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Self-service and the Experience of High-Street Retail: Shopping at Boots The Chemists in the Post-War Era, 1945-1980.

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Abstract

Self-service and the Experience of High-Street Retail: Shopping at Boots The Chemists in the Post-War Era, 1945-1980 examines the impact modernised self-service retailing had upon Britain's foremost chain of retail-pharmacists. By demonstrating that Boots repurposed aspects of its own tradition and ethos, this thesis challenges the dominant historiographical interpretations of self-service as a transformative and unitary retail system. Using the company's own historical archive in Nottingham, England, it goes beyond the business history *of* the company, to foreground the cultures and retail experiences of post-war British shopping. It provides the first in-depth analyses of 'self-selection' trading, offering a rare long-term perspective for how an established retailer combined elements of personalised service and the provision of healthcare advice with self-service's promise of enhanced consumer choice and freedom. Its narrative is traced out in five thematic chapters: after exploring the company's experimental adoption of full-scale self-service in 1951, it extends analysis into the 1960s and 70s, to understand how the retailer's moderated sales system influenced its processes of in-store design, merchandising, staff-training and criminal abatement.

It argues the in-store experience generated by Boots' own-brand version of self-selection represented a complex, delicate balance between the opposing forces of tradition and modernity, freedom and control, and commercial and healthcare interests. Boots' adoption of self-service techniques was flexible and often deliberately indeterminate, which enabled its stores to appeal to both the era's newly affluent and youth consumer, whilst upholding the

dignified, high-class atmosphere of a traditional retail-chemist. It also demonstrates how Boots' diverse approach was capable of retaining the oversight of their skilled sales personnel, while simultaneously promoting concepts of modern consumer autonomy. By arguing that this moderated system of self-selection was advantageous to the company's ongoing success, it stresses the agency retailers had for altering self-service methodologies to their own-ends. It therefore contributes significant new evidence for the diversity of self-service practice present within post-war Britain's retail landscape.

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Introduction- Boots The Chemist, Self-Service and the History of Post-war Britain.

Prelude: 'The Shop of Tomorrow'

In July 1933, London's Olympia hosted the Advertising and Marketing Exhibition. Although it featured hundreds of individual corporate stalls, its own daily newspaper and a 'Hall of Service' showcasing Britain's leading advertised brands, public attention and media coverage were concentrated on just one aspect of the Exhibition.[1] Situated near the main entrance and designated the 'Shop of 1950' within the official catalogue, the 'Packeteria' or 'Shop of Tomorrow' offered visitors a tantalising glimpse of Britain's retailing modernity. Designed by modernist architect Joseph Emberton and inspired by the contemporary cafeteria, the exhibit generated significant levels of excitement, not least among its visiting royal delegates.[2] According to the *Daily Mail*, the Prince of Wales found it 'ingenious', while the *Daily Telegraph* noted that during her tour with the King, the Queen asked four times when she would be taken to the exhibit.[3] Claiming the Packeteria was 'certain' to be one of the Exhibition's biggest attractions, trade-journal *Advertiser's Weekly* argued that it was likely to become known as a significant 'event in the history' of British merchandising and package design.[4]

[1] Unknown, "Plan for the Advertising and Marketing Exhibition", *Advertiser's Weekly*, July 13th 1933, 38-39.
[2] James Taylor, ""A Fascinating Show for John Citizen and His Wife": Advertising Exhibitions in Early Twentieth-Century London," *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 4 (2017): 911-12.
[3] Unknown, "The Prince Among the Advertisers at Olympia: The Exhibition that Amazed Him", The Daily Mail, July 19th 1933, 13. "The King and Queen at Olympia", *The Daily Telegraph*, July 20th 1933, 12.
[4] Unknown, "Packeteria: A Vision Which May Become a Reality", *Advertiser's Weekly*, July 13th 1933, 58.

In addition to a design heavily reliant on chromium and glass, the Packeteria expressed its modernity through the use of in-store shopping bags, an automatic cash register and individually portioned merchandise in branded containers. While these features gave the store a futuristic, prototype feel, the Packeteria was always planned to be much more than a gimmick. According to the *Advertiser's Weekly,* its designers saw no 'technical' or 'commercial' reason why the store could not be successfully 'transplanted to Oxford Street'.[5] Beyond influencing new ideas in shop layout, the exhibit aimed to stimulate industry-wide advances in packaging techniques and improve the connections between good product design and increased retail sales.

The Packeteria operated in a systematic way. Upon entry, shoppers received a wooden tray and embarked upon a canalised, pre-planned, journey through the store's five departments of grocery, food, haberdashery, horticultural and pharmaceutical goods. Customers continually passed in front of three tiers of glass shelving, adding pre-packaged, clearly priced items to their tray before paying at a single cash register at the store's exit. The innovatively designed cartons and packages aimed to facilitate the selection process, by both attracting the customer's attention and providing them with sufficient product details and brand information. The emphasis upon high-quality merchandising and customer-led self-service ensured the Packeteria's staffing numbers were 'no larger than was necessary'. [6] With workplace tasks limited to shelf stacking, answering queries and supervising sales, the *Advertiser's Weekly* described the innovation as 'the nightmare of

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

the shop assistant'.[7] Therefore, as well as encompassing changes in *how* people shopped, the Packeteria represented an entirely new approach to *what* customers purchased and from *whom* they bought their goods.

Regarded by the *Evening Telegraph* as a woman's 'dream shop', the Packeteria's popularity lay in a simplistic, rational design that foretold an era of fast-paced, burden-free, autonomous shopping.[8] Upon finally reaching the exhibit, the Queen praised the Packeteria's presentation of a future where shopping would not only 'be much easier' but also far less time-consuming.[9] The removal of counter-service staff empowered shoppers towards informed, efficient choices on the products they wished to buy, with the shop gaining conceptualisation as the ideal consumerist accompaniment to the mechanical age. In its review of the exhibit, the *Daily Mail* suggested 'The Shop of Tomorrow' provided 'as near to automatic shopping as is possible', while the *Advertiser's Weekly* proclaimed it an 'astonishing' and 'revolutionary piece of shop-making'.[10]

As well as eliciting the hyperbolic reactions of royalty and social commentators, the Packeteria also provoked serious, considered responses from contemporary British retailers. By 1933, Boots The Chemist was Britain's foremost chain of high-street retail pharmacists, with nearly 1,000 stores throughout the country.[11] The efficient, rational era of retailing

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Unknown, "Modern Marketing: Exhibition to be Opened Next Week", *Evening Telegraph*, July 10th 1933, 10.
[9] Unknown, "The King and Queen at Olympia", *The Daily Telegraph*, July 20th 1933, 12.
[10] Unknown, "Shop of the Future: Where Customers Will Help Themselves", *Daily Mail*, July 12th 1933, 8. "Packeteria: A Vision", *Advertiser's Weekly*, 58.
[11] WBA/BT/3/1/19- Boots Pure Drug Company Limited Annual Report and Statement of Accounts to 31st March 1933, Boots Archive. (All other archival material from Boots Archive unless initially stated)

heralded by the Packeteria, therefore carried potentially huge implications for an established organisation such as Boots. In July 1933, Boots' senior employees relayed their impressions of the Packeteria via their in-house staff magazine, *The Bee.* Written by an unnamed member of the editorial team, the report struck a notably different tone to the public media accounts celebrating the Packeteria's radical credentials. While the author of *The Bee* article recognised the shop's 'appeal of novelty', they expressed considerable doubt about the possibility of its 'very wide adoption'.[12] They highlighted numerous practical problems with the Packeteria's design; not least, the fact customers were obliged to renegotiate the store's pre-planned route if they forgot an item. As well as querying whether it was suitable to the 'customer in a hurry', the report asked why customers were forced to experience the entirety of the Packeteria, even if they only wanted to purchase one item. Furthermore, the author questioned whether the Packeteria's erosion of 'personal commendation' would ever be suitable for an advice-based retail pharmacist such as Boots. Noting that the recommendation of speciality healthcare products was severely limited by the Packeteria's propensity to only stock 'advertised lines', the report claimed:

> The average chemist will incline to the opinion that even if the 'Packeteria' idea were adopted in *part*…it is unlikely that it would ever extend so far as to embrace the whole of the pharmacists' activities.[13]

[12] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "The Shop of 1950", *The Bee*, Vol. 12, No. 5, July 1933: 196-197.
[13] Ibid.

Clearly, while bosses acknowledged the Packeteria's novelty and potential, they equally understood it as a contentious innovation that challenged many of the ideologies that had been foundational to Boots' success. *The Bee* article made clear that the Packeteria provoked serious questions around whether, and in what ways, a pharmacist could embrace modern retailing ideas, whilst remaining true to the principle of providing personalised, advice-based customer service. It also questioned whether the vast majority of the company's customers would actually welcome these types of retail innovation. At a more fundamental level, the article questioned whether chemist shops like Boots were inherently incompatible with self-service ideologies and consequently predestined to bypass or be excluded from the advantages of modernity.

Although company bosses delivered a circumspect assessment of both the Packeteria and the wider applicability of self-service ideas, Boots' post-1945 history was nevertheless defined by a long-lasting and highly engaged relationship with the sales format. The following thesis explores this relationship, examining how the traditions of retail pharmacy interacted with modern retailing practices. It investigates how Boots' pre-established procedures and values shaped the implementation of self-service ideologies, to influence aspects as wide-ranging as shop design, own-brand merchandising, retail employment and methods of in-store criminal abatement. Positioned at the intersection of three main historiographical conversations, the study contributes to new understandings of the post-1945 business history of Boots, in addition to advancing scholarly interpretations of the history of self-service practice and the wider debates associated with

post-war British society and culture. Focused on the years 1945-1980, it offers an innovative exploration of Boots' internal organisation, to understand how a retailer embedded in notions of personalised healthcare service was able to respond successfully to a modern retailing landscape infused with notions of consumer orientated freedom and choice. By evidencing the flexible, negotiated strategies adopted by executives, the thesis foregrounds how the company's post-war strategies were the result of a continual navigation between the ideas of tradition and modernity, freedom and control and commercial and healthcare provision. In doing so, it challenges the understanding of self-service as a unitary retail ideology and presents fresh evidence for the ways in which the era's newly constituted affluent and youth consumers had their shopping needs met by an established British retailer.

The History of Boots

This thesis argues that two key aspects of Boots' historical development were pivotal to the company's post-war adoption of self-service techniques. The first concerns the company's role as professional pharmacists, while the second focuses on the way in which its retail spaces operated in line with a deeply held sense of tradition and corporate values. As the interrelationship between these two elements cultivated impressions of Boots stores as dignified spaces that were accommodating of middle-class tastes and sensibilities, the thesis explores how the company upheld such values while simultaneously advancing a programme of retail modernisation. With the post-1945 history of Boots so far unexplored by scholars, the thesis therefore examines how the company's established practices were adapted into the 1950s and beyond. Rather than undertaking a strict business history *of*

Boots, it instead incorporates approaches related to the social and cultural history of shopping. In doing so, it builds upon many of the arguments and trends noted by scholars of Boots' late nineteenth and early-twentieth century period, to demonstrate how the company's post-war methodologies furthered its policy of adopting patient, moderated approaches to retail change.

