a virtual monopoly on travel at this point, picturing what was at the end of the line was

considered more important than what was on it. Despite boasting many famous designs and powerful engines, the GWR was no exception.¹

However, after the late 1920s there was a surprising, and surprisingly swift, change in policy. The GWR began to release promotional photographs, along with books, games and jigsaws, which not only exhibited railway technology but paraded it proudly as part of general holiday publicity. This new branch of railway advertising photography gave prominence to the carriage environment and the service which passengers could expect to receive, crafting an idealised version of how journeys could and should be consumed. The photographs showed graceful and well-mannered passengers dining and relaxing in comfort, attended by exacting and well-presented company officials. They constructed an aspirational vision of the carriage as a setting where friends could meet to chat, laugh, drink and dine in security and comfort whilst being whisked at high speed to glamorous destinations. Where previously the railway carriage had been championed as offering a unique vantage point to observe Britain's diverse landscape as it rushed by, the GWR now also began to turn the gaze inwards, using the carriage window to frame an altogether different 'holiday haunt'.

Travelling inspired various emotions, making passengers feel adventurous, confident and modern, but regardless of the form of transport, it could also be tiring, dreary, anxiety-inducing and irritating if the service performed below par or travelling companions provided unwelcome distractions. Although throughout the first half of the twentieth century passengers were able to experience unprecedented levels of speed, suburbanisation meant that for many travelling by train had become fundamentally *de rigueur*. New forms of transportation offered more thrilling alternatives: uncomfortable at first, with occupants exposed to the elements, rapid strides in comfort civilised the motor car and ascribed it a luxurious and modern image. By the end of the 1930s, select individuals were even able to experience being a passenger in the air. Airlines countered worries about risk and safety by including women in their advertising. Shown mounting the stairs to the aircraft cabin or placidly within it, their reassuring smiles recommended air travel as reliable and comfortable.²

When railway companies held the monopoly on travel, the above considerations did not factor too largely. But intermodal competition and the prestigious image of car ownership forced them to rethink their offerings as well as how they visualised the journey in advertising as part of the holiday experience. Yet it would be a mistake to attribute change to just this admittedly influential factor. Competition from cars might have expedited a reconsideration of rail's operational image, but as this chapter will

show, the GWR had long been aware of a disconnect between passenger wants and requirements, the effect of the popular image of railway travel, and widespread opinions about what the railways could and should offer. For many decades, the GWR professed to provide the 'Acme of Comfortable Travel' (one of many company slogans), but generally, and despite the availability of new technologies and design ideologies which improved carriage conditions, many services still left much to be desired. This was especially so on holiday trains, which were frequently overcrowded or utilised older carriage stock to satisfy demand. Image management and getting to know the passengers therefore became essential in ways not seen before. Drawing upon qualitative research into passenger experiences and grievances, this chapter will firstly analyse what the GWR knew, and what it wanted to know, about who was travelling and their requirements. The sources, including correspondence pages in the *Great Western Railway Magazine*, as well as sessions of the Great Western Debating Society, provide revealing insights into how passengers travelled, their impressions of the experience and levels of service, and how they engaged with the GWR when they felt these fell below an acceptable standard. The correspondence shows how the GWR tried to track and attend to rail's image through formal and informal public relations and advertising, latterly in light of the competing image forwarded by car manufacturers which shifted to emphasise comfort and luxury over reliability and economy.

The chapter then relates the attempts to understand passengers and competition to the development of photographic advertising, and the creation of promotional shots which presented the case for the advantages of train travel.³ It explores the GWR's attempts to safeguard the middle-class holidaymaker as a customer of railway travel by manipulating common notions of speed, luxury and service, as well as shaping a sense of 'experience' and visualising these saleable concepts. The question of 'how to get there' has not featured highly in histories of tourism and holidaymaking despite its undeniably essential role, and by addressing this the chapter reveals how transport providers presented themselves as part of the holiday experience rather than merely facilitators. In examining the GWR's corporate gaze in the context of the service, it demonstrates how passenger requirements were understood and used to inform photographic advertising, as well as how this image was remodelled to suit changing times, tastes and innovations.

KNOWING THE PASSENGERS

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, most railway companies did not consider designing their carriages, much less their locomotives, with attracting passengers in mind. Mainly choosing function over form, the machinery did, however, feature attractive liveries and some attention was paid to fashioning finer artistic details into the mechanical behemoths. Marked improvement came during the 1870s, a period of competition which became known as the ‘comfort revolution’. ‘Comfort’ was perhaps a rather grand description for some of these improvements, which were by no means universal. It took years for adequate heating to be offered beyond first class.⁴ The *British Medical Journal* recorded the persistent criticisms levelled at railways on the elements which posed a serious danger to public health.⁵ Yet by 1900, the GWR had some generally good facilities to show off, as well as some rather more impressive and exclusive offerings such as the enormous carriages known as ‘Dreadnoughts’ after the Royal Navy’s battleships.⁶ These rarely made it into press advertising, however, and when illustrations were used, as in a 1913 advertisement in *The Times*, carriage conditions were ambiguously included alongside lengthier descriptions of the destination. Those wanting to know what a ‘perfectly-appointed’ carriage looked like were left disappointed, and the GWR’s claim to provide the ‘acme of comfortable travel’ received little support. The same was true of other railways which made similar statements; Divall and Shin demonstrate how the Great Central Railway and the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway’s claims to offer comfort at speed received little visual backing.⁷ In all likelihood, this was less to do with ignorance of its value on the part of the companies, but rather difficulties of representing the required level of detail, as well as uncertainty about how to achieve the desired effect. Even in the larger space and better quality paper offered by the GWR’s *Holiday Haunts*, essays on the superlative loveliness of travelling by GWR, such as an extensive panel on ‘Modern Travel Comfort’ in 1908’s volume, were accompanied only by standard halftones of locomotives.

Photography’s initial importance to the railways was rooted in providing a precise visual record of industrial output such as new locomotives and rolling stock,⁸ and the conventions developed here were at first simply replicated in the examples selected to advertise services. In this respect, photography possessed some advantages and some disadvantages over posters and press advertisements, having the potential to provide visual

‘proof’ of new carriages and improvements within, but doing little to entice. Unless it was particularly close up, a common complaint regarding photographic advertising was that ‘much detail that can be clearly shown in a drawing is usually lost in the photograph’.⁹ These difficulties were, however, felt by contemporary car manufacturers as well; reviewing a selection of advertisements which featured motor cars in the natural landscape, one commentator lamented that each one ‘shows the car and background in precisely the same uninspired fashion. No attempt is made to give human interest’¹⁰ Ultimately, only a handful of railway carriage interiors appeared in the GWR’s Edwardian sales publications, and the ones that did also lacked any human interest. The published examples were chosen instead to add visual emphasis to the claims about the luxury of first class, specifically its availability on special express trains, and a peopled aesthetic was likely seen as detrimental for the same reasons it was omitted in photographs of the countryside. Passengers did not want to be reminded of the presence of others. But on the whole, and unlike railway companies in other parts of the world such as Canada,¹¹ the GWR became reticent about using photographs to glorify the company’s infrastructure, and only occasionally featured locomotives set in the landscape. This reserve carried over into the 1920s, as no carriage interior photographs featured whatsoever in the GWR’s chief holiday publications. Instead, the most extensive comment was confined to specialist books for enthusiasts such as 1923’s *The 10.30 Limited*. Priced at one shilling and aimed at ‘boys of all ages’, rather than descriptions of scenery or the charms of seaside resorts, *The 10.30 Limited* gave comprehensive but simple information on modern railway practice.¹² Although popular, this was a niche publication intended to satisfy a rather different interest in the company, but which nevertheless served another useful public relations function. Photographs also featured in short pamphlets released by the Hotels and Catering Department, but, in all likelihood, most ordinary passengers would rarely have come into contact with this branch of promotional imagery.

The mediocre nature of such photographs is surprising given that railway companies came into direct daily contact with their customers. Quantitative data regarding passenger loadings statistics and line patronage may have afforded only rudimentary ideas about how the service was being appreciated, but qualitative feedback gave a very different impression in anticipating and seeking to satisfy passenger wants, as well as helping to deal with occasions when the service was seen to have underperformed. The absence of any significant consumer group representing

railway passengers' concerns meant that interested companies had to develop and rely on their own methods.¹³

Qualitative data took various forms. As well as inviting aggrieved passengers to air their objections publicly, the GWR received a large amount of unsolicited correspondence.¹⁴ From 1922 onwards, the GWR made some of this correspondence public when it inaugurated a section in the company magazine titled, 'From People We Have Pleased'. The aim initially was to showcase evidence of the company excelling itself, intended to improve staff morale and encourage high standards.¹⁵ Some years later, in 1926, the company took the bolder step of including a section for negative comments titled 'From People We Intend to Please'. The purpose of this page was to incentivise staff by requesting they study customer remarks and reflect on their own conduct.¹⁶ The importance of pleasing customers and swiftly resolving any dispute was underlined in a final section, 'People Whom We Intended to Please ... And Have'.¹⁷ These public pages offer a significant sample of the written comments received about conditions for passengers as well as, in some cases, the company's response.¹⁸ Including positive and negative views, they demonstrate a popular view of railway travel and a number of overarching concerns which railway company officials would need to heed when planning campaigns to safeguard travel by rail.

SPEED AND SAFETY

Practically all passengers expected and desired speed and punctuality from the service, and therefore high speed as a means of advertising had been discussed for many years. It also garnered prominent attention in the daily press during the late nineteenth century 'race to the North', when several companies competed fiercely over the speed of their express services between London and Scotland. The 1920s brought a renewed interest in speed competitions and mechanical excellence generally. In 1925, the GWR and London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) exchanged locomotives in a well-publicised test of power and pride, reported upon by the daily newspapers.¹⁹ The construction of new streamlined locomotives around this time took this corporate interest in speed's advertising potential further. Although a favourite strategy of many American railroads, in Britain the LNER and London Midland and Scottish Railway were the chief streamliners.²⁰ The Southern Railway (SR), by contrast, worked to electrify its services, promoting electricity as a cleaner, quicker and more 'modern' way to deliver the service.²¹ Speed or, in the case of streamlining, the impression of speed, was one measure to convince potential consumers

of the capability and excitement of rail travel. Yet on this subject the railways as a whole were cautious. Failing to deliver on promises of very fast services was deemed to be too close to negative advertising.²² Such worries were well-founded as deviation from the timetable brought scathing criticism. One passenger wrote:

It is most interesting ... to read that the GWR has achieved another record run ... But your regular passengers sigh on reading these records and wish that they could arrive something less than 10 min late at their destination.²³

Another letter struck at the heart of speed's promotional value: 'many pounds are spent on advertising ... [but] if the GWR could run these trains to time its patrons would do the advertising'.²⁴ Furthermore, speed did not interest all: *The Times* noted with regards to streamlining that slight differences in construction and performance, which mattered deeply to all railwaymen, were as esoteric to the prospective passenger as a debate on the relative charms of Elizabeth Bennet and Anne Elliot to someone who had never opened a Jane Austen novel.²⁵

Inextricably linked to this was the unquestionable concern with safety. Throughout the interwar years, railway accidents hit the headlines in a sensational manner, their infrequency making the tragedies all the more newsworthy. The GWR's strategy to counteract these stories relied on a good relationship with the press. It immediately released announcements, in newspapers and on the radio, allaying public fears and highlighting the particular causes of certain accidents.²⁶ 'Damage limitation', in modern parlance, was the task of George Beer, a well-connected newsman formerly of *The Times*.²⁷ Safety was mentioned frequently when reporting on carriage improvements such as safer steel construction and fire safety measures, but it rarely appeared prominently in mainstream holiday advertising. Despite enjoying generally good safety records, Britain's Big Four railways rarely advertised these for fear that the mere mention would prompt negative associations. Indeed, the general slogan 'It's *Quicker* and Safer to Travel by Rail' was proposed, and acknowledged as truthful, but never adopted. The abbreviated 'It's Quicker by Rail' was used instead.²⁸

COMFORT, CLEANLINESS AND OVERCROWDING

By far the most common and vociferous passenger complaints concerned the on-board experience. Even travelling first class did not necessarily guarantee a good journey. One passenger wrote to the general manager:

Repeatedly I have complained locally of the wretched accommodation provided for first-class passengers ... The compartments are often dirty and want refitting, while on many days lavatory essentials are altogether absent ... unless your company wish to eliminate first class passengers altogether, at least ordinary travelling comforts must be provided or those now taking first class seasons will take thirds.²⁹

Another, a year later:

This morning I went to see my wife and daughter off to Bournemouth (in wooden coaches) and I should like you to know that I have never seen, in this country, a train in a dirtier state. There was hardly a carriage fit for a lady to sit in, and I had to finish up by putting my wife and little girl into a smoking carriage which was passably clean ... I do not wonder the railway companies are feeling the competition of motor coaches etc when they send long distance trains out in this filthy condition.³⁰

This gentleman did not hold back when referencing the harmful competition; a plea that suggested a degree of desperation, and that the average customer would be quite content to use the railway if the company would at least keep up their part of the bargain. One letter detailed the case when, after a man's vomit had escaped through a window, the same carriage continued to run all day sporting its new decoration.³¹ Automatic carriage washing facilities were unknown before the late 1930s, the arduous duty falling to men with buckets of water and long-handled mops.³² Needless to say, any argument in favour of thrift was met unsympathetically by the majority of passengers.

The use of ageing carriages irritated holiday travellers in particular. Between the late 1920s and early 1930s, holiday traffic tripled with its greatest density concentrated in a three-week period from July to August, most acute at weekends.³³ The age of some carriages, pressed into service due to sheer demand, meant they lacked basic amenities such as lavatories, which were expected of all long-distance services by this time.³⁴ Sometimes passengers had to relieve themselves from windows or in buckets intended for the beach.³⁵ Holidaymakers could be infrequent railway users and therefore more severe in their criticism, believing that the unsatisfactory conditions found at peak times were the norm. The already stressful business of negotiating connections, marshalling luggage and children, was not helped when trains were late or uncomfortable. Overcrowding was a

connected issue, the chief complaint being that paying for a seat did not necessarily guarantee one:

I travelled down from London ... enduring a thoroughly uncomfortable journey. The accommodation was totally inadequate there were insufficient seats for third class passengers and I, like dozens of others spent the greater part of the journey standing.³⁶

Another:

My daughter left London for Bath with an ordinary weekend ticket ... the train arrived at Bristol packed with people standing in the corridors ... my daughter had to stand all the way to Paddington.³⁷

Cartoons produced by the company and sent in by passengers offered a contrasting and light-hearted look at overcrowding, and the 1925 popular history *Brunel and After: The Romance of the Great Western Railway* sought to 'induce philosophy' in those who picked holes in the organisation of the traffic department by comparing the situation in the 1920s to the earliest conditions of rail travel.³⁸ But for many, the grin-and-bear-it approach offered little consolation, especially on a long, and long-anticipated, trip.

The GWR took a rational stance when it reminded the public of the heavy demands on the railways, and asked passengers to consider holidays outside of peak times. In response passengers asked why, when very busy, the railways did not just put on extra services.³⁹ The company defended itself by citing operational and financial considerations: the principal trunk routes already carried as many trains as could be efficiently operated, and purchasing large quantities of additional rolling stock which would only be required at weekends represented a very poor return on their cost.⁴⁰ Occasionally, criticism did lead to direct improvements; one complaint published in the magazine was followed by the editor's comment that the service in question, the 3.40 ex Weston-super-Mare, would be strengthened with extra coaches.⁴¹ This seems to have been one happy resolution amongst many disappointments.

Passengers also reported angry and surly ticket inspectors who harassed customers they believed had the wrong ticket or none at all.⁴² Some employees were merely unhelpful; others were rude. The GWR's company magazine reported the experience of one lady who, having booked her

first-class excursion tickets, went to board the train with her children when a porter yelled, 'Hey! That's a first-class compartment'. When the tickets were produced and the matter resolved the porter explained, 'I'm very sorry madam but there are so many of the riff-raff getting into first-class compartments these days that I have to be careful'.⁴³ The GWR implored its employees to acknowledge their role as ambassadors because, as was broadly recognised since the Edwardian era, even the slightest discourtesy could potentially result in a lost passenger.⁴⁴

FELLOW PASSENGERS

Finally, the behaviour of other passengers was frequently highlighted as detrimental to the on-board experience, but was surprisingly seen as the GWR's duty to mediate. Comments concerning passenger 'habits' in the 1920s and 1930s built on experiences in the unique environment of the railway carriage since the earliest days of railway travel. Schivelbusch, for instance, argues that the nineteenth-century railway carriage 'killed' conversation as people, forced to sit for long periods facing each other, felt increasingly uncomfortable about forced interaction with fellow passengers.⁴⁵ Changing the nature of conversation was just one part of the revolution in social interaction wrought by the railways. Passengers from different social classes were forced to mix at stations and, although segregated in class-defined carriages, many travelling first-class claimed they could hear the neighbouring third-class passengers whooping and hollering further down the train.⁴⁶ The railway carriage was also popularised in the press and fiction as a place where theft and assault was common, particularly with regards to female passengers, although these were comparatively rare occurrences in reality.⁴⁷

The GWR company magazine devoted much attention to passenger 'foibles', and the ways in which otherwise normally behaved people conducted themselves in the carriage. Annoying habits and pastimes, including smoking, eating, loud voices, opening windows, uncontrollable children, coughing and whistling, all drew angry comment.⁴⁸ 'Staking-out' (reserving) seats was a common nuisance,⁴⁹ prompting the company to write in 1918:

the ethics of railway travelling embrace an unwritten law ... whereby the courteous traveller respects the act of another in reserving a seat for a friend ... but the feelings of the courteous traveller are apt to be outraged if he

finds innocent conventions abused and in these days of restricted services and crowded trains it is to be feared that this is often the case.⁵⁰

Yet passengers continued to bend the rules in their favour. After nearly one hundred years the public had developed little sense of how they could ease their fellow passengers' journeys. The GWR encouraged all travellers to be good citizens and respect each other's needs, and when this failed it took a firm line. The company reiterated the legal position that a passenger's ticket entitled them to one seat only.⁵¹ Spitting could lead to fines and court proceedings.⁵² Although the GWR ultimately had little control over a journey spoilt by the actions of other passengers, and believed that it could do little in this matter, it was well aware of the need to subvert the negative images associated with mass travel. Indeed, this explains why passengers were not pictured in railway advertising for so long. Doing so would have reminded discretionary travellers about their negative experiences or presumptions.