Established by John Boot in 1849, the first Boots shop was a small, family-run herbalist situated on Goosegate in Nottingham, England. By making and selling medicines alongside the respected distribution of community-based health and wellbeing advice, the store epitomised many of the practices associated with a traditional chemists and druggists.[14] The shop was inherited by John's son Jesse in 1877, who upon reaching adulthood grew the company rapidly to establish both a nationwide network of pharmacy stores and a large, industrial complex for the manufacture of pharmaceutical goods. Scholars have largely relied upon the discipline of business history to interpret this period of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century expansion, with many accentuating the role Jesse's astute, guiding vision played in propelling the company towards success. While Stanley Chapman's study provides the most comprehensive example of this type of work, Christopher Weir's research also follows similar lines of enquiry.[15]

Chapman's work details how, alongside other multiple pharmacy chains like Taylor's Drugs Stores of Leeds and Day's Southern Drug Company of Southampton, Boots was able to establish a distinctive new style of retail-

[14] W.E. Court, "General Practice Pharmacy in the 1840s (Part Two)," *Pharmaceutical Historian* 21, no. 3 (1991): 288; Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Fontana Press, 1999).

[15] Stanley Chapman, *Jesse Boot of Boots the Chemists: A Study in Business History* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1973); Christopher Weir, *Jesse Boot of Nottingham: Founder of the Boots Company* (Nottingham: Boots Company, 1994).

pharmacy trading.[16] As well as adopting novel techniques such as mainstream newspaper advertising, Boots stores introduced a wide range of discounted proprietary lines, with small profit margins aimed at generating a higher rate of turnover.[17] The sale of a wider range of patent medicines and toiletry goods expanded the company's offering beyond the mere dispensing of medical prescriptions and advice, which enabled Boots' late-nineteenth-century stores to build upon their reputation for serving lower-income groups and begin attracting a much broader class demographic of customers.[18]

According to Chapman, this new approach constituted a 'direct challenge to the 'old-fashioned' established traders' and saw Boots stores face hostility from smaller, independent pharmacists, who feared the company were operating beyond the profession's accepted modes of community-based, trusted practice.[19] The work of Simon Phillips and Andrew Alexander demonstrates how these professional resentments were reflective of broader inter-war retailing trends, with many small-scale traders concerned about the impact efficient, large-scale multiples such as Boots and Marks & Spencer (M&S) would have upon their traditional modes of practice.[20] Equally, Stuart Anderson demonstrates that while the early twentieth-century marked a period of increased pharmacological professionalisation, it also saw Britain's

[16] Chapman, *Jesse Boot*, 78-79.
[17] Ibid., 41.
[18] Peter Scott and James T. Walker, "Large-Scale Retailing, Mass-Market Strategies and the Blurring of Class Demarcations in Interwar Britain," in *People, Places and Business Cultures: Essays in Honour of Francesca Carnevali*, ed. Paolo Di Martino, Andrew Popp, and Peter Scott (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 105.
[19] Chapman, *Jesse Boot*, 105.
[20] Andrew Alexander and Simon Phillips, "'Fair Play for the Small Man': Perspectives on the Contribution of the Independent Shopkeeper 1930–C.1945," *Business History* 48, no. 1 (2006); Simon Phillips and Andrew Alexander, "An Efficient Pursuit? Independent Shopkeeping in 1930s Britain," *Enterprise & Society* 6, no. 2 (2005).For an example of retail management at another multiple see, Martin Purvis, "Direction and Discretion: The Roles of Centre and Branch in the Interwar Management of Marks and Spencer," *History of Retailing and Consumption* 1, no. 1 (2015).

regulatory member's body, The Pharmaceutical Society, granted increased legal authority to define the parameters of professional pharmacy practice.[21] Boots' expansion and its presentation of a new variety of retail-pharmacy selling brought it into regular and on-going conflict with the Society, with both parties advancing differing interpretations on the appropriate means of operating contemporary pharmacy stores.

These antagonisms saw the company's stores project a series of reoccurring values to its customers that were strongly aligned with the traditions of healthcare provision and pharmacological advice. From the late-nineteenth century, the company had a policy of constructing elegant new stores within prosperous towns and cities, with many offering mock-Tudor facades that emphasised both their sense of Englishness and their rootedness within tradition.[22] Boots built a reputation by selling high-quality drugs and proprietary medicines, often of its own manufacture, at significantly cheaper rates than ordinary chemist stores. These products were supported by attentive, personalised service and an immutable ethos that the customer was always right. Furthermore, the company's stores retained counter-based dispensing as a core element of the business, with individual store advertisements accentuating how their pharmacists were caring, knowledgeable experts, who had attained the professional standards ascribed by the Pharmaceutical Society.[23] These values were encapsulated in the company's 'Chemist to the Nation' slogan, which from 1929 sought to

[21] Stuart Anderson, "From "Bespoke" to "Off-the-Peg": Community Pharmacists and the Retailing of Medicines in Great Britain 1900 to 1970," *Pharmacy in History* 50, no. 2 (2008).
[22] For example, see images of Exeter High-Street branch opened in 1907 within, WBA/BT/4/15/1/1- Company Guard Book. See also, Peter Scott, "Learning to Multiply: The Property Market and the Growth of Multiple Retailing in Britain, 1919-39," *Business history* 36, no. 3 (1994).
[23] WBA/BT/4/15/1/1- Company Guard Book.

project a mission of service and trust, while also helping to differentiate Boots from other pharmacy chains.[24] According to Simon Phillips, the new motto performed the dual purpose of encapsulating the firm's 'national importance and prestige', while underlining the pivotal role it played in advancing the health and wellbeing needs of British shoppers.[25] Phillips argues that the company's staff magazine, *The Bee* consistently portrayed the motto's ideology, by demonstrating that Boots was an integral part of inter-war Britain's retailing cultures, a vital component of civic benevolence and a considerate steward of the nation's health and well-being needs.

The company's reliance upon the traditions of retail-pharmacy enabled it to build a reputation as a retailer with distinctive middle-class appeal. This did not come at the expense of the company's universal commitment to health and well-being, but rather demonstrated how Boots was using its foundation in pharmacy provision to offer a higher quality, more refined customer experience.[26] Scholars Nickianne Moody and Nicola Wilson have argued that the 'Booklover's' subscription library introduced during the 1890s expanded the company's appeal amongst middle-class consumers, while the introduction of 'Number 2 Departments' by Jesse's wife Florence, sold durables such as stationery, books, artistic materials and fancy goods that targeted the refined tastes of the middle class. [27] Furthermore, during the

[24] Gary Kerridge, "Reconceptualising Organizational Identity: A Critical Realist and Historical Case Study of Walgreens Boots Alliance (1892-2002)" (University of Warwick, 2016), 138.
[25] Simon Phillips, "'Chemists to the Nation': House Magazines, Locality and Health at Boots the Chemists 1919–1939," *Management & Organizational History* 3, no. 3-4 (2008): 240.
[26] This partly reflects the trends noted by Charlotte Wildman, who claimed the period's central urban shopping facilities were increasingly refashioned as cross-class sites of leisure and mass consumer culture. See, Charlotte Wildman, *Urban Redevelopment and Modernity in Liverpool and Manchester, 1918-1939* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 109.
[27] Nickianne Moody, "Something to Read: The Boots Booklovers Library and the Great Fiction Question," *Popular Narrative Media* 1, no. 2 (2008): 197; Nicola Wilson, "Boots Book-Lovers' Library

early decades of the twentieth-century, Boots introduced opulent city-centre shops, such as the examples on Edinburgh's Princes Street and London's Regent Street, which deliberately aped the retailing methods of the department store.[28] According to Peter Scott and James Walker, these prestigious stores represented a further 'upward, rather than downward' expansion of the company's retail experience.[29]

Crucially, this consideration of middle-class tastes did not mean the company was rooted in anachronistic values. Various studies have demonstrated how Boots' early twentieth-century practices incorporated modern ideas, with Alistair Mutch exploring the company's modernist D10 manufacturing facility at Beeston and Paul Whysall examining how the firm's period of American ownership (1920-1933) was accompanied by more innovative and professionalised managerial structures.[30] A significant number of the company's larger inter-war stores also mirrored the retailing methods of rival high street multiples like Woolworth's and M&S through their use of open-display, counter-topped troughs for the handling and selection of goods.[31] In addition, Richard Hornsey demonstrates how the introduction of the premium own-brand cosmetic 'Number Seven' in 1935, used the ideas of modernity

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and the Novel: The Impact of a Circulating Library Market on Twentieth-Century Fiction," *Information & Culture* 49, no. 4 (2014): 431.

[28] Chapman, *Jesse Boot*, 87.

[29] Scott and Walker, "Large-Scale Retailing," 104.

[30] Alistair Mutch, "Modernist Architecture and Scientific Management: Owen Williams, the Boots 'Wets' Building and the Importance of Practice," *Management & Organizational History* 6, no. 3 (2011); Paul Whysall, "Interwar Retail Internationalization: Boots under American Ownership," *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 7, no. 2 (1997).

[31] Scott and Walker, "Large-Scale Retailing."

while also retaining an emphasis upon the sensibilities and tastes of its middle-brow users. [32]

Although the company was committed to post-war retailing modernity, this thesis argues that bosses were keen to extend their longstanding values, traditions and middle-class centred appeal into the self-service age. It contends that such ambitions were accentuated in the face of a new retailing system synonymous with notions of efficiency and homogeneity, with bosses using the company's grounding in pharmacological practice, and its associated connotations of service, quality and trust, to remould the precepts of self-service techniques. Furthermore, the thesis demonstrates how the introduction of self-service methods perpetuated the company's battles with the Pharmaceutical Society, with Boots' adherence to modern practices provoking further debates about how retail-pharmacy could be appropriately practiced in the post-war age.

The History of Self-Service

This thesis presents a comprehensive, long-term analysis of the ways in which a non-grocery retailer engaged with and adapted self-service techniques. It undertakes the literature's first detailed study of 'self-selection' methods and argues that the uniquely modified forms of self-service implemented by Boots had a significant impact on the retail experiences of Britain's post-war shoppers. Although historians including Barbara Usherwood, Lawrence Black & Thomas Spain and Shaw et al. have recognised that Britain's adoption of self-service techniques was varied,

[32] Richard Hornsey, "'The Modern Way to Loveliness': Middle-Class Cosmetics and Chain-Store Beauty Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain," *Women's History Review* 28, no. 1 (2019): 113.

contingent and highly contested, the literature has so far failed to engage with the system's diversity of practice.[33] Boots' adoption of self-selection provides a compelling example of how this variety of practice functioned in practical terms, enabling the thesis to explore more deeply the questions posed by Black & Spain surrounding how self-service techniques were experienced on the shop floor and what they *felt* like for consumers.[34] Furthermore, by responding to Alexander et al.'s call to move beyond simplistic modernisation narratives that portray self-service as inherently superior to earlier retail models, this thesis is able to challenge several dominant interpretations derived from grocery-based assessments of pure self-service systems. [35]

Historian Rachel Bowlby identifies how, in the early decades of the twentieth-century, North American grocery chains such as Piggly Wiggly, Big Bear and King Cullen pioneered the system of self-service. [36] Although there were subtle differences between these retailer's methods of operation, they nevertheless established a series of common characteristics that would eventually become synonymous with the new process of supermarket shopping. The direct person-to-person sales techniques of the over-the-

[33] Lawrence Black and Thomas Spain, "How Self-Service Happened : The Vision and Reality of Changing Market Practices in Britain," in *Imagining Britain's Economic Future, C.1800-1975*, ed. David. Thackeray, Andrew. Thompson, and Richard. Toye (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 162; Barbara Usherwood, "'Mrs Housewife and Her Grocer': The Advent of Self-Service Food Shopping in Britain " in *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot (London: Cassell, 2000), 114; Gareth Shaw and Andrew Alexander, "British Co-Operative Societies as Retail Innovators: Interpreting the Early Stages of the Self-Service Revolution," *Business History* 50, no. 1 (2008): 66.