When a more direct approach was needed, the GWR interviewed passengers. Interested to hear what the 'man on the street' thought about its services, in 1921 the company's debating society invited ordinary passengers to share their opinions.⁵³ A Mr Salis described how improvements could be made to timetables and the price of tickets, but also the carelessness of staff and the 'smells' in carriages.⁵⁴ The study was repeated in 1934, when a Mr Mount raised criticisms which generally reflected the correspondence from the 'intend to please' pages. He stipulated that carriage interiors 'should be an aesthetic delight, with warmth, light, brightness, freshness, and spotless cleanliness the characteristics'.⁵⁵ Mount also spoke negatively of restaurant cars, and the often substandard quality, freshness and variety of food. Food presentation and those serving it caught Mount's eye, arguing that waiters should wear white jackets, changed daily, to improve the tone of the service. It was made clear that most did not in fact relate solely to the GWR's services, instead indicating where the railways as a whole could improve.

Having been promised the acme of comfortable travel, displeased passengers thought that the companies were either incompetent, disorganised or parsimonious. The result was a poor, and yet perhaps undeserved, impression of the service, which the popular literature released by the railways failed to fully address. This begs the question: when so much was known, why was this information not transferred into the improvement of carriages or advertising during the 1920s? The answer lies in the

culmination of several factors. As seen throughout this book, during this period the destination was key. It was privileged above all else in railway advertising and meant that using the railways was relegated to a supporting role in a number of minor publications. In addition, there was no significant intermodal competition: instead, competition between railway companies for the leisure market lay in convincing customers to travel to different regions where, again, the destination was key. It must also be remembered that passengers were used to railways. We have seen that the GWR was aware of these problems, but the way forward was costly or unclear. Should staff be incentivised? What was the value of gimmicks to reduce the monotony of travel (such as the introduction of radio sets on the Cornish Riviera Express and for which headsets were provided)? The debate about how exactly the passenger experience could be successfully advertised, in print and visually, continued for some time. But the discussion was thrown into sharp relief with the rise of the motor car as a serious competitor.

THE GLAMOUR OF THE ROAD

The challenge from private motor cars was first keenly felt towards the end of the 1920s. From very small numbers of cars on the roads before the First World War, a more democratised car culture flourished afterwards, fuelled by cheaper and more reliable models as well as a burgeoning second-hand market. Models to suit many tastes, uses and budgets offered increased comfort and reliability over the products of yesteryear. The promises made in automobile advertisements encouraged a direct comparison to rail, competing over roughly the same themes of speed, safety and comfort. To play down the negative image of drivers who drove too fast for their capabilities, car advertising now presented power being harnessed deliberately and skilfully. The appeals also equated this power with freedom, as new models were pictured racing down rural lanes, the countryside disappearing in a blur behind. In certain cases, motor manufacturers compared their speed directly to railway locomotives. As well as proclaiming greater luxury, the Jowett Motor Company declared that its latest model could beat the Royal Scot train's London to York time,⁵⁶ even though, as Jowett subsequently admitted, it knew that the Royal Scot did not in fact run to York. Unlike the Big Four railways, much more was also made of safety features in an attempt to attract the respectable middle classes and those in search of their first taste of this new technology. MG

showed that safety and speed were not incompatible in its advertisement 'Safety Fast!', and towards the end of the 1920s a new vogue for streamlining emphasised not just the speed but also the modernity compared to older models.

Comfort and luxury were also well-represented and a key point of emphasis given the reputation of early automobile refinement as rough (exacerbated by the era's poor roads) and susceptible to inclement weather. It was also important for manufacturers of compact models, such as the Austin Swallow, to show that compromising on size did not mean decreased quality. Austin announced 'luxurious interior fittings' and 'deep upholstery', and although its Swallow was a miniscule car (the Austin Seven in disguise), it claimed 'big car bodywork, big car appearance, big car comfort'.⁵⁷ Chrysler's Airflow was a frontrunner of streamlined exterior bodywork, but also emphasised that the comfortable interior allowed for a unique experience: 'riding in the back seat you can read, write, sew or even sleep, at high speeds'.⁵⁸ For the fashion conscious, some manufacturers collaborated with designers to create special editions. The Humber Vogue saloon was billed as 'a car for those who desire individuality without eccentricity ... dignity and exclusiveness'.⁵⁹ Alvis advised people to 'be modern in your motoring',⁶⁰ and Hillman's Wizard was the self-proclaimed 'car of the moderns'.⁶¹ Each made the implicit assertion that rail was outmoded by comparison.

Car advertisements also presented the car as synonymous with holiday time, and forwarded a complementary carefree motoring lifestyle. It was still common practice to store a vehicle during the winter and tax it for six months from March when road conditions were more dependable, meaning that many were predominantly used for summer leisure and holidays. Advertisements described the unique feeling of motoring down sun-dappled country lanes, entirely in charge of one's own destiny. They claimed a car allowed one to get the most out of one's leisure time: the Austin Seven allowed people to find 'a new and better meaning for the word "holiday"', by doing more and going further afield.⁶² Buick owners were 'the people who see the most of the glorious out-of-doors'.⁶³ Advertisements pictured cars and their occupants on their way to the coast, on the beach, and even occasionally amongst the waves. Belsize's 15hp two-seater made tracks through the sand, and the stately Morris Ten-Four Saloon was pictured, slightly out of place, in front of a couple surfing.

As more people took to the roads, between 1924 and 1932 the number of passenger journeys taken on the GWR alone declined by roughly thirty million.⁶⁴ Although in part the result of economic depression, the

alternative option provided by motor coaches and cars undoubtedly played a role. The topic was regularly analysed in the GWR magazine, ranging from passionate defences of rail, to hopeful reassurances and gloomy predictions.⁶⁵ In the 1920s, the GWR responded where possible to the complaints and released a steady stream of articles in its magazine about upgrades, some of which made it into the daily press. However, it was most probably recognised that these were not the right mediums to win this battle. Another way of fighting back was to demonstrate the unique experience offered by rail, chiefly its matchless vantage point for viewing scenery. In this case the GWR's *Through The Carriage Window* (1924) and *Atlantic Coast Express* publications took on additional importance. But some questioned who really offered the sightseeing vehicle *par excellence*.⁶⁶ Regarding shorter journeys, the GWR realised that rail would cease to be a viable competitor as it could not take passengers door to door. Thus the holiday market, and long-distance discretionary travel in general, was the key battleground. The railways would not be beaten easily.

‘THE JOY OF THE JOURNEY’: PICTURING PASSENGERS IN THE 1930s

The initial problem with the response, however, is evident in photograph of the GWR's streamlined railcar. The railcar was the company's only significant foray into streamlined design, and was therefore deemed highly newsworthy by the company. The photograph (Fig. 6.1) is interesting not because it is an exemplary effort, but rather because of the lacklustre outcome. It illustrates some of the difficulties which attended remodelling carriage advertising, especially when passengers were introduced into the scene. There were a number of problems, not least the glazing, which reflected the glare from the sunlight outside and occupied big, blank, uninteresting spaces within the image. Although the company was proud of the view from the carriage window, here it was completely unsatisfactory. Despite not being overly crowded, it is difficult to see all of the passengers and much of the carriage's detail. The photographer's positioning drew the viewer's focus to the rear of the carriage where the individuals were partially obscured and harder to define. The passengers, whilst not appearing overly bored or uncomfortable, did little to convince viewers that this was a journey worth taking. Their facial expressions and



Fig. 6.1 'The Interior of the Great Western Railway Company's New Stream-Lined Rail Car', *The Great Western Railway Magazine*, August 1934. National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

demeanour were passive and the photograph presented the epitome of everyday dullness, totally unsuitable for campaigns which sought to craft adventurous, luxurious connotations aspired to by the GWR. Unsurprisingly this particular view did not feature in the company's large guides or the railcar's official advertising brochure, exterior shots of the railcar speeding through the countryside being used instead.⁶⁷

This example is valuable as an illustration that simply adding in human interest was not a guaranteed route to commercial success. Reframing the carriage experience required considerable effort as well as new directions in railway photographic advertising. George Orton had singled out photography as a primary means for conveying new messages about service excellence. He termed it 'Prestige advertising': 'advertising the undertaking of railway travel in general, including speed and comfort ... which is used to attract the public to rail in preference to other forms of transport'.⁶⁸ This important demarcation suggests a mid-1930s' mindset which recognised

promotion of the carriage interior as a significant individual consideration *alongside* holiday advertising, and that it required similar levels of consideration and esteem.

After 1930, photographic content which focused on the carriage experience was not only reintroduced into the main guides but afforded prominence amongst the first pages of company literature. This confirms the GWR's wish to present the journey as an integral part of the holiday, its imaginary as well as physical starting point. To update and add vigour to this advertising the GWR enlisted the expertise of the Fox Films model agency, with the aim of *selling* the service as desirable rather than simply stating its existence. The resulting output represented a sizeable collection of around two hundred photographs produced over the space a few years, with dozens taken of passengers in different arrangements or at different stages of the journey.⁶⁹ The many situations and variations suggests a creative atmosphere where attention to detail was the paramount consideration. Of these a small selection ultimately featured in the guidebooks. Chosen to portray vaunted qualities supposedly unique to the GWR, they reveal many of the features highlighted for improvement in the customer research: speed, punctuality, safety, cleanliness, overcrowding, design, the helpfulness and courtesy of staff, and the behaviour of other passengers. It is of course impossible to tell whether these were received favourably, or whether they were met with disdain by seasoned passengers. Nonetheless, as indicators of the GWR's drive to remodel the passenger experience they provide invaluable evidence of where it believed it needed to direct the most effort, as well as its belief in photography's abilities to convey change.