[34] Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 161.

[35] Andrew Alexander, Simon Phillips, and Gareth Shaw, "Retail Innovation and Shopping Practices: Consumers' Reactions to Self-Service Retailing," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 40, no. 9 (2008): 2216-18.

[36] Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping* (London: Faber and Faber 2000), 135-51.

counter system were substituted for processes that asked customers to undertake the labour of shopping for themselves. As well as a reduction in the number of service staff, self-service techniques also saw the inclusion of pre-packaged and clearly priced goods; accessible, open-shelving; entry and exit turnstiles; complimentary wire baskets and the use of check-out counters with automatic cash registers. For Bowlby, these aspects functioned on the overriding principle of enhanced consumer freedom, with customers granted direct access to goods without the intercession of sales staff.[37]

Although self-service gained considerable traction within Depression era America, its history within Britain has largely been understood as a phenomenon tied to the efforts of post-war grocery retailers. As Britain's number of self-service food shops increased from 1,800 to over 6,000 between 1953 and 1959, scholars have largely sought to uncover and explain the reasons behind this rapid diffusion. [38] While recent work by Kathryn Morrison questions the true extent of the trial-blazing role ascribed to the Co-operative movement, scholars including Shaw et al. and Black & Spain nonetheless demonstrate the pivotal role played by the organisation in normalising and solidifying self-service techniques amongst post-war British shoppers. [39] Historians have also associated Britain's earliest forms of self-

[37] "Supermarket Futures," in *The Shopping Experience*, ed. Pasi Falk and Colin B. Campbell (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 98.
[38] Andrew Alexander, Gareth Shaw, and Louise Curth, "Promoting Retail Innovation: Knowledge Flows During the Emergence of Self-Service and Supermarket Retailing in Britain," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 37, no. 5 (2005): 810; Gareth Shaw, Louise Curth, and Andrew Alexander, "Selling Self-Service and the Supermarket: The Americanisation of Food Retailing in Britain, 1945–60," *Business History* 46, no. 4 (2004): 574.
[39] Kathryn A. Morrison, "The Great New Shopping Idea: Introducing Self-Service Retailing in the British Isles," *History of Retailing and Consumption* 9, no. 1 (2023); Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 165; Shaw and Alexander, "British Co-Operative Societies." See also, Adrian R Bailey et al., "Consumer Behaviour and the Life Course: Shopper Reactions to Self-Service Grocery

service with America's post-war mission of 'soft power' and influence, with specific attention granted to the role an offshoot of the Marshall Plan known as the Anglo-American Council of Productivity played in disseminating the system's ideas amongst Britain's grocery retailers.[40] As well as arguing that these transatlantic knowledge flows played an influential role in the post-war British Government's formulation of a new consumer oriented economic model, Alexander et al. contend they helped to establish a tight-knit 'community of practice' within Britain's grocery sector.[41] Analysis therefore focuses upon the grocery industry's shared practices and the ways in which certain firms successfully exploited self-service's economies of scale to advance the new system of supermarket trading. [42] With the number of British supermarkets increasing from 286 to 572 between 1959 and 1961, scholars predominately view the early-1960s as self-service's moment of ascension and the point from which the format became the established and normalised form of shopping for British grocery consumers.[43] Although these assessments are helpful in tracing the roots of British forms of self-service, they nonetheless sideline the role played by non-grocery retailers in promoting and familiarising the system amongst post-war shoppers. As Boots' first self-service experiment took place in 1951, it was contemporaneous with the system's period of rapid growth. Furthermore, the company's official 1960 launch of self-selection occurred in parallel with the

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Shops and Supermarkets in England C. 1947–75," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 42, no. 6 (2010): 5.

[40] Alexander, Shaw, and Curth, "Promoting Retail Innovation," 812; Shaw, Curth, and Alexander, "Selling Self-Service," 568.

[41] Alexander, Shaw, and Curth, "Promoting Retail Innovation," 815; Shaw, Curth, and Alexander, "Selling Self-Service," 574.

[42] See, Alexander, Shaw, and Curth, "Promoting Retail Innovation," 814.

[43] W. G. McClelland, "Economics of the Supermarket," *The Economic Journal* 72, no. 285 (1962): 156.

rise of supermarket trading. This thesis therefore argues that Boots' programmes of modernisation were deeply interconnected with the emergent ecology of self-service practice and thus a significant part of how the system became embedded within the retail cultures of post-war Britain.

Importantly, the thesis formulates these arguments without relying on the literature's traditional framing of self-service as a transformative retail innovation. The focus on rapid expansion, the novelty of the supermarket and the notion that self-service transitioned seamlessly *from* America *into* the British context places an undue emphasis upon the system's capacity to supplant traditional methods of operation. For example, Bowlby labels self-service 'the great retailing change of the twentieth century', while retail historian John Dawson claims its introduction was a 'marketing revolution'.[44] Moreover, Jon Stobart states self-service methods 'revolutionised shopping', while Carl Gardner and Julie Sheppard argue its adoption 'swept aside' traditional modes of retailing.[45] Equally, Kathryn Morrison states supermarkets 'revolutionised retailing'.[46] As well as creating the impression that self-service initiated a decisive break between pre and post-war forms of retailing, such approaches leave little scope for understanding the role continuity played in shaping Britain's uptake of modernised sales systems. They also fail to reflect the diversity of practice implemented at Boots and the ways in which the company's executives retained elements of their own

[44] Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 31; J.A. Dawson, "Innovation Adoption in Food Retailing — the Example of Self Service Methods," *Service Industries Review* 1, no. 2 (1981): 22.
[45] Jon Stobart, *Spend Spend Spend! A History of Shopping* (Stroud: The History Press, 2008).193. Carl Gardner and Julie Sheppard, *Consuming Passions: The Rise of Retail Culture*, vol. Volume 1 (London: Routledge, 2013). 183.
[46] Kathryn A. Morrison, *English Shops and Shopping: An Architectural History* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 275.

tradition and ethos within their reformulated model of self-selection. This thesis challenges the conventional periodisation of self-service history, by emphasising a stronger interplay between tradition and modernity in how self-service techniques were conceived and implemented. In doing so, it supports the research of Paul du Gay and Franck Cochoy, who have argued against revolutionary readings of self-service by demonstrating that many aspects of the model were already present within previous retailing techniques.[47]

The literature's focus upon narratives of expansion and transformation has occurred at the expense of understanding self-service's longer-term impacts. Few studies engage with the period after its initial moment of ascension, with limited understandings of how individual firms altered their approach to self-service to accommodate the shifting expectations and needs of their customers.[48] While this thesis supports du Gay's argument that many major British retailers took a cautious and experimental approach to self-service, adopting such a perspective for the entirety of the post-war period fails to recognise Boots' growing confidence to alter the format during the late 1950s and early 1960s.[49] Although the company's 1951 self-service experiment at Burnt Oak is crucial to this thesis' arguments, analysing this event in isolation only offers a limited perspective on Boots' relationship with the format. It therefore extends the analysis into the 1960s and 70s, to illustrate how the

[47] Paul du Gay, "Self-Service: Retail, Shopping and Personhood," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 7, no. 2 (2004); Franck Cochoy, *On the Origins of Self-Service* (London: Routledge, 2019).
[48] While the following authors explore consumer responses to grocery self-service, there is limited analysis of how retail firms altered their own approaches and models to accommodate consumer tastes. Alexander, Phillips, and Shaw, "Consumers' Reactions "; Bailey et al., "Consumer Behaviour and the Life Course."
[49] du Gay, "Self-Service," 161.

retailer's flexible adoption of self-service techniques enabled its stores to attract new consumer groups like the affluent teenager and respond to external pressures like rising retail crime and the growing public demand for higher standards of customer service.

The post-war era's swathe of new guidebooks and trade-journals were instrumental in establishing the grocery sector's shared community of practice and the wider professional understanding that there was a correct and incorrect way of doing self-service. The guidebooks written by retail experts such as Harry Hedges, Patrick Galvani & Arthur Arnell, and Ralph Towsey during the 1950s and 60s formulated industry-wide best practice and standards, while established trade-journals like *The Grocer* and new periodicals *Self-Service and Supermarket*, and *Supermarket & Self-Service* provided regular, upbeat messages to retailers on the system's benefits and opportunities. [50] Scholars have tended to uphold the messages of these publications by focusing analysis upon coherent, unitary examples of pure self-service practice. This has resulted in interpretations of self-selection methods being overlooked on account of their limited rendering of the format's techniques. For example, du Gay claims self-selection was a euphemistic device that allowed proponents to capture the benefits of modern techniques without damaging customer relations, while Stobart and Morrison label Boots' moderated system a 'partial' implementation of self-

[50] Partick Galvani & Arthur F. Arnell, *Going Self-Service? A Practical Guide to Self-Service Grocery Retailing* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Limited, 1952); Harry J. Hedges, *This Way to Self-Service* (London: Piscatorial Press, 1957); Ralph G. Towsey, *Self-Service Retailing: It's Profitable Application to All Trades* (London: Iliffe Books Ltd, 1964). See also, Alexander, Shaw, and Curth, "Promoting Retail Innovation," 812.

service methods.[51] While this thesis does not entirely refute these claims, it alternatively frames the system's moderation in more positive terms, arguing the root-causes of Boots' post-war successes lay in its restricted, fragmentary deployment of self-selection systems. It therefore illustrates that, for Boots, self-selection represented the culmination of an *enhanced* understanding of self-service techniques, rather than a compromised, inferior or ill-considered version of the system.

In doing so, this thesis presents an alternative narrative to that noted by Lawrence Black for the post-war Co-operative movement. While the Co-op's overlapping identity between the political and commercial spheres shared a number of similarities with Boots' desire to serve both medical and profitmaking interests, Black argues that the Co-operative struggled with these tensions and ultimately failed to come to terms with the post-war consumerist boom and its associated influx of self-service techniques.[52] In contrast, Boots' confident embrace of self-selection's duality positively differentiated the retailer from other high-street rivals and ultimately saw the company alleviate the tensions between the opposing elements of its business model. This acknowledgement allows the thesis to explain the various paradoxical aspects of Boots' post-war retail experience, including the ways in which its nationwide portfolio of stores were able to offer customers both localised community-pharmacy provisions alongside modernised department store consumerism. It also allows the thesis to add greater nuance to the dominant historiographical idea that the self-service

[51] du Gay, "Self-Service," 160; Morrison, *English Shops*, 217; Stobart, *Spend!*, 198.
[52] Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954-70* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 46-74.

era induced a significant loss to retail employee skill and expertise.[53] In addition, it enables the thesis to demonstrate how the company were able to harness the benefits of self-service techniques and offer a sufficiently modernised form of shopping, while maintaining its longstanding tradition of meeting the medical and healthcare needs of its customers.

Post-war Society and Culture

This thesis contributes towards five areas of scholarly debate regarding post-war British society and culture. These are the alleged Americanisation of post-war British life, the impact of rising mass affluence, the reconstruction of Britain's urban environments, the emergence of distinctive youth cultures, and the fears concerning the nation's post-1960s decline. By demonstrating that Boots' post-war history intersected these different topic areas, the thesis supports the work of scholars including Matthew Hilton and Frank Trentmann, who argue for the central role retail shopping and individual consumerism played in the economic, social and cultural life of post-war Britain.[54] Furthermore, by showing that Boots' retail experience both informed and shaped these different aspects of social-cultural life, the thesis emphasises the influence a multiple chain store could exert over the quotidian routines and practices of post-war Britons.

[53] For example, Bethan Bide, "The Fashion City and the Suburb: How Bentalls of Kingston Upon Thames Helped Rebuild Cultures of Fashionable Consumption in London after the Second World War," *The London Journal* 46, no. 1 (2021): 54; Pamela Cox, "Shop Girls, Social History and Social Theory," *Revista Brasileira de História* 37 (2017); du Gay, "Self-Service," 159.

[54] Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Peter Gurney, *The Making of Consumer Culture in Modern Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

This thesis argues that while Boots closely observed American-retailing practices, its engagements with self-service techniques were more complex and nuanced than those advanced within simplistic accounts of Britain's 'Americanisation'. The term Americanisation relates to the idea that Britain's traditional customs and values were usurped by the influx of America's more homogenised, brasher forms of consumer oriented leisure and culture. The term was epitomised by the early twentieth-century expansion of transatlantic retail chain Woolworth's, whose emporiums of cheap, easily obtainable goods brought a sense of unease and ambivalence amongst British commentators.[55] These anxieties gained further prominence during the missions of 'soft power' enacted by the post-1945 American Government, with Francis Williams' 1962 book, *The American Invasion* symptomatic of the concerns associated with Britain's apparent acceptance of both US capital and influence.[56] Due to its origins within inter-war America, modern-day scholars have understood Britain's uptake of self-service methods as symbolic of Britain's post-war Americanisation, with Shaw et al. citing the spread of the supermarket as representative of the ascendancy of US inspired techniques.[57] However, the uncritical use of the term not only reinforces the notion that British retailers passively accepted American-retailing ideologies, but also furthers the literature's revolutionary reading of

[55] Janice Winship, "Culture of Restraint: The British Chain Store 1920-39," in *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces*, ed. Peter Jackson, et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 16-17.
[56] Francis Williams, *The American Invasion* (London: Anthony Blond, 1962). See also, Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).
[57] Shaw, Curth, and Alexander, "Selling Self-Service," 569. See also, Scott R. Fletcher and Andrew Godley, "Foreign Direct Investment in British Retailing, 1850–1962," ibid.42, no. 2 (2000); Andrew Godley, "Foreign Multinationals and Innovation in British Retailing, 1850-1962," ibid.45, no. 1 (2003).

self-service by implying its novel, foreign methods had little connection to Britain's existing retail practices.

Boots' complex interrelationship with American methodologies was observable during its period of inter-war ownership by the US-based United Drug Company (1920-1933). While this period saw an ailing Boots firm implement increasingly professionalised structures, like the use of Territorial General Managers to oversee geographical areas of retail operations, such reorganisations did not amount to a full-scale Americanisation of the business.[58] Despite this injection of American ideas, Boots' inter-war bosses understood the two nations as culturally distinct, with Chapman arguing Jesse's son, John Boot, 'consciously strove to avoid the model of the American Drug store', after believing such forms of shopping were not well suited 'to the tastes of the British public'.[59] Such patterns were repeated during the post-war period, with Boots' moderated version of self-selection underlining how the model's American roots were decisively remoulded to suit the customs and expectations of localised retail-pharmacy customers. As well as regularly demonstrating how Boots executives rejected what they considered the gaudier forms of retailing culture present within North America, the thesis highlights how various elements of self-service ideology were deliberately reconditioned for Boots' post-war British context. In doing so, it supports works by authors such as Adrian Horn and Sean Nixon, who while acknowledging America's socio-cultural impacts, nevertheless argue

[58] Whysall, "Boots under American Ownership," 162.
[59] Chapman, *Jesse Boot*, 193.

for processes of negotiation and indigenisation in how different aspects of British culture accepted US practices. [60]

By demonstrating how Boots' schemes of retail modernisation responded to the age of rising living standards and mass consumerism, this thesis also contributes to debates concerning post-war affluence. While the concept of affluence is a central organising concept within studies of post-war Britain, it is, as Shinobu Majima and Mike Savage acknowledge, a somewhat indistinct formulation defined by its own sense of malleability and state of flux.[61] Broadly defined as an increase in individual wealth, coupled with heightened forms of consumer spending on new durables like televisions and motor vehicles, studies of affluence have encompassed a wide range of topics including its political ramifications and its impacts upon traditional class structures.[62] Influenced by contemporary sociological studies investigating the social, economic and political ramifications of affluence, the scholarly literature also contains disagreements about when the process began and which elements of British society benefited, or were changed the most, by its occurrence.[63] Although these studies help to define the broad effects of

[60] Adrian Michael Horn, *Juke Box Britain: Americanisation and Youth Culture, 1945-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Sean Nixon, "Apostles of Americanization? J. Walter Thompson Company Ltd, Advertising and Anglo-American Relations 1945–67," *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 4 (2008). See also, Allison Abra, *Dancing in the English Style: Consumption, Americanisation and National Identity in Britain, 1918-50* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 154.
[61] Shinobu Majima and Mike Savage, "Contesting Affluence: An Introduction," *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 4 (2008).
[62] Rodney Lowe, "Modernizing Britain's Welfare State: The Influence of Affluence, 1957-1964," in *An Affluent Society?: Britain's 'Golden Age' Revisited*, ed. Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Avner Offer, "British Manual Workers: From Producers to Consumers, C. 1950–2000," *Contemporary British History* 22, no. 4 (2008); Stefan Ramsden, "Remaking Working-Class Community: Sociability, Belonging and 'Affluence' in a Small Town, 1930–80," ibid.29, no. 1 (2015); Mike Savage, "Working-Class Identities in the 1960s:Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study," *Sociology* 39, no. 5 (2005).
[63] John H. Goldthorpe and David Lockwood, "Affluence and the British Class Structure," *The Sociological Review* 11, no. 2 (1963); Jon Lawrence, "Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, C. 1930–64," *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 2 (2013); Selina Todd, "Phoenix Rising:

affluence, there are currently limited empirical understandings of the diverse material and spatial ways in which it was accommodated and expressed.[64] This thesis therefore responds to two elements of the literature representative of Britain's period of mass affluence—namely post-war urban development and the emergence of new youth cultures—to demonstrate the distinctive ways Boots stores accommodated rising individual prosperity.

Historians including Guy Ortolano, Sam Wetherell and Otto Saumarez-Smith acknowledge how the optimism brought by rising affluence shaped Britain's post-war schemes of urban renewal and planning. [65] They describe how modernised shopping precincts were invariably positioned as the centrepieces of these redevelopments, with such facilities seeking to reify the ambitions of Britain's new consumer orientated economy. [66] By arguing Milton Keynes New Town was designed around notions of freedom, choice and abundance, Ortolano demonstrates the significant ideological overlaps between these schemes of urban redevelopment and the new forms of self-service shopping they contained. [67] Furthermore, Alistair Kefford argues many large-scale retailers exploited this moment of urban improvement to position themselves as 'the only actors capable of servicing the consumption

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Working-Class Life and Urban Reconstruction, C. 1945–1967," *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 3 (2015).

[64] An example of this more empirical approach is, Alistair Kefford, "Housing the Citizen-Consumer in Post-War Britain: The Parker Morris Report, Affluence and the Even Briefer Life of Social Democracy," *Twentieth Century British History* 29, no. 2 (2017).

[65] Guy Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Sam Wetherell, *Foundations. How the Built Environment Made Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020); Otto Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities: Architect-Planners and the Politics of Radical Urban Renewal in 1960s Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[66] For example see, Wetherell, *Foundations*, 60-61.

[67] Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, 52.

needs of a newly affluent nation'. [68] Nevertheless, despite illustrating the connection between self-service ideas, affluence and the construction of new urban shopping facilities, such studies are predominately undertaken at the macro-level, with no detailed analysis of how the constituent stores within these schemes used self-service techniques to facilitate the more pleasurable, choice-based forms of shopping necessitated by rising affluence. This thesis therefore demonstrates how Boots aligned with aspects of these urban development programmes to redesign its stores for the affluent age. In doing so, it provides important empirical evidence for how one of the nation's leading multiple chains responded to the desires of Britain's newly affluent consumers.

Importantly, the thesis does not argue that Boots assimilated entirely with these broader schemes of retail modernisation. By highlighting how the company used its model of self-selection to resist the commonplace accusations of standardisation and homogeneity accompanying these new retail environments, it provides important new evidence for the diversity of Britain's post-war affluent experience. [69] In doing so, it expands understandings of post-war shopping history, by illustrating how Boots acted autonomously, and somewhat paradoxically, to embrace retail modernity, while also acting as the flagbearers for the increasingly at risk forms of service-based shopping.

While David Fowler argues the social categorisation of the teenager emerged from the enhanced wage-earning opportunities of the inter-war

[68] Alistair Kefford, *The Life and Death of the Shopping City: Public Planning and Private Redevelopment in Britain since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 103-04.
[69] For discussions of retail standardisation see, Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*, 83; Stobart, *Spend!*, 196.

period, distinctive forms of youth culture were unquestionably given fresh impetus during the age of post-war affluence.[70] As well as valuing the post-war youth market at over £850 million, Mark Abrams' influential 1959 study, *The Teenage Consumer*, highlights how Britain's 15 to 25 years olds craved new forms of leisure-based consumption centred around fashion, popular music, cosmetics and socialising. [71] The sense of novelty associated with these forms of adolescent sociability has seen the scholarly literature predominately understand youth subcultures from the perspective of the working classes and as an expression of resistance to, and divergence from, established societal norms and structures. [72] Yet, as scholars Arthur Marwick and Hannah Charnock contend, not all of Britain's youth cultures were shaped by notions of conflict and opposition. [73] By specifically looking at cosmetic goods, this thesis broadens understandings of the post-war youth experience, by evidencing how Boots exploited the flexible nature of its self-selection model to provide new shopping experiences and lines of merchandise centred on the mainstream practices of young, British girls.[74] Furthermore, by demonstrating how Boots' appeal to the emergent adolescent market was shaped by its own British-centric traditions and

[70] David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, C.1920-1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[71] Mark Abrams, *The Teenage Consumer* (London: London Press Exchange, 1959), 9-18.
[72] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979); Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Rituals : Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006). See also the more contemporary sociological surveys of the phenomenon of the teenager, such as Geoff Mungham and Geoff Pearson, eds., *Working Class Youth Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976); Peter Laurie, *The Teenage Revolution* (London: Anthony Blond, 1965).
[73] Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, C. 1958-C. 1974*, 1 ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 59; Hannah Charnock, "Teenage Girls, Female Friendship and the Making of the Sexual Revolution in England, 1950-1980," *The Historical Journal* 63, no. 4 (2020): 1037.
[74] For a complimentary analysis of mainstream youth experiences, see Jim Gledhill, "White Heat, Guide Blue: The Girl Guide Movement in the 1960s," *Contemporary British History* 27, no. 1 (2013).