FELLOW TRAVELLERS

As was the case for much of the company's photographic advertising in the 1930s, the overarching shift in direction followed the recommendations regarding human interest and the use of peopled imagery. In the carriage the GWR revealed an ideal consumer, a prototypical passenger who was well-mannered and fashionable, and who, it was hoped, improved the service's attractiveness by association. In an attempt to dispel the common fears associated with boring, rude or inconsiderate passengers, the GWR's models approximated to the archetypes described in previous chapters. The women conformed to the contemporary standards of ideal femininity and their male companions were similarly dashing and well-dressed. The context of consumption was privileged, supported by the use of carriages which were dressed elaborately as sets. At the other end of the scale, simple

conventions which had been honed through years of development were also used including lighting techniques, relative height and perspective, and camera trickery. Potential customers would have been expected to understand if not absorb the inference that the right kind of person travelled by train, and that rail travel delivered an approximation of the contentment presented in the advertising.

The photographs emphasised conviviality, and offered the carriage as a place of companionship. The passengers appeared to forget that they were on a train; none looked absent-mindedly out of the window, checked tickets or handled luggage. Instead they laughed and joked as if at home or out with friends. The message was that being a master of one's destiny was less important when faced with the superior experience of being able to sit, talk and while away the journey in comfort. Unlike the majority of photographs in *Holiday Haunts*, in the carriages people were commonly paired into heterosexual groupings. Facilitated by the seating arrangements, this lent an air of intimacy to the photographs. Most were taken from inside the carriage, but 'The Joy of the Journey' (1939) offered an entirely different perspective (Fig. 6.2). With the viewer looking in from the outside, the photograph made especial use of the large window—an important



Fig. 6.2 'The Joy of the Journey', *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1939). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

advertising symbol for directing the viewer's gaze and adding special emphasis to the object or scene visible through the glass.⁷⁰ Here the carriage window was used to encourage the viewer to want to feel part of this experience. In addition to what was seen, advertising photographs were as much concerned with what was not pictured, creating associations in the mind of the viewer. Crucial to this photograph's narrative was the fact that these passengers would imminently be served a meal: this was clearly the dining car, as suggested by the presence of drinks, menus and a waiter. The sense of a comfortable scenario was supported by other techniques such as the glow of light on skin, and white clothing and table cloths. Additional depth is given to the composition by the fact that the story continues beyond the foreground: rather than empty seats, the viewer looks past the main group to see a similarly contented passenger taking bread from a member of staff. It was a carefully crafted vision of consumption, a deliberately staged, yet apparently natural and human vision of rail travel. The photograph was part of an attempt to allay everyday fears and concerns about railway travel and instead emphasise the 'joy' of the journey.

Whilst some of the conventions were adapted from the company's destination photography, the GWR also tried to match the motor car advertisements which situated the car in a context of consumption, be this in town, at sporting events or outside the theatre, to connect ideas about wealth, culture and privilege to the vehicles. The GWR placed amongst its passengers various items which hinted at an anticipated experience. Sporting goods were a particularly effective symbol. Rackets and golf clubs connoted wealth in that one would have needed to be sufficiently affluent to join a club and buy the accessories, but also that passengers had the necessary leisure time to pursue genteel sports.⁷¹ The presence of sporting equipment added depth to the visual narrative. Unpublished negative B 12125 (Fig. 6.3) shows how the GWR experimented with the best way to suggest such experiences to the viewer. There was plenty to see and do, which contrasted with the boredom and forced conversation expected by many. In these examples, one can also see the company's promotional photographs pressed into service both as interior decorations and advertising (seated passengers were, after all, a captive audience), and to fill in the blank space of the carriage window. This simple trick, securing a large photograph to the window's exterior to make it look as though the passengers really were on a journey, shows an added level of concern about seducing viewers and asking them to lose themselves in the story on show.



Fig. 6.3 GWR B Series Negative 12125. National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library

Whilst the perceived class of fellow passengers was a concern which featured in letters to the GWR, allusions to the decorum popularly associated with first- and third-class passengers were avoided in the company's publicity materials. Instead discrete reference was made to the qualitative differences offered by each class, visible in the different upholstery, cornicing and general decoration, as well as passengers' clothing, but not in passengers' demeanour. Two such photographs, 'GWR By First and Third Class' were included in 1939's *Holiday Haunts*, and at first glance were composed identically; each view looked in on a compartment of three passengers, two women and one man, who sat with reading materials amongst their tennis rackets (and a cricket bat in first). Upon closer inspection a number of subtle differences were built into these staged scenes: the clothing sported by those in first was discernibly more tailored and upmarket, and the ladies in that compartment wore hats. Their seats also looked fuller and brighter. As Divall notes, it is arguable that including first-class travel in advertising to social groups who most likely would not have travelled this way nevertheless appealed to those amongst them that aspired to something 'better'.⁷² As at the destination, rather than simply selling the

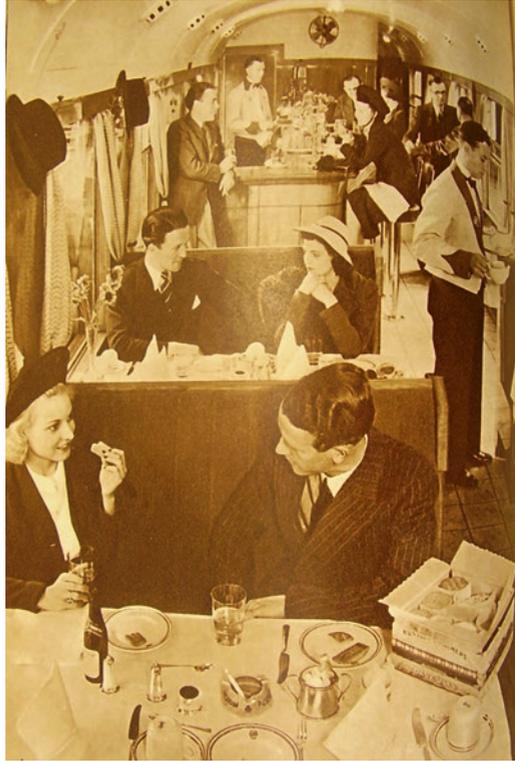
idea of travel by rail, the aspirationalised actors were intended to make deeper appeals to the subconscious, equating the services with more beautiful and alluring depictions of life. Whilst the GWR subtly presented the ‘right’ passenger in the ‘right’ carriage, and even enforced comparison in the case of ‘GWR By First and Third Class’, it ensured that each one communicated an impression of comfort and cleanliness where the passengers were well-behaved and personable.

By the mid-1930s other members of the Big Four companies released similar compositions on themes of comfort and conviviality. In its brochure promoting holiday season tickets for the eastern counties, the LNER offered journey-focused narratives, setting the scene with an intimate encounter between a couple sitting face-to-face in the carriage, silhouetted by the carriage window and the decorative lamp between them. The rear cover showed men and women, arm in arm, gaily walking down the platform towards their waiting carriage.⁷³ Again expressing that this was more than just a journey, the viewer was meant to believe that these glamorous people were travelling to a similarly glamorous destination, and were choosing to go there by train. The LNER also combined comfort and intimacy with the fantastical in ‘The Northern Belle, LNER Cruise Train in Scotland’ (*The Holiday Handbook*, 1937).⁷⁴ In this example, two female passengers leaned in over a table to gaze happily at the ‘passing’ dramatic countryside of mountains. Each recommended the railway carriage as uniquely pleasurable experience which offered companionship in the spirit of the journey.

‘FROM ORDEAL TO LUXURY’⁷⁵

The GWR’s photographs communicated a level of sanitised cleanliness and exactness which probably fell far short of the reality of many holiday services. The carriages chosen were, of course, not the ageing Edwardian stock but modern designs featuring the latest refinements. Upholstered arm rests, curtains and carpets made carriages look more like sitting rooms, an impression reflected in the relaxed, conversational poses of the passengers. Unlike the photograph of the streamlined railcar, the new promotional photography was composed in such a way that the viewer adopted a privileged viewpoint, looking down upon the carriage (Fig. 6.4). The technique not only allowed seating obstructions to be overcome, suggesting spaciousness, but also placed them as masters of the situation, reflecting the upscale nature of the imagery and helping to assuage the powerlessness felt in the stressful environment of a crowded railway

Fig. 6.4 ‘A GWR Buffet Car’, *Holiday Haunts* (London: Great Western Railway, 1939). National Railway Museum/Science and Society Picture Library



carriage. The photographs carefully avoided the crowded conditions commonly associated with peak holiday travel, and no one was left unattended. Everybody received a seat, with plenty of space around them and empty luggage racks.

Well cared for soft furnishings in compartments uncluttered by luggage or litter were presented as the norm in ordinary carriages, but the GWR reserved the greatest effort for its dining cars. By championing dining on the train the GWR emphasised an element which distinguished rail travel as a dignified experience, and with which cars and motor buses could not be compared. The inclusion of such photographs also helped discourage ideas about being hurried around or harassed by staff, and the supposedly unsanitary conditions and the general dank ambiance on the train. The carriages showcased in ‘In The Dining Car’ (*Holiday Haunts*, 1938) and ‘A GWR Buffet

Car' (1939) (Fig. 6.4), for example, were immaculately clean—especially important where food was being served. Obviously proud of its latest innovations, corporate photography picked out the new materials involved in carriage construction. The bright woods and reflective metals, sparkling white materials, from the headrests to napkins, plates to tablecloths, all looked good in the photographs, and the photographers ensured that the company's branding was in full focus. Although the dining cars were populated, one could not describe them as crowded, adding to the perception of space, airiness and, to some degree, seclusion. Unlike 'food', 'eating' was considered difficult to advertise, possessing potentially negative connotations such as greed and incivility if handled insensitively.⁷⁶ The GWR's models either did not touch the food before them, or held it delicately. Whilst not all would have been able to afford the expense of dining in transit—£3 for a basic meal was not far off the average weekly wage in 1938—the inclusion of such aspirational settings was designed to create the impression that those who travelled by GWR dined on the train as well, lending a certain cachet to consuming the service, even if these particular elements were not used.

Furthermore, a sense of modernity was cultivated, particularly in the case of the company's buffet car with its chromium-plated bar and unobtrusive light fittings which reflected American styles,⁷⁷ whilst the GWR's use of large plate glass and simple, woven textiles were all evident. 'The Buffet Car' (*Holiday Haunts*, 1939) exhibited a further innovation, the curved ceiling eliminated angular junctions and thus created a brighter and more spacious environment. These simple, restrained and functional designs contrasted the dark, bulky, oak-veneered designs still in use on much of the system. A view of the GWR's new buffet cars was included in the *Daily Mirror*, showing passengers being served quick lunches at the long bar, which extended the whole length of the car.⁷⁸ They represented a clear attempt to foster associations between the fashionable new London bars and eateries and the GWR's own efforts, as well as the company's attempt to take its message of civilised mobility to a wider audience and ask all travellers to rethink their pre-conceptions about rail travel. Like the photographs above, it showed contented, well-turned-out passengers enjoying the facilities, spaced out along the glimmering 'long bar'. Conventions for the buffet cars were carried over into station cafeterias and snack bars. As the stations were essentially the shop windows of the railway, having the right kind of services and the right kind of people assisted in reworking rail's image as pleasurable and upscale. Despite the recognition that the press was, from

a photographic point of view, insufficient in terms of quality for displaying photogravures, these instances illustrate the perceived advertising value of taking corporate imagery to an even wider audience.

Finally, photographs featuring staff were also used as visual evidence that they could adequately ‘uphold the traditions of the GWR’.⁷⁹ As remarked upon in the ‘People We Intend to Please’ pages, the company stressed that a ‘slammed plate could be the loss of a journey’.⁸⁰ Therefore, when staff appeared amongst the company’s new advertising photography they were immaculately turned out, posed in deference to the passengers. Their jackets, picked out at the public consultation, now gleamed white connoting hygiene and exactitude. For the first time in GWR photographs the staff were emphasised as part of the passenger experience and, as denoted in the unpublished negative complete with cropping tape (Fig. 6.5), they were an element to be emphasised. Other companies introduced different measures to turn their staff from surly goblins into effective representatives: the SR’s ‘Sunny South Sam’, a jolly conductor, was even the subject of a holiday-themed record.⁸¹

Fig. 6.5 GWR B Series
Negative 13254.
National Railway
Museum/Science and
Society Picture Library



Nevertheless, these visions of passengerhood, despite being included in a position of prominence at the front of the GWR's chief guide, as well appearing in the daily press, continued to be rarities compared with the number pictured at the destination. This reflected the fact that so much of the GWR's visual advertising was geared towards nurturing reveries, and for many these dreams now centred on car ownership rather than rail travel, even if for many this continued to remain out of their reach. Although both railway companies and motor car manufacturers released stylish imagery of the consumers who used them, there was an inherent glamour and mystery to being a driver or passenger in a car in these years, which automobile advertising sought to enhance. Passers-by saw drivers, but only fleetingly, and through a glass barrier. Passengers, however, could be examined up close and at length, be this on the train, the tram or the motor bus. They provided a visceral reminder that this was a shared and somewhat servile experience at a time when privacy and seclusion were relished and viewed ever more as a mark of success. Had war not intervened, then the GWR may have extended the relationship with Fox models and used passenger imagery in innovative ways. But in the 1930s, this evocative advertising was used defensively, as people increasingly wanted to be a passenger in a two- or four-seater rather than a carriage, no matter how *à la mode* or immaculately turned out the company proclaimed it to be.

CONCLUSIONS

Like the narratives constructed to sell its destinations, the GWR used photography to convey an idea of its core service which it hoped would convince potential passengers that it could surpass the offerings of competitors and rivals. But the company also intended to call into question expectations and common assumptions about rail travel. For the many reasons outlined in this chapter's first section, it took the company a long time to develop effective photographic narratives aboard the train, and in the 1930s this aspect of railway advertising changed completely. Railway vehicles were fully reinstated as companies fought to nurture a proud image of progress in terms of serving the customer, a relaxed and aspirational image of travel by rail, as well as rail's endurance as a superior method of travel. For the GWR, this image was carried across the company's appeals, evoked in posters such as Charles Mayo's 'Speed to the West' (1939), where the rushing smoke and steam of the locomotive, allied to the blurred lines and disappearing rake of carriages, gave an impression of controlled power and

velocity. The same was true for '100 years of Progress', a poster, modelled on a photograph, which used a locomotive emerging from a tunnel onto a sunny coastal line to suggest that Cornwall, Devon, Somerset or Wales were but an excitingly swift journey away.

The GWR anticipated that customers would react favourably to this revisionist idea of rail's image. The photographs built upon the information gleaned about passengers from their correspondence with the GWR. The published and unpublished variants are visual confirmation that passenger concerns were being listened to, and joined a number of necessary improvements to construction and décor, as well as more experimental attempts to recreate the carriage environment. However, it is impossible to discern the response on the part of the passengers, or whether, having been convinced by the advertising they were disappointed by the actual experience. Ultimately, the goal of the sparsely populated carriage photographs was to create fully loaded carriages in reality, and therefore the imagery presents somewhat of a paradox. Regardless of the actual experience, this collection of photographs represents the company's considered and best efforts to encourage customers to look upon rail travel as offering something new and better. Photographic advertising was at the forefront of this strategy. But like streamlining it was a tactic to address rail's image that was ultimately a bright distraction against real problems or ones that simply could not be overcome within the capacities of normal service.

A familiar interpretation of the competition between road and rail claims that as soon as they could, consumers opted for cars and that the railways were largely powerless against this.⁸² This chapter has argued differently; photographic evidence, considered in the light of that from other repositories such as the company magazine and departmental minutes, suggests the GWR did not give up on those tempted by an Austin or Vauxhall but instead targeted them more rigorously. That this was done in the chief holiday guides, and sometimes in the daily press too, confirms the GWR's new direction in engaging with widely held impressions about passengers and rail journeys. Whilst others highlight the good results from exterior design and comfort innovations,⁸³ this chapter has argued that improvements also depended on strategies which worked at the level of the subconscious and relied on people rethinking their impressions. As with the strategies of naming crack locomotives and expresses, they sought to create an aura around rail travel which transported it from everyday mundanity.⁸⁴ By utilising photography to display the travel experience

from the customer perspective, the GWR also showed how it could beat the car. In addition to technical performance and exterior styling, the GWR emphasised its advantages in terms that the consumer could understand: comfort and lifestyle. The photographs contributed to the air of departure which asked viewers to reconsider travel as an anticipated part of the holiday. Finally, the photographs also presented an advantage over pen-and-brush poster illustrations by contrasting allusions of reality with desires for fantasy. Ultimately, they are the material legacy of the GWR's attempts to understand passenger mindsets and create a pervasive visual culture about what it was to travel, over and above moving from 'A' to 'B'.

NOTES

1. To be clear from the start, this chapter does not suggest that the GWR was not proud of, or neglected the publicity opportunities of its designs; there is plenty of evidence in support of this. It refers chiefly to its place within the general holiday advertising distributed to the average public.
2. Peter Lyth, "'Think of Her as Your Mother': Airline Advertising and the Stewardess in America, 1930–1980," *Journal of Transport History* 30, no. 1 (2009): 4.
3. These issues continue to concern modern-day travel planners, such as in the case of the metro railway in Delhi, India, where galvanising public support and attracting patrons centred on creating a positive image that 'combined tangible variables with an intangible set of symbolic meanings'. Matti Siemiatycki, "Message in a Metro: Building Urban Rail Infrastructure and Image in Delhi, India," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30, no. 2 (2006).
4. Chris de Winter-Hebron, *Dining at Speed: A Celebration of 125 Years of Railway Catering* (Kettering: Silver Link, 2004), 10–13; John Gloag, *Victorian Comfort: A Social History of Design from 1830–1900* (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1973), 160–61; Phillip Bagwell, *The Railway Clearing House In The British Economy 1842–1922* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), 58.
5. See for example "Railway Unpunctuality and Public Health," *The British Medical Journal*, October 13, 1883, 734; "Warming Railway Carriages," *The British Medical Journal*, January 24, 1885, 189; "Damp Railway Carriages," *The British Medical Journal*, December 20, 1884, 1256; "Women's Lavatories at Railway Stations," *The British Medical Journal*, January 29, 1910, 294.
6. David Jenkinson, *British Railway Carriages of the 20th Century* (Wellingborough: Patrick Stephens, 1984), 134–35.