customs, the thesis challenges the scholarly viewpoint that the teenager was an American import and thus symbolic of Britain's submission to US consumerist culture. [75]

The thesis also contributes to debates surrounding the perception of Britain's decline during the second half of the post-war period. While declinist narratives were traditionally focused on Britain's economic performance, they also encompassed fears related to the social and cultural demise of contemporary life.[76] In light of the prominence of declinist debates within the literature, it is surprising that the rapid escalation in rates of shoplifting from the beginning of the 1970s has so far received limited attention from scholars.[77] Accompanied by high-level political debate and a sense of moral panic, shoplifting's increased presence served as the antithesis of the optimism associated with post-war affluence. Furthermore, its attendant fears of urban malaise also tested the principles of self-service shopping and the foundations of the country's wider schemes of urban development. Nevertheless, it is important to look beyond the social discourse of decline to discover if those retailers at the centre of the situation understood the crime in similar terms. [78] By providing a detailed picture of Boots' response to shoplifting, this thesis offers a more nuanced appraisal of this alleged point of crisis. It shows that while Boots were determined to limit the crime, the

[75] Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2005), 435-37.
[76] For examples of these two perspectives on decline see, Jim Tomlinson, "Economic 'Decline' in Post-War Britain," in *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939–2000*, ed. Paul Addison and Harriet Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005); Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, 2nd Edition ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[77] Dawn Nell et al., "Helping Yourself: Self-Service Grocery Retailing and Shoplifting in Britain C. 1950-75," *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 3 (2011).
[78] Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, "Introduction: The Benighted Decade? Reassessing the 1970s," in *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, ed. Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

associated criminological paradigm of deterrence made it difficult to contain. Furthermore, the continued hegemony of self-service methods raised questions about the retailer's willingness to withhold those freedoms like touch and customer-centred choice, felt to propel the temptation to steal. It therefore highlights the ambivalent role retailers played in perpetuating the sense of decline associated with the affluent retail economy.

Methods and structure

This thesis is divided into five thematic chapters. These follow a broad chronological pattern, beginning in the immediate post-war years and finishing in the late-1970s. However, as the thesis relies upon understandings of Boots' traditions and values, its chronology is not strictly confined to the post-war period and where necessary context is provided through engagements with the company's inter-war retailing practices and approaches. Analysis is predominately based upon original archival material from the Boots company archive in Nottingham. Here a wide variety of source materials, both internal and external facing, have been consulted. These include in-house magazines distributed to retail sales staff, such as *The Bee* (1921-1969)*, Boots News* (1970-1994) and *Sales & Selling* (1953-1962). It also includes sales bulletin *The Merchandise News* (1963-1972), sent fortnightly to Boots stores outlining the latest promotions and sales techniques. Published advertisements are also consulted, as are internally published staff reports, internal correspondence related to merchandise development, staff-training literature and architectural plans. Where possible, evidence within the Boots company archive has been supplemented and cross-referenced with material from outside the company, such as within the

local and national press, retail trade-journals and archival collections related to the Home Office and local police constabularies.

The first chapter examines how Boots came to adopt a stable, moderated version of self-selection. It begins by analysing the company's 1951 full-scale self-service experiment at its store in Burnt Oak, London. Although the Burnt Oak store was contemporaneous with Britain's first wave of post-war self-service experiments and was the first chemist in the country to adopt the technique, this was not the 'moment' when Boots became a self-service retailer. A 1952 legal challenge from the Pharmaceutical Society sought to question the suitability of self-service trading within a pharmacy setting and significantly altered Boots' relationship with the format. After this case, Boots explored ways to balance the modernity of self-service with the traditions of its pharmacy business. The chapter therefore demonstrates how the Burnt Oak experiment marked the beginning of a decade-long process of patient research with the format. This research involved extensive executive-level visits to observe American retailing methods, as well as piecemeal, and largely surreptitious, in-store trials. In assessing the impact of this research, the chapter outlines how company bosses gained the confidence to moderate self-service ideas in ways that upheld their traditional values and longstanding corporate ethos.

Chapter two begins in 1960, at the moment when Boots executives formally announced their 'own-branded' version of self-selection. It focuses upon the design of the company's modernised stores and the ways in which these spaces sought to accommodate the balanced forms of shopping promised by the new system of self-selection. It examines four common elements of this

in-store scheme— visibility and lighting, layout, materiality and colour, and merchandising— to show how the company's post-war shops offered new forms of retail experience to their customers. These features were modelled around notions of the newly affluent post-war consumer to facilitate those experiences expected within the age of self-service— namely browsing, rational consumer-based choice and freedom of circulation. However, the chapter argues that to avoid alignment with full self-service operations, Boots bosses sought to refract these facilities through the company's middle-class sensibilities and pharmacological traditions. It did this by ensuring these new design features projected ideas of refined taste, orderliness and dignified calm. The chapter demonstrates the ways in which Boots' approach to self-selection responded to the needs and desires of a largely pre-existing, and pre-understood, customer typology.

The third chapter focuses on youth and argues that Boots were prepared to introduced unconventional lines of new merchandise and adapt its model of self-selection in order to attract the affluent teen consumer. It does so by examining 'Seventeen', a brand new own-good cosmetic range targeted exclusively at teenaged girls. Launched in 1968, the range was an attempt to reverse the company's fortunes with this distinctive new market, after a series of largely unsuccessful attempts during the early 1960s. It shows how Seventeen encapsulated many of the exciting elements of modern youth culture through its appeal to cosmetic experimentation, its use of younger sales assistants and its encouragement towards collective teen-girl shopping experiences. While many of these aspects were promoted as being different from those offered to the company's adult customers, the chapter

demonstrates how they were always recalibrated towards Boots' own traditions and ethos. It argues Seventeen was defined by its opposition to resistant forms of youth subculture and through its appeal to constrained, orderly make-up use that reflected the tastes of a particular type of demure, mainstream, 'nice-girl' customer. It also shows how Seventeen was sold via a distinctive hybridised adaption of the company's own model of self-selection, which while promoting modern retail experiences like browsing, simultaneously enveloped teens within the company's longstanding retail tradition of counter-led service and advice. The chapter therefore demonstrates the similarities between Seventeen and the entire model of tempered self-selection enacted by the company, arguing that both operated as a projection of modernity, while simultaneously acting as a bulwark to conventional middle-class practices and tastes.

Chapter four examines the employee's role within Boots' model of self-selection. While retail work is an under-examined aspect of post-war shopping histories, the literature largely understands self-service techniques as having induced a reduction in both the skills and availability of shop-floor employees. The chapter challenges these interpretations, by showing how Boots' model of self-selection facilitated continuities with the company's inter-war, counter-service practices. By examining the demands and expectations placed upon an employee's product knowledge, customer service and aesthetic presentation skills, the chapter highlights how Boots sought to differentiate its in-store offer from the wider perceptions of deskilling and rationality encircling modernised retail techniques. While the company's executive genuinely wished to maintain a high-level of employee skill, the

chapter reveals how Boots' model of self-selection placed its employees under a unique set of tensions, with the desire to maintain strong service-based practices regularly jeopardised by a new-retailing culture simultaneously promoting faster, more convenient forms of choice-based shopping. It argues the company's desire to uphold personalised service practices was undermined by its parallel pursuit of the operational efficiencies and cost-saving measures mandated by self-service techniques. In particular, these related to an increased recourse to employing part-time workers, which raised new apprehensions regarding their commitment to the company, as well as questions concerning their abilities and levels of trustworthiness.

The final chapter examines the interrelationship between self-service techniques and shoplifting. It argues that while Boots executives recognised that the new methods of self-service would cause a rise in shoplifting, they were nevertheless taken aback by the rapid escalation of the crime during the early 1970s. As this situation necessitated new approaches, the chapter examines the company's participation within the 1971 Bristol Experiment, a unique citywide trial that sought to measure the impact of novel crime-cutting technologies like CCTV cameras and convex mirrors on rates of shoplifting. While this experiment demonstrated Boots' commitment to the new criminological paradigm of deterrence, it raised pertinent new questions about how the retailer could introduce these novel tools of control whilst maintaining the freedoms and sense of choice promised to law-abiding customers by self-service techniques. While the company's updated employee procedures for the containment of shoplifting also demonstrated its

seriousness about confronting the issue, the nationwide shift to deterrence, and its reliance upon the latent threat of surveillance, posed serious challenges for the company's effective containment of the crime. Furthermore, the police's partial withdrawal from policies of conviction, coupled with the retailer's increased autonomy to orchestrate its own approach to systems of containment, created significant differences in how the crime was conceptualised and confronted by individual high-street retailers. The chapter therefore demonstrates how the desire to uphold the freedoms of the post-war retail economy perpetuated shoplifting's presence as an inevitable, unresolvable consequence of the choice-based, consumer-orientated model of the self-service age.[79]

These chapters emphasise that self-service was not a rigid, monolithic system, but rather a flexible and adaptive model, capable of evolving in response to the needs and practices of established retail firms. As well as illustrating the diversity of self-service practice present within Britain's post-war high street, the example from Boots represents the ways in which a shopper's exposure to modern retailing experiences was conditioned by a series of complex interactions between needs-based provision and profitability, freedom and control, and tradition and modernity. The thesis therefore exemplifies how post-war Britain's ecology of self-service practice was always much more compromised and diluted than the optimistic, efficient and unencumbered version of retail modernity foretold within the Packeteria.

[79] For a criminal theory discussion about managing crime as an inevitability of modern life see, Marcus Felson, *Crime and Everyday Life: Insights and Implications for Society* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 1994).

Chapter One- 'An Experiment in Selling': Self-Service on Trial and the Progression Towards Modernised Forms of Retailing c.1950-1960.

On March 9th 1951, Boots opened its first self-service store in the London district of Burnt Oak, Edgware. Equipped with two checkout counters and a central gondola full of merchandise, the experimental store was a faithful representation of the newly expounded precepts of self-service retailing. Representing a radical departure from the company's previous design standards, the new store was heralded as Britain's first known example of a self-service chemist.[1] Nevertheless, in spite of its pioneering nature, the Burnt Oak experiment failed to initiate either Boots' immediate, or wholesale, conversion to self-service principles. Instead of offering executives a straightforward template for change, the experiment prompted a reformulation of the ways in which the company understood and utilised the new sales format. The decade after the Burnt Oak experiment therefore saw Boots executives make gradual manoeuvres towards a new hybrid style of shopping that represented neither the complete rejection, nor the comprehensive acceptance, of self-service principles. Ultimately known as self-selection, this tempered style of modernised shopping came to epitomise the experiences available to Boots customers throughout the 1960s.