7. Colin Divall and Hiroki Shin, "Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity: Representations of Speed in Britain's Railway Marketing," in *Trains, Culture, and Mobility: Riding the Rails: Volume 2*, ed. Benjamin Fraser and Steven Spalding (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 12–14.
8. Ed Bartholomew and Michael Blakemore, *Railways In Focus: Photographs From The National Railway Museum Collections* (Penryn: Atlantic Transport, 1998), 12–15.
9. "What the Camera Can Do," *The Advertising World*, November, 1911, 580.
10. "The Camera and Commercial Art," *The Advertising World*, June, 1912, 668.
11. Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere, "Canada by Photograph: Instructed Looking and Tourism of the Late Nineteenth-century Canadian Landscape," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 49, no. 99 (2016): 308.
12. Walter George Chapman, *The 10.30 Limited* (London : Great Western Railway, 1923).
13. Colin Divall, "The Modern Passenger: Constructing the Consumer on Britain's Railways, 1919–1939," in *Railway Modernization: An Historical Perspective, 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Magda Pinheiro (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos de História Contemporânea Portuguesa, 2009), 110–13.
14. The National Archives (TNA), ZPER 38/13, Great Western Railway (London): Lecture and Debating Society Proceedings 1920–1921, Meeting of 31st March 1921, pp. 1–10; ZPER 38/26, Great Western Railway (London): Lecture and Debating Society Proceedings 1933–1934, Meeting 31st March 1934, 1–10.
15. Great Western Railway Magazine, July, 1922, 271. GWRM hereafter.
16. GWRM, December, 1926, 395.
17. First Introduced in 1927, GWRM, September, 1927, 351.
18. It is impossible to tell why the page disappeared in the 1930s; perhaps with the introduction of formal staff salesmanship courses this kind of instruction became further 'internalised'. Indeed, the magazine continued to tell interested readers from the general public what the GWR was doing to better their experience, but announcements of instances when the company had 'got this wrong' stopped altogether.
19. "Locomotive Interchange," *Financial Times*, April 14, 1925, 3; "Exchanged Engines Test," *The Times*, May 12, 1925, 10; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, April 13, 1925, 4.
20. Tad Burness, *Classic Railroad Advertising: Riding the Rails Again* (Iola, Wis.: Krause, 2001), 6–8; Gregory Votolato, *Transport Design: A Travel History* (London: Reaktion, 2007), 47; Allen Middleton, *It's Quicker By Rail!: The History Of LNER Advertising* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2002), 46.

21. Michael Bonavia, *The Four Great Railways* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1980), 74–80.
22. “High Speed as a Means of Advertising,” *The Railway Gazette*, July 22, 1910, 109.
23. GWRM, January, 1927, 29.
24. GWRM, January, 1927, 29. Punctuality made frequent appearances in the ‘People We Intend To Please Section’: see GWRM, April, 1927, 148; February 1928, 75; July 1928, 293.
25. “Streamlined Competition,” *The Times*, July 6, 1937, 17.
26. TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, 32–37.
27. Felix Pole, *His Book* (London: Town and Country Press, 1969), 84.
28. TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, 32–37.
29. GWRM, November 1927, 447.
30. GWRM, January 1928, 31.
31. GWRM, March 1927, 447.
32. Phillip Unwin, *Travelling By Train In The Edwardian Age* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1979), 58–59.
33. James Walvin, *Beside The Seaside: A Social History Of The Popular Seaside Holiday* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 116.
34. Bonavia, *The Four Great Railways*, 102–07.
35. Rosa Matheson, *Trip: The Annual Holiday of GWR’s Swindon Works* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), 23–26; Phillip Unwin, *Travelling By Train in the ‘Twenties and ‘Thirties* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 36–37.
36. GWRM, October, 1928, 401.
37. GWRM, July, 1929, 287.
38. Archibald Williams, *Brunel And After: The Romance Of The Great Western Railway* (London: Great Western Railway, 1925), 161–89.
39. GWRM, August, 1927, 335.
40. GWRM, June 1927, 218.
41. GWRM, August, 1927, 335.
42. GWRM, January, 1927, 29.
43. GWRM, April, 1929, 163.
44. TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, 32–37.
45. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization Of Time and Space In The Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 74.
46. Julian Treuherz, ‘The Human Drama of The Railway’, in *The Railway: Art In The Age of Steam: Europe, America and the Railway 1830–1960*, ed. Ian Kennedy and Julian Treuherz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 83–118.
47. Ralph Harrington, ‘The Railway Journey and The Neuroses Of Modernity’, in *Pathologies of Travel*, ed. Richard Wrigley and George Revill (Amsterdam:

- Rodopi, 2000), 236–39; Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 202–04.
48. See, for example, GWRM, February, 1939, 67–68; March, 1939, 125;
 49. *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, January, 1914.
 50. GWRM, August, 1918, 117.
 51. GWRM, August, 1918, 117.
 52. GWRM, May, 1914, 123.
 53. TNA, ZPER 38/13, Meeting of 31st March 1921, 1–10.
 54. TNA, ZPER 38/13, Meeting of 31st March 1921, 4.
 55. TNA, ZPER 38/26, Meeting 22nd March 1934, 1–10.
 56. *Advertiser's Weekly*, April 11, 1930.
 57. *The Autocar*, October 12, 1928.
 58. *The Autocar*, July 5, 1935.
 59. *The Autocar*, February 7, 1936.
 60. *The Autocar*, April 7, 1933.
 61. *The Autocar*, October 31, 1930.
 62. *The Autocar*, July 28, 1925.
 63. *The Autocar*, June 23, 1925.
 64. “A Brief Review of the Company’s Hundred Years of Business,” GWRM, September, 1935, 496.
 65. See for example, GWRM, September 1922; October 1924; October 1927.
 66. “Seeing Britain by Train,” *The Railway Gazette*, August 15, 1930, 208.
 67. *The Streamline Way: Inauguration of Express Streamlined Rail Car Service Between Birmingham and Cardiff* (London: Great Western Railway, 1934).
 68. TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, 32–37.
 69. National Railway Museum (NRM), GWR B Series: Negatives 13486–12492 depict a new buffet car; 14553–14569 show a restaurant car; 12114–12119 portray passengers about to embark a train and so on.
 70. Roland Marchand, *Advertising The American Dream: Making Way For Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 238–54.
 71. John Benson, *The Rise Of Consumer Society In Britain, 1880–1980* (London: Longman, 1994), 129–30.
 72. Colin Divall, “Civilising Velocity: Masculinity and the Marketing of Britain’s Passenger Trains, 1921–39,” *Journal of Transport History* 32, no. 2 (2011): 6.
 73. LNER, *Weekly Holiday Season Tickets—Eastern Counties* (1936).
 74. *The Holiday Handbook* (London: London and North Eastern Railway, 1937).
 75. GWRM, September, 1935, 505.

76. Marchand, *Advertising The American Dream*, 162–63.
77. See Votolato, *Transport Design*, 48–49, for an in-depth description of American advances in carriage design.
78. *The Daily Mirror*, July 11, 1934. A short piece was also run in *The Times*, August 31, 1935.
79. GWRM, December, 1926, 395.
80. ‘It is true to say that the majority of the complaints received by any Railway Company are concerned with matters arising between the staff and the public – discourtesy, carelessness, indifference, thoughtlessness, and so on – not always directly, because many of these failings lead to the creation of a situation the man himself could hardly be expected to visualise: when for example he throws a parcel on to the platform he probably has not troubled to notice beforehand that it is fragile, but a claim results just the same. Similarly the Shunter who allows rough shunting to continue does not give the question of damage a thought. The Restaurant Car Attendant who serves up a meal in a “take it or leave it” attitude does not realise that because the passenger suffers in silence he has lost the Company a customer’, TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, 32–37.
81. For more on this character, see Tony Hillman and Beverley Cole, *South for Sunshine: Southern Railway Publicity and Posters, 1923 to 1947* (Harrow Weald: Capital Transport in association with the National Railway Museum, 1999), 50.
82. Peter Lyth and Philip Bagwell, *Transport in Britain: From Canal Lock to Gridlock* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002), 80; Sean O’Connell, *The Car In British Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 79.
83. Votolato, *Transport Design*, 47; Divall and Shin, ‘Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity’, 12–14.
84. John Walton, “Power, Speed and Glamour: The Naming Of Express Steam Locomotives In Interwar Britain,” *Journal Of Transport History* 26, no. 2 (2005): 1–16.