This chapter describes how Boots transitioned from the pure form of self-service introduced at Burnt Oak to the more stable and distinctive self-selection model eventually adopted by its executives. Focused upon the

[1] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "An Experiment in Selling: Self-service shop opened at Burnt Oak, Edgware". *The Bee*, Vol.22 No.2, April 1951:2.

decade of activity after Burnt Oak's inauguration, it is arranged chronologically into five sections. After outlining the objectives of the Burnt Oak experiment in section one, the second part discusses the 1952 legal challenge Boots faced from the Pharmaceutical Society. This trial questioned whether self-service trading was suitable for the advice-based retail cultures of a professional pharmacist. It argues that the trial altered the company's relationship with self-service formats, ultimately turning the company's executives away from pure versions of the model. Although the Burnt Oak experiment ran until 1955, the mid-to-late1950s were marked by periods of hesitant experimentation with self-service ideas. By highlighting some of these isolated experiments, section three argues that company bosses adopted a piecemeal approach that sought to bring Boots customers with them on the journey towards modernisation. Section four examines the late 1950s North American research visits embarked upon by senior executives. Undertaken to observe transatlantic self-service techniques, these visits offer a crucial insight into the executive-level reasoning behind the new format. These visits decisively shaped the company's manoeuvres towards self-selection methods, with executives seeking to retain the company's traditions alongside any moves towards modernisation. Finally, section five examines the company's 1960 announcement that it was adopting an 'own-brand' version of self-selection. It argues that this model encapsulated a decade's worth of research and purported to offer customers a unique balance between counter and self-service methods.

Despite its structure, the chapter does not wish to suggest Boots arrived at its version of self-selection principles in coherent linear manner. Although the

company's approaches to, and understandings of, self-service techniques matured through the 1950s, executives did not simplistically accrue such knowledge. Each of the chapter's sections are therefore inflected with varying degrees of uncertainty, negotiation and experimentation, as company bosses patiently developed the confidence to adapt self-service's overarching ideas. Taken together, the sections construct a holistic account of the company's evolving relationship with self-service techniques, rather than drawing partial conclusions from one, limited, moment of its history. By suggesting that Boots' relationship with self-service techniques outlasted, and was more complex, than the engagements first presented at Burnt Oak, the chapter begins to break down the literature's rather monolithic interpretations of the format. In the process, it can also challenge the historiographical perception that self-service was a fixed, revolutionary moment, distinctly aligned with the grocery sector and the arrival of the supermarket.[2]

As discussed in the thesis' main introduction, historians have largely understood self-service techniques as a North American import that revolutionised British retailing practices.[3] By demonstrating that Boots were able to adapt self-service techniques for its own purposes, the chapter adds to recent historiographical evidence for the gradual unpicking of Americanisation narratives.[4] The appreciation that self-service was not

[2] For example, Alexander, Shaw, and Curth, "Promoting Retail Innovation."; Bailey et al., "Consumer Behaviour and the Life Course."; Bowlby, *Carried Away*; "Supermarket Futures."; Usherwood, "Mrs Housewife ".
[3] Shaw, Curth, and Alexander, "Selling Self-Service."
[4] Horn, *Juke Box Britain: Americanisation and Youth Culture, 1945-60*. Nixon, "Apostles of Americanization? J. Walter Thompson Company Ltd, Advertising and Anglo-American Relations 1945–67."

homogenously supplanted into British retailing systems, offers more scope for recognising that retailers like Boots exercised significant agency in how the system was interpreted and deployed. The chapter subsequently broadens understandings of how modified versions of self-service actually functioned in practical terms, and the role these systems subsequently played in shaping the quotidian retail practices of British shoppers.

1951- The Burnt Oak Experiment

During 1950, the company's senior executives were gradually building the confidence to perform their own experiment with self-service principles. After undertaking a research trip to observe North American retail practices, future chairman Willoughby R. Norman, was said to be 'full of enthusiasm' for self-service techniques. [5] The topic also featured prominently during a senior managers conference held at Gleneagles, Scotland in May 1950. During the event, Retail Sales Manager Henry Fraser used his speech to propose the removal of all service counters from future Boots shops. Regarding counters as the 'final barrier' to modernised sales practices, Fraser implored colleagues to begin a new chapter in the company's history by having sales assistants walk forward, greet the customer and sell 'from the *front!*' of the firm's traditional kiosks. [6]

This approach was largely determined by the actions of Britain's major retailing organisations, who had already initiated their own experiments with self-service methodologies. For example, the food hall within M&S' Wood

[5] Taken from, PSC/4/12/9/4- Dr Stanley Chapman's oral history notes, "Interview with R.M. Dickson, 10th and 24th May and 18th July 1974." (used with authors permission)
[6] WBA/BT/5/34/3/1- "Territorial General Managers' Conference at Gleneagles, May 15th-19th 1950": 13. Emphasis in original.

Green store was converted to self-service in January 1947, while Tesco had trialled the format in St. Albans during the same year. Sainsbury's had also experimented with the model at Croydon in early 1950.[7] These trials posed a nascent threat to Boots, because within an expanded self-service system, many grocers stood to make large financial gains on the toiletries and simple pain reliefs traditionally sold by the company. [8] By positioning their experiment within a comparable outer-London suburb, Boots' managers were demonstrating their desire to mimic the context and set-up of their rivals. This would have offered bosses a comparable variable to measure their Burnt Oak experiment against and can explain the somewhat unusual decision not to perform the trial nearer to Boots' Nottingham headquarters.

All of these trials appeared broadly similar to one another, with each retailer faithfully implementing the system's overarching criteria of entry turnstiles, one way customer flows, complimentary baskets and checkout counters.[9] This reflected the fact that during the early 1950s, self-service in Britain was still in a tentative, embryonic phase, with many retailers uncertain that such approaches were suited to the British context. For example, Tesco reverted its St. Albans store back to counter-service methods in 1948, before readopting the system a year later.[10] Furthermore, Sainsbury's had only converted three of its stores to the system by 1954.[11] Boots also displayed this element of uncertainty, with the company's internal publications largely playing-down the radical nature of the Burnt Oak store. Arguing that the

[7] Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 164-65.
[8] Taken from, PSC/4/12/9/7- Chapman notes "Interview with R.M. Dickson".
[9] For example of this similarity see, "Sainsbury's Sample Self-Service", *J.S. Journal*, Vol. 3 No.4, September 1950: 3-10.
[10] Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 164.
[11] Ibid., 165.

experiment was undertaken firmly within the company's own traditions, *The Bee* claimed it was seeking to discover whether 'the advantages of self-service' could be applied 'without sacrificing any of the traditional standards on which the reputation of pharmacy is founded'.[12] The new store contained 'the complete Boots inventory', with the only stock differential coming from the fact it did not issue 'poisons for which a prescription is necessary'.[13] Reflecting the merchandise offer of a correspondingly sized Boots branch, stock was concentrated around toiletry and chemist's lines, plus a range of greetings cards. Employees were also reassured that the experiment did not seek to 'save staff', with executive's anticipating the store would function with 'the same' number of employees 'as that of a branch of similar size'.[14]

The experiment therefore encapsulated a cautious balance between change and continuity. Boots Branch 1033 had been in operation at 71 Burnt Oak Broadway since 1938, with one staff circular noting it had never been a 'particularly remarkable shop' and was 'not very different' from the majority of the company's other branches.[15] By 1951, executives recognised that the district was in need of a larger shop, so promptly acquired the premises adjacent to the store at number 73.[16] Although executives wanted to conduct their self-service experiment as part of an enlarged Branch 1033, their planning application was turned down, ensuring the company had to run its trial in a 'completely different shop', next door at number 73 Burnt Oak

[12] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "An Experiment in Selling", *The Bee*.
[13] WBA/BT/5/39/1/1/9- "Personnel Department Newsletter No.9", January-February 1951.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "An Experiment in Selling", *The Bee*.

Broadway.[17] Separated through the retention of an internal, dividing wall both stores remained open simultaneously, with the experimental shop known as Branch 1033a to enable employees to differentiate between the two spaces.[18]

The shortage of timber, bricks and construction labour stemming from wartime rationing, meant the store at 73 Burnt Oak Broadway mirrored the majority of the major chain's earliest self-service experiments, by taking place within an adapted, re-fitted retail space.[19] As Image 1.1 demonstrates, the company's designers utilised this situation to their advantage, in order to continue downplaying the most radical elements of the trial. The comparable external architecture, signage and frontage of the two stores illustrated that Boots' self-service trial did not take place within a purpose-built shop, with designers choosing to accentuate these similarities by shunning any overt indication that the new store offered self-service techniques. Although there was a sign within the entranceway announcing 'Boots Self-Service', the company's approach differed from the methods adopted by the Express Dairy grocery chain, which boldly placed self-service signage over the thresholds of its converted stores.[20] The prototype Boots store instead chose to offer more tacit indications of its internal selling practices. Firstly, the store's modern, partial window display technique allowed passing customers a more open view of the shop's interior (see also chapter two). While this was more tempered than the unrestricted views offered into Express Dairy

[17] Ibid.
[18] The number was later changed to 1500 because suppliers were charging all items to the original store. For details, see WBA/BT/32/51/12- "Oral History Reminiscences".
[19] Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 162.
[20] See image in, Galvani & Arnell, *Going Self-Service?* , 47.

stores, it nonetheless contrasted sharply with the traditional full window adornment adopted in the adjacent store. Secondly, the new store had a wider double doorway, which facilitated easier customer access, and permitted the sales floor's one-way 'in' and 'out' system. As well as confirming the company's cautious and uncertain approach to self-service, these understated external design choices mitigated the risks associated with the trial, as they allowed bosses to quickly and quietly disband the experiment at any time, should customers fail to warm to its methods.



Image 1.1- The exterior of the both Burnt Oak stores, taken from Burnt Oak Broadway. The store on the left is the traditional counter-service Branch 1033. The store on the right is the self-service Branch 1033a. (WBA/BT/21/46/1/560/195/1-c.1953)

As Image 1.2 shows, the contrast between the two stores was more clearly defined within the internal design scheme. Drawn by Boots' chief architect, Mr. Colin St. Clair Oakes, the top floorplan depicts the limited sales area of a traditional, inter-war style counter-service shop. It shows how the floor space within Branch 1033 was segmented into the three distinct zones of toiletry/surgical, chemist and dispensary needs, with each of these spaces earmarked by imposing service fixtures and counters. Although the prominent position of the dispensary instantly verified the shop's pharmacy remit to entering customers, the long service counters positioned on either side of the store served to funnel customers into a constricted sales space. The store's singular doorway store also compounded this confined, linear flow of customers. Although Boots shops traditionally displayed merchandise under glass, after 1925, shops gradually introduced open-displayed troughs situated on top of service counters, which allowed customers to touch and select certain goods. [21] While this approach was a direct response to Woolworth's modernised style of trading, it nonetheless still placed limitations upon the quantity of merchandise that could be displayed within the shop.[22] Furthermore, as significant quantities of products were displayed on the walls behind each counter, customer enquiries had to be mediated through a sales assistant and therefore often proceeded under the assumption of 'no-touch' advisory selling. The large stock room positioned behind the dispensary of Branch 1033, underlined that the majority of merchandise within this

[21] For an example arrangement of a traditional, interwar Boots counter see, WBA/BT/21/46/1/540/24- Half glass plate negative of chemists counter in Boots High-Street, Lincoln store, 1935.

[22] Britain's first Woolworth's shop was introduced in Liverpool in 1909, see Kathryn A. Morrison, *Woolworth's: 100 Years on the High Street* (Swindon: Historic England, 2015). For a comment about Boots responding to this style of trading see, PSC4/12/1/2- "Interview with Henry Fraser 22nd November 1976".

traditional counter-service store remained hidden from customer view and touch. This explained why the original store utilised bountiful window-displays, as this offered managers a form of promotion that advertised internal products, as well as enticing passing customers inside.

By contrast, the plans for the new prototype store demonstrated that St. Clair Oakes had elected to implement an 'orthodox self-service pattern'.[23] While the two stores were of a comparable size, the plan illustrated the expanded sales area that had been created by pushing the majority of fixtures and fittings to the perimeter of the shop floor and arranging them within a distinctive horseshoe shape. Capable of accommodating around 60 customers at a time, this arrangement afforded the new store a novel sense of openness and allowed the sales-floor to occupy space originally reserved for the dispensary and excess stock within the traditional counter-service shop.[24] It also enabled designers to place a large central gondola of open-displayed merchandise in the centre of the sales space. Unlike the constricted channel created by the traditional store's opposing service counters, this gondola was accessible from both sides, with its slightly curved-edge gently coercing customers through the entirety of the sales space. The conspicuous positioning of arrows throughout the plan demonstrated that the shop was conceptualised with an ingrained sense of movement and flow, with customers expected to begin their tour by collecting a wire basket from the right-hand side of the shop, before passing all

[23] WBA/BT/5/39/1/1/9- "Personnel Department Newsletter".
[24] "Self-Service Shops: Pharmaceutical Society v Boots Cash Chemists (Southern) Ltd.", *The Pharmaceutical Journal,* July 26th 1952: 67.

available merchandise and exiting via the two checkout counters positioned on the store's left-hand side.[25]

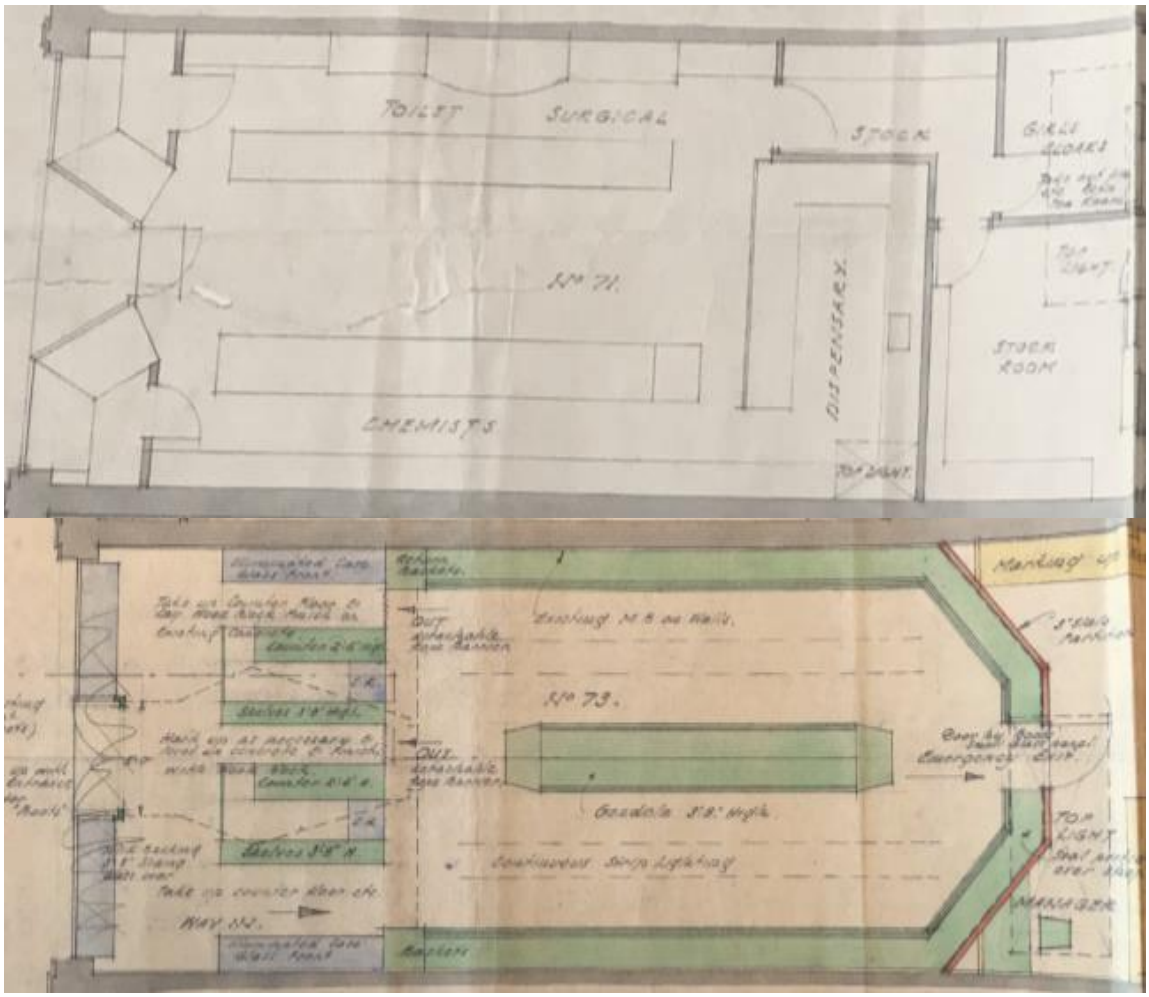


Image 1.2- Architectural floorplans of both Burnt Oak stores. The top image represents the traditional counter-service Branch 1033. The bottom image represents the self-service Branch 1033a (WBA/BT/21/28/1/560/195/1)

The newly designed wall fixtures and central gondola allowed the self-service store to display significantly more merchandise than the adjacent counter-service shop. A new ratio between display and replacement stock was devised for the store, with merchandise arranged in quantities of three on the

[25] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "An Experiment in Selling", *The Bee*. For contemporary ideas on customer flow in self-service see, Towsey, *Self-Service Retailing*, 42-53.

shelves and only one item held in reserve within the stock room.[26] Image 1.3 shows how products were arranged into five tiers of deep-filled, open-access shelving that granted customers the autonomy to handle and inspect goods without the intervention of sales staff. Customer agency was also enhanced by the small black rectangles at the front of the shelves, which indicated the individual prices of goods. Although items were arranged in departmental zones denoted through small-bannered signs above the fixtures, these divisions were purposely less pronounced than the countered segregations of the traditional shop.[27] Alongside the removal of direct counter-service, this feature helped to enhance the store's sense of flow and saw the customer experience injected with a newfound sense of speed and efficiency. Customers were even promised they would experience 'absolutely no waiting' or queuing within the new store.[28] The sense of speed and increased proximity to goods facilitated a rise in the number of impulse purchases made by customers. The sight of customers presenting heavily laden wire baskets to checkout workers therefore became more commonplace within the new store, with *The Bee* commenting with surprise how one customer purchased 'no fewer than twenty-three items, and another nineteen'.[29]

[26] WBA/BT/32/51/12- "Oral History Reminiscences".
[27] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "An Experiment in Selling", *The Bee*.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.





Image 1.3- Interior of Burnt Oak Self-Service store. The above image depicts the two checkout counters, while the image below depicts the perimeter shelving and central gondola of merchandise. (Taken from *Retail Chemist* April 1951, see WBA/BT/35/165).

The new store operated with a staff of seven, including a manager, a registered pharmacist, three shop assistants and two checkout operators.[30] The shop assistants were tasked with restocking shelves and assisting with customer enquiries, while the checkout assistants were permanently positioned at their individual stations. While the branch manager's office was situated behind the perimeter shelving in the right-hand corner of the shop,

[30] "Self-Service Shops": *The Pharmaceutical Journal*: 67.

the removal of the dispensary ensured the pharmacist lacked a permanent station within the store. The exclusion of the dispensary and the fact the branch manager was not a qualified pharmacist were both significant departures from traditional Boots policy and saw the pharmacist thrust into a novel ambulatory role among the shop floor. One section of shelving within the chemist department contained proprietary medicines, ointments and pain reliefs, which despite not posing any acute danger to customers, nonetheless contained ingredients regarded as poisons under Part I of the 1933 Pharmacy and Poisons Act. While these products were openly displayed and easily accessible to customers, they remained under the personal control of the registered pharmacist, who was responsible for ensuring such products were appropriate for their buyers and were not intended for use on young children or those with particular health conditions. As well as prominently displaying the pharmacist's certificate of registration, this section of restricted products also offered direct sight of the checkout counters, to ensure the pharmacist could be easily summoned to supervise the moment of sale. [31] In addition, when the pharmacist went to lunch, a blind was pulled down over the section to guarantee no sales were enacted until he returned.[32]

Although the pharmacist was largely assigned to the controlled poisons section of the shop and was a near constant presence on the shop floor, the status and qualities of their role were significantly altered by self-service techniques. This shift concerned the loss of professional prestige and gravitas associated with the pharmacist's traditional position of selling and advising from behind a counter. Although Boots bosses emphasised that the

[31] Ibid.
[32] WBA/BT/32/51/12- "Oral History Reminiscences".

remit of the pharmacist's professional expertise remained unchanged, the fact this individual now intermingled alongside sales assistants and checkout operators risked making their role an indistinguishable part of routine retail operations. It also meant that any member of floor staff was now liable to be approached by customers for information concerning the sale of restricted drugs. This apparent loss of professional distinction was compounded by Boots' moderated approach to the trial, which continued to insist that all shop-floor assistants offered advice and recommendations to customers as they shopped.

After the initial fanfare of its opening, a period of intense, company-wide, research and scrutiny was applied to the new Burnt Oak store. In an effort to understand the novel buying dynamics of self-service systems and to 'test for extra sales', the company's management experimented with specially selected items sent down from the Nottingham headquarters.[33] Recorded as seconds within the stock lodger, these items were sold at discounted rates and aimed to discover whether the lures of self-service were potent enough to sell products deemed unusual or unsuitable for the inventories of Boots' traditional counter-service shops. According to one of the store's employees, these methods were a success, with many of the items 'quickly snapped up by the public'.[34] The employee also recalled how the store had 'plenty of people down from Nottingham', who shifted the position and presentation of

[33] Ibid.

[34] WBA/BT/32/51/12- "Oral History Reminiscences". In the late 1990's the Boots Archive made a public request for the recollections of the company's former retail employees. The remit of the request was wide-ranging and none specific, with many former workers sending letters to the archive containing personal memories. Details for Burnt Oak are taken from a letter contained within this file, from Mr A.R. Benger-Liddall, dated 29th September 1999.

goods in order 'to find the best selling points' of individual items.[35] This included understanding which particular goods 'sold best near the entrance of the shop'. The prototype store thus became a testbed of experimentation and learning, with staff from Boots' head office monitoring sales figures on both a monthly, weekly and 'sometimes daily' basis.[36] During the four years in which the experiment remained live, senior managers, including the executive team's most ardent supporter of self-service methods Willoughby R. Norman, regularly visited the store.[37] The staff member recalled how these visiting parties frequently 'went into conference' with the branch manager and qualified pharmacist, as they probed to uncover the suitable sales tactics and display methods of self-service operations.

Although executives were committed to discovering more about self-service methods, the retention of two contrasting stores for the entirety of the trial illustrated the company's underlying sense of caution. Positioning the traditional and the modern stores side-by-side offered a reliable controlled variable that allowed managers to assess, in isolation, the impact of self-service methodologies. The tactic enabled the company to emphasise to the public that self-service methods had not usurped or immediately eradicated its traditional modes of shopping. As counter-service methods remained available to those who wished to use them, the new self-service store was conceptualised as an additional, rather than replacement, style of trading. At the same time, the co-existence of the Burnt Oak stores demonstrated Boots' capacity to mitigate and manage the risks associated with enacting self-

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

service formats. Retaining Branch 1033's established lines of trade was therefore a defensive decision that both mirrored and extended the partly restrained approach Boots took to its self-service experiment. Far from heralding the revolutionary, triumphant arrival of self-service techniques, Boots executives were instead always wrestling with the unverified nature of this new sales system.