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Conclusion

Upon the outbreak of war in September 1939, advertising hoardings at stations across Britain were cleared of the last season's holiday paraphernalia. Whereas but a few weeks before, each railway company had endeavoured to encourage as many people as possible to take discretionary journeys, new notices appeared, issued by the Railway Executive Committee, which warned passengers that certain services would be disrupted. They now also asked passengers to consider whether their trip was really necessary, and to keep the lines clear for traffic essential to the war effort. Major John Dewar joined the Royal Engineers and was invalided out of the service, and W.H. Fraser passed away in 1943.¹ But the Second World War did not mark the end of *Holiday Haunts* or many of its companion and competitor volumes. Afterwards, the Big Four railways released a handful of publications, and although their appearance was nevertheless very similar to their pre-war counterparts, they represented an indomitable commitment to, and belief in, these publications.

The year 1948, however, marked the formal end of the Big Four railways when they were compulsorily nationalised. Along with the others, the GWR, which had survived interwar reorganisation, was subsumed into the new concern, British Railways (BR), and its territory became known as the Western Region. Nonetheless, advertising operations remained essential to BR, and guidebooks and posters were retained, appearing in familiar guises for many years. At first, the promotional materials adopted in the

early years of nationalisation depended on the theories, developments and even some of the individuals, covered in this volume. Major Dewar was appointed the first public relations and publicity officer for the Western Region in 1949, but died in office in November 1952.² Since 1900, railway advertising had advanced from a subject of some importance but little detailed or considered thought, to a fundamental part of the modern railway business. BR's advertising also continued to compete against familiar, yet ever more pressing challenges. Competition from private motor cars continued to worry railwaymen, as affordable motoring became within the reach of more families who increasingly piled into their Austins and Hillmans rather than railway carriages on their way to the seaside. The 1938 Holidays With Pay Act sparked a holidaymaking revolution, yet whilst unprecedented numbers were able to consider a holiday, the post-war period witnessed a shift in customers' tastes and aspirations as they looked to the more glamorous offerings abroad.

This volume has explored how British consumers were persuaded to travel to holiday destinations, principally via advertising photography. It has argued that the design of photographic guidebooks released in the early twentieth century was the product of a changing outlook which viewed them less as a homogenous mass and increasingly as groups and individuals with specific wants and ideas about their treatment. Chap. 2 presented a periodisation of railway advertising direction across the first four decades of the twentieth century. By no means a hard and fast distinction, it is offered as a structure to rethink and organise railway advertising's development. Even in the embryonic stages around 1900 the GWR's strategies were not sightless. The company's advertising department questioned how to better influence customers' decisions, and promote all it had to offer through managed advertising campaigns. It embraced a widely-held objective not just to portray travel as convenient, fast, reliable and safe, but to persuade people to make journeys it had not occurred to them to make. Photographic guidebooks were an essential part of this strategy. A tremendous amount of photographic views were offered to customers who were encouraged to place themselves in scenes, and seek out and replicate the views with their own cameras. In this early period, railway advertising photography was marked by the almost complete absence of railway buildings, vehicles or staff, signifying that the GWR wanted potential passengers to overlook everyday concerns and focus on the idealised scenes and scenarios constructed by the company. Although the GWR considered its passengers in more detail, and ran competitions

which delivered to the company an impression of popular attitudes to travel and holidaymaking, it is debatable how 'scientific' the process really was, despite the term being used prolifically in connection with railway advertising. Nevertheless, by the outbreak of the First World War, 'advertising in the modern sense' had taken hold.³

The interwar years represented a further material progression as the companies acknowledged that the landscape of railway operations had profoundly changed. Amalgamation forced them to rebrand and re-appeal to customers, and economic stagnation, coupled with road competition, engrained the need to advertise or face financial ruin. Although slow to rethink its advertising, the GWR responded with new publications which ranged from regional offerings to niche guides, as well as a plethora of shorter pamphlets. In the early 1930s, the character of the photographs which adorned these guides was transformed. The company understood that promotional photography could assist potential passengers in selecting their holiday by showing destinations realistically, but it increasingly used photographs to engage passengers' aspirations and anxieties. Numerous techniques were experimented with; the lighting and staging of photographs was used to draw the viewer's attention to certain subjects; photographic aspect, perspective and relative height gave potential customers unusual viewpoints and were further used to direct their view. Photographs were diligently composed to create idealised pictures where contested elements were purposefully left out. In response to the prevailing trends in advertising thought, the GWR's photographs came to emphasise people, using models and model agencies to more precisely craft a spirit of holidaymaking and a romanticised view of travel. The GWR and its competitor railways largely agreed upon what they could and should offer, barring certain individual idiosyncrasies. The use, in some cases, of the same model and photographic agencies further contributed to an industry-wide resemblance.

It has not been possible within the scope of this volume to cover the entire spread of advertising activities. Some, which nevertheless contribute to the overarching conclusions outlined above, have been treated only lightly. The railways collectively recognised that advertising could do more than encourage people to consume, and it was therefore used to help enhance the relationship with the public and address the concerns of those who had grown disillusioned with services which they considered to be performing below par. Public relations activity was a frequently discussed topic, and photographic advertising was used in the hope that it would

help to create a cheerier public image of railway travel against very real problems in the service. Unlike companies such as Rowntree and Lever, the GWR did not use specialist market research agencies to deliver information about customers,⁴ but its advertising was by no means a fixed or one-way relationship as a result. Since the earliest years of the twentieth century, customers had opportunities to comment upon and help structure GWR publicity, evident in essay and photographic competitions, as well as in the later correspondence to the publicity department's staff. The GWR had to develop its own quantitative and qualitative understandings of passengers, and although it got to know them through these means there were appreciable limits as to how far it could address their myriad complaints and concerns. These limitations entrenched the value of advertising as a means of mediating negative impressions. Whilst at the Southern Railway such efforts helped to reverse a rather more desperate public impression, on the whole it would be better to know more about public attitudes to this advertising before concluding with certainty whether it worked. This does not detract, however, from the corporate view of image management as an ever more important strategy.

Advertising's principles as applied to the streamlining of locomotives and updating of carriages was a material attempt to demonstrate that even at the centenary of railway travel it still presented an up-to-date option. Reproduced in the press, photographs of crack locomotives at speed and carriage updates represented an important strategy later in the period. The creation and modernisation of company roundels presents further evidence of a corporate need for image-making. Yet, there are shortcomings to consider too in addition to those mentioned in the preceding chapters. The GWR's lack of fanfare around its centenary in 1935 has puzzled some, and has led to questions regarding whether the company was fully alive to the opportunities to promote its image. Nevertheless, this volume argued that focusing fixedly on successes and failures, innovations and stasis, is an unfair and unhelpful way of assessing the totality of operations. Taken together, such was the competitive environment that forward strides or missteps were quickly copied or learned from. This speaks of a culture that was vigilant, but also one in which innovation went hand in hand with economic stringency out of necessity.

Focusing chiefly on photographic advertising, this volume sought to question an overlooked yet key part of railway advertising, and consider the chief narratives put forward by the GWR, as well as what it thought and hoped that they would achieve. Establishing the GWR's significance

within the wider history of photographic advertising is more difficult, not least because of the imbalanced focus on products over services, and the fact that the company's advertising photography predominantly featured in holiday guides and pamphlets rather than in the press or on posters. Nevertheless, the GWR appears to have at least kept pace with the kinds of advertising ploys and techniques utilised by other businesses. Viewed against Shell's concerns about the spoliation of the countryside, and the 'motoring pastoral' created by motoring manufacturers,⁵ the GWR was alive to the benefits of creating contrived images of rural contentedness and was a significant and early proponent of these. Both the GWR and the Kodak company sponsored an idealised vision of family life, where photographic advertising was intended to give touching reminders about making time for the family, as well as prompting parents to fill up their photograph albums. By no means did the GWR produce technically groundbreaking photography akin to the luminaries making forward strides in the United States or Germany, whose designs were adopted by some advertisers in Britain. As Bartholomew and Blakemore suggest, once the company photographers' promotional work was completed, they returned to photographing engines and company buildings.⁶ It is therefore unsurprising that when specific styles were required the GWR turned to specialised agencies. Whilst professional photographers provided well-composed views, there was a turn, especially in the interwar years, to those who were more in touch with popular tastes and skilled at providing imagery specifically for advertising. Although the GWR's records are ultimately silent on this matter, it would be fascinating to know more about the discussions which led to such agencies being employed, and whether company photographers accepted this or fought back. Lack of information about the individuals concerned and their background similarly makes it impossible to discern how they viewed the developments in their profession as outlined in periodicals such as *The Advertising World* and *Advertiser's Weekly* even though, the company having featured in these publications reasonably frequently, they were likely read at least by some of the individuals responsible for the GWR's advertising.

But, again, focusing on innovativeness and stylishness overlooks a more fundamental point about whether railway photography avoided the avant-garde because whilst it was meant to be attractive it was probably also required to be unchallenging. Some railways certainly courted modernist aesthetics in their poster designs, but the value here was to create a stir around the crack services or locomotives shown. The guidebooks made a

different proposition. Offered for the mass market, they needed to be uncontroversial (as seen in the case of keeping bathing out of guides prior to the First World War). Photographic views were also likely intended to mimic popular photography, the kinds of shots which people took at home or on holiday, and to inspire them to use the holiday as a stage to take more. Furthermore, whilst modern designs sought to disrupt traditional ways of seeing,⁷ a large part of the GWR's work was rather geared towards enhancing a sense of tradition. Those desiring a holiday in the countryside, for instance, most likely sought stability and, as Chap. 3 argued, escape from the modern world. Overall, the GWR's output was rarely unattractive or technically weak, and was formed in a culture which was certainly receptive to the modern debates in advertising, even if ultimately these went unheeded.

This volume has concerned the picturing process from the GWR's perspective, focusing on what those responsible for promoting the company and its services thought potential customers would like to see, what they *wanted* customers to see, and how they hoped passengers would approach travel and holidaymaking. It has not been possible to determine in extensive detail how the guides and photographs within were viewed or consumed beyond reviews in contemporary publications and a handful of comments in the company magazine and Maxwell Fraser archive, and these snippets also require appropriate levels of caution before extrapolating outwards. The volume has not sought to suggest that the GWR's output was absorbed totally and uncritically by the consuming public; there were likely countless counter impressions on the part of the thousands who purchased the guides. Similarly, it is debatable how closely the public followed the railway business or advertising efforts generally, much less agreed unreservedly with its messages. Some expressed their incredulity that so much was spent on advertising when public goodwill could just as easily be created by performing the fundamentals better. Nevertheless, the fact that the publications sold well, and that the GWR remained a competitive railway, strongly suggests a widespread engagement with and certain appreciation of the underlying messages.

Above all, rather than having a decreasing influence on British society at this time, the railways' position as prolific photographers and publishers of popular literature means that they likely made a significant contribution to how people viewed the world around them. Photographs were more than illustrations or a record of place, and evince how deeply the GWR tried to align itself with contemporary developments in British culture,

and how it used the interest in these developments to encourage people to consume place, imaginatively at first and then at the destination. The core chapters identified the GWR's chief image-making taking place at key areas; the countryside, the seaside, at towns and cities, and on the train. The GWR engaged with regional identities and perceptions about the characters who lived there. It helped to entrench what was to be desired at particular locations by providing 'that which looked good in a picture', as well as what was to be excluded. It attempted to show anticipated scenes and played down more contested elements such as crowds, the rather desperate character of many rural regions, clashes over access to the countryside, and the strains of the journey or lacklustre accommodation. The company got creative in providing indicators of intangible allurements such as ancient ancestors and customs, and holiday spirit, vitality and togetherness. In each case, the GWR was primarily concerned with selling the ideal; at each destination the sun shone and passengers and holiday-makers behaved themselves, united in a collective spirit of fun.

The GWR supported new fads for rambling and sunbathing. It glamorised these practices and, in relation to the bathing boom, helped to keep new attractions in sight and mind, contributing to their anticipation and popularity. Indeed, the railway companies were integral to holiday fashions: in having to keep up with customer tastes, railways broadcast ideas about clothing, seaside decorum, body styles and fashionable activities—factors not normally associated with a railway company. The GWR supported the rhetoric about the benefits of an outdoors lifestyle and being healthy more generally by propounding the idea that discretionary travel was essential respite from modern living. It also showed people how to act in certain settings via a range of model people and activities. But whilst the GWR contributed to the modern spirit, it also appreciated the growing concerns about its wider impact. This volume supports Rieger's conclusion that whilst many were fascinated by modernity and the future, they were also anxious about it.⁸ The GWR shared, for instance, popular fears about the encroachment of modernity onto traditional British landscapes and values, and in response forwarded a village world where past traditions, peoples and practices still thrived. Faced with a modern competitor in the motor car, the GWR also placed itself as a countryside custodian. But again, it was similarly careful about fusion. Whilst the company wanted to be considered as a progressive and competitive business which offered appropriate levels of functionality and comfort, it also wanted to be seen as rooted in tradition, and viewed this as a particular saleable

feature against competitors who made specific claims about modernity. Linked to this point regarding modernity is the contemporary concern about the Americanisation of British society in the interwar years.⁹ The GWR, however, put out significant information the other way, celebrating traditional ways of life and educating people about British history. In taking its messages to foreign, and especially American, markets the company contributed to how Britain was viewed on the world stage as well as at home.

Bridging leisure and information, and consumed many months before and after holiday time, the guidebooks likely offered solace from an increasingly troublesome world and, especially in the 1930s, a worrying political climate. Whilst many likely used the guides in their intended purpose to select a holiday destination, others would have engaged with them as armchair travellers. This raises a further point about their role in contemporary anticipation and boredom experienced by the broad swathe of the middle classes in the interwar years. Systematised roles led to dreaming and fantasising about a more exciting life or the possibility of retirement and getting away from it all. This dreaming was assisted by an overabundance of visual opportunities to escape, such as illustrated magazines, the cinema, and the increasing predominance of photographs of celebrities and high-end consumer products in the daily press.¹⁰ The GWR contributed to this reverie by providing cheap imaginative access to a holiday world which prompted customers' fantasies about relationships, perfect families, adventure, or escape into a more tranquil existence. The counterpoint to this desire for fantasy was, nevertheless, a corresponding boredom enforced by mass repetition. This meant that advertisers, publishers and filmmakers constantly searched for more and novel ways of picturing to hold the attention. At this unprecedentedly competitive time in the mass media, the GWR's holiday guides were galleries which aided selection, but the need to provide so many images, as well as update this annually in some cases, likely recognised the now fleeting glance rather than a sustained tourist gaze.

The afterlife of the railway guide has also not been considered here. There is evidence to suggest that many guides were consumed beyond their functional purpose. They were eagerly anticipated and collected by those who wanted to complete sets of railway literature. This likely continued the craze for postcard collecting, which the railways used to their promotional advantage. Several sources posit that the GWR's guides were

used in classrooms to instruct students in British topography. The guides made their way around the world, collected not just by those who could contemplate a trip by sea or air to visit Britain. Of those which were used for their functional purpose, it would be fascinating to assemble multiple examples and scrutinise them for marginalia and evidence of their use on holiday, to discern more precisely how they were used and what contemporary purchasers thought of the information and illustrations. All would deepen the understanding of the usage of guides from the customer's point of view, but would take a considerable amount of effort or good fortune, which might ultimately be in vain.

This particular task follows the more general challenge of studying railway advertising. Notwithstanding the existence of extensive archives devoted to many of the largest railway companies, advertising is a subject which is, by comparison to other topics, vastly under-represented. Given the amount of comment dedicated to advertising matters in railway company magazines, debating societies and journals, and the snippets that exist in the Maxwell Fraser archive, it is likely that the information generated on railway advertising and photographic advertising at the time was significant. The fact that little of this survives could be due to several reasons. The details of previous campaigns may have quickly been deemed superfluous and discarded. Records retained by companies may have been lost during the bombing campaigns of the Second World War, or, having survived the war, been discarded upon nationalisation.¹¹ The author has personally listened to former railwaymen who described files being thrown away outside main offices in the 1960s and 1970s. Although a campaign quickly goes out of date, and is no longer of corporate use, it nevertheless continues to be appreciated by some, not least those who were closely connected with it. It may be the case that some advertising records were saved and now lie forgotten in a private collection or loft. Occasionally the remnants of the railways' advertising past turn up on the popular BBC television series *Antiques Roadshow*, as families bring for valuation recently discovered collections of pristine interwar posters long conserved by a relative. But the rewards are there for those who are prepared to get creative, and I hope that this volume has demonstrated, in particular, the value of scouring the unindexed copies of *The Advertising World* and *Advertiser's Weekly* for traces of the GWR's advertising culture.

The railways' advertising lives on in a substantial market for nostalgia. Designs now approaching their own centenary continue to delight new audiences who appreciate them as romantic representations of places well known to them, or apparent testimony of a bygone, golden age of travel. Certainly this popular interest merits study in its own right. This volume sought to address railway advertising's 'quaint' reputation and place it back at the core of addressing some very serious problems in the railway business. 'Running trains is one thing – filling trains is another', wrote a correspondent in the *North Devon Journal*,¹² and this volume has sought to tie the two together by assessing how the GWR pictured passengers and persuaded them to travel.

NOTES

1. Roger Wilson, *Go Great Western: A History of GWR Publicity* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1987), 37–38.
2. Wilson, *Go Great Western*, 40.
3. "Do Railways Believe in Advertising?," *Great Western Railway Magazine*, April, 1913, 102.
4. Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and The Marketing Revolution, 1862–1969* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 295; Stefan Schwarzkopf, "Discovering The Consumer: Market Research, Product Innovation, and the Creation Of Brand Loyalty In Britain and The United States In The Interwar Years," *Journal Of Macromarketing* 29, no. 1 (2009): 8–11.
5. David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 64–66.
6. Ed Bartholomew and Michael Blakemore, *Railways in Focus: Photographs from the National Railway Museum Collections* (Penryn: Atlantic Transport, 1998), 9–17.
7. Stefan Schwarzkopf, "Creativity, Capital and Tacit Knowledge: the Crawford Agency and British Advertising in the Interwar Years," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 1, no. 2 (2008): 193.
8. Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and The Culture Of Modernity In Britain and Germany, 1890–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.
9. Siân Nicholas, "American Commentaries: News, Current Affairs, and the Limits of Anglo-American Exchange in Inter-War Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 4 (2007): 461–79.
10. Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930–1939* (London: Routledge, 1989).
11. See for instance the comments in, Vicky Stretch, "Network Rail: Managing Railway Records in the Twenty First Century," *Business Archives* 102 (2011): 49–50.
12. *North Devon Journal*, 16 March, 1933, 6.

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