1952- Boots v The Pharmaceutical Society

Whilst these internal streams of research were important to Boots, the company's relationship with self-service techniques received significant influence from external sources. Principal among these were the actions of The Pharmaceutical Society, the regulatory members body of Britain's pharmacy profession. Founded in 1841 by pharmacists with recognised qualifications, the Society sought to uphold and protect the skilled status and standards of the profession. It was capable of wielding significant political and legislative power and was instrumental in pushing for the establishment of various late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Acts that regulated a pharmacist's ability to sell, dispense and mix poisonous drugs.[38] Examples including the 1868 Pharmacy Act and the 1908 Poisons and Pharmacy Act granted the Society powers to define what substances counted as poisonous material, as well as the ability to prosecute those individuals practicing without a qualification. Afforded the legal authority to police these Acts, the

[38] Anderson, "From "Bespoke" to "Off-the-Peg": Community Pharmacists and the Retailing of Medicines in Great Britain 1900 to 1970," 45-47.

Society therefore positioned itself as the custodians of professional pharmaceutical integrity and practice.[39]

The opening of the Burnt Oak store proved to be the latest chapter in an ongoing, fractious relationship between Boots and the Society.[40] In July 1952, the Society brought a legal case that challenged how Boots' Burnt Oak store utilised the professional expertise of its resident pharmacist. As far as the Society were concerned, Boots' actions at Burnt Oak not only degraded the pharmacist's role to that of a regular sales assistant, but also risked damaging the reputation and status of pharmacists working in shops, by making them an indistinguishable part of Britain's cohort of self-service grocery retailers. This situation ultimately created fears within the sector that Boots were beginning to reject its professional obligations to distribute pharmacological knowledge and advice in a learned, structured manner. For example, the lack of a functioning dispensary appeared to limit the opportunities for confidentiality in regards to a customer's health concerns. It also raised concerns over whether the pharmacist was rigorously excerpting his discretion over the appropriate distribution of potentially harmful medicines. While Boots executives would have strongly rejected these claims, the presence of impulse buying and flash sales posed difficult questions regarding the future direction the company was planning to take. Furthermore, the tendency of self-service to narrow the proximities between customers and products appeared to create increasingly fewer opportunities for pharmacy staff to influence the direction of sale with their professional courtesy and advice.

[39] Ibid.
[40] Chapman, *Jesse Boot*, 59-60.

The Society therefore saw the Burnt Oak store as a challenge to its authority, with Boots seemingly overreaching its status by seeking to define how modern pharmacy was to be practiced within the self-service era. In order to resolve the novel dilemmas initiated by Boots' self-service store, the legal case centred on two key questions. Firstly, whether Boots had provided sufficient professional supervision for the sale of controlled substances and secondly, when exactly a transaction was completed within a self-service system.[41] To rule on the first question, the court heard the examples of two women who had purchased restricted medicines from the Burnt Oak store. Although each of the women were able to place restricted items into their wire baskets without arousing the attention of staff, the court heard how the pharmacist was always made aware they had done so, once the basket was presented to the checkout counter. The judge was satisfied that in 'every case involving the sale of a drug' the pharmacist was able to supervise the cash desk transaction and exercise his discretion over the sale. This part of the ruling therefore preserved some space within a transaction for the interjection of professional pharmaceutical knowledge, with it noted that the pharmacist could still prevent customers removing drugs from the premises, 'if he saw fit'.[42]

The fact customers had been able to select items and place them in their baskets without the awareness of the pharmacist provoked the more contentious arguments of question two. The Society's lawyers presented evidence from Section 22 of the 1933 Pharmacy and Poisons Act, which

[41] David Charlton, "Retail Pharmacy- Litigation Ancient and Modern," Nottingham Law School (Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University, 1996).
[42] "Self-Service Shops", *The Pharmaceutical Journal*: 67.

claimed no restricted poison should be exposed or offered for sale by an 'automatic machine'.[43] For the Society, self-service was a 'variant of an automatic sale', with its introduction imperilling the pharmacist's capacity to control or veto the sale of prohibited substances at the earliest opportunity.[44] The Society's lawyers argued the arrangement and logics of self-service stores amounted to an unrestricted offer to sell, with customers encouraged to help themselves to any item within the shop. The individual pricing and attractive display of merchandise had, the lawyers contended, tipped the balance of professional discretion away from the pharmacist towards the decisions of customers, rendering the first touch of an item enough to confirm its sale and thereby marginalise professional expertise and advice. While Boots were found to have made adequate legal provision for the sale of restricted drugs, the Society's arguments demonstrated they remained concerned about where exactly the pharmacist's legal and intellectual power over the distribution of drugs sat within a self-service transaction.

Boots' legal team sought to play down the innovative nature of the self-service system, arguing it was 'nothing new for the customer to help himself'.[45] They used the example of book selling to demonstrate how retailers had traditionally used displays to encourage customers to pick-up and engage with merchandise. In describing this form of selling, the lawyers maintained that the touching of the product never diminished the shopkeeper's ability to refuse a sale. For Boots, change only occurred in

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.,68. For a discussion on the nascent promise of automated retail technology see, D. J. Huppatz, "Robot Salesmen: Automated Food Retailing in the United States, 1925–39," *History of Retailing and Consumption* 7, no. 3 (2021).
[45] Ibid.

relation to the performance of retail labour, with the team emphasising how the removal of exhibited goods from their shelves now rested with the customer, rather than the shop worker. Lawyers therefore argued that self-service selling had merely moved the moment of professional pharmacological scrutiny to the end of the transaction, rather than its initial moment of touch.

The Justice found in favour of Boots, and in reaching his judgement, verified that goods were legally purchased upon the exchange of money, rather than at the point at which they were first touched. He even claimed there would be 'serious consequences' for the retail profession if the Society's arguments were upheld, because such a position would leave little scope for either the shopkeeper or customer to change their minds during a transaction.[46] While pharmacists could still pass judgement over the administration of controlled drugs, the case had made it clear that the initial moment of customer interaction was important to the profession, and was critical in enabling individuals to demonstrate bespoke pharmacological knowledge and discretion. Shortly after the case's findings, a letter to the *Pharmaceutical Journal* neatly summarised this situation. It asked, 'How many pharmacists are prepared to turn themselves into automata, spending the entire day standing by a cash register and 'supervising' in this manner?'.[47] This reflected the Society's judgement of self-service as a form of automatic selling and emphasised that many professionals resented the prospect of unthinkingly verifying medicinal choices already made by customers, rather than being more personally involved in their process of health guidance and

[46] Ibid., 69.
[47] See, Charlton, "Retail Pharmacy," 39.

advice. The idea that the future of retail pharmacy rested on being summoned to a checkout desk to verify the final moments of the advisory process raised important questions about whether the individual's professional expertise was being reduced to an additional, automatized form of contemporary selling.

Neither Boots nor the Society gained a clear picture about where the new system would leave professional standards and customer service. While the system held the potential to boost profits, the court case revealed the potential to alter Boots' longstanding purpose and sense of identity. Despite Boots winning the case, bosses had become increasingly aware of the way self-service might erode some of the values on which the company had painstakingly built its reputation. Rather than immediately stimulating the opening of more self-service stores, the court case instead shifted Boots' approach towards self-service, with executives wishing to preserve the professional expertise of their staff and, in turn, the qualities and professionalism it bestowed upon their stores and brand. However slightly, the efforts of the Pharmaceutical Society had warned company bosses against the wholesale uptake of self-service, causing them to revaluate how they deployed and interpreted the model. Incapable of entirely ignoring the grievances and suggestions of the Society and its members, Boots executives significantly altered the course of action they were willing to take. While modernisation remained a key objective of the organisation, after 1952, its retail strategies predominately came to be understood as efforts to uphold and promote the status of its pharmacists.

1953-1957 Gradual Research

Despite lasting until 1955, the Burnt Oak experiment failed to produce clear-cut conclusions. Initial reports were positive, with Galvani & Arnell's 1952 self-service guidebook considering the shop a 'great success'.[48] This positivity became more muted after the Pharmaceutical Society's legal challenge, with the retrospective accounts of Boots employees painting a more nuanced picture of the experiment's impact. While he had confidently encouraged investigations during the 1950 Gleneagles conference, Henry Fraser claimed the experiment 'fell flat'.[49] When writing in 1962, Retail Director Mr R.M. Dickson claimed, 'conditions and customer acceptance' of self-service with checkouts had 'changed radically since the days of Burnt Oak'.[50] Despite *The Bee*'s initial promise to update colleagues on the progress of Branch 1033a, no assessment of the company's impressions of, or learnings from, Burnt Oak ever appear within the company literature.[51] Nevertheless, in the absence of any definitive evaluations of Burnt Oak's success, what does remain certain is that the project ultimately became the exception, rather than rule, of Boots' post-war retail operations.

During the mid-1950s, company executives adopted a very cautious approach to retail modernisation, offering no definitive directive on either the immediate implementation, or comprehensive abandonment, of self-service principles. This resulted in a paradox, whereby executives professed their commitment to upgrading retail branches without ascribing to the self-service techniques such processes implied. Executives therefore used the five years

[48] Galvani & Arnell, *Going Self-Service?* , 118.
[49] Taken from, PSC/4/12/12/1/2- Chapman notes "Interview with Henry Fraser 22nd November 1976".
[50] WBA/BT/12/17/1/13- "Visit to United States of America: 8th April- 8th May 1962": Report on a visit to America by R.M. Dickson and Party, 38.
[51] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "An Experiment in Selling", *The Bee*.

after 1955 to gather evidence about how the system could be best utilised, while continuing to maintain the near total ascendancy of the counter-service tradition.

The 1953-54 Annual Review claimed the building restrictions imposed during the immediate post-war years had left 'much leeway to be made good'.[52] Executives suggested they were approaching the job of rebuilding their war-damaged portfolio with 'vigour', and were 'embarking on a programme of modernisation' designed to bring stores up to the standards of the present day.[53] When new stores opened at Swansea in 1952 and Plymouth in 1953, Boots' internal literature categorised these shops as future-facing, modern constructions, situated at the vanguard of post-war schemes of urban reconstruction and civic improvement. Although it was described as containing the 'most up-to-date ideas of shopfitting and layout', the Plymouth store nonetheless continued to rely on traditional counter-service methods.[54] The same was true of the Swansea shop, which despite containing a number of enlarged central islands that encouraged customers to handle, compare and select merchandise, continued to operate with staff serving from behind a counter (Image 1.4).

[52] See, *Boots Review of Activities 1953-54*: 7. Taken from WBA/BT/4/15/1/3-"Shareholder Scrapbook, c. 1931-1963".
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.



Image 1.4- Interior of newly opened Boots stores, deploying counter-service methods. The top image shows the interior of the Plymouth Branch, opened 1953 (WBA/BT/22/47/2/17), the bottom image shows the interior of the Swansea Branch, opened 1952 (WBA/BT/22/47/4/23)

When the experiment ended in early 1955, the new Burnt Oak store also readopted counter-service methods. As Image 1.5 demonstrates, this conversion was not a simple reversion to the store's previous inter-war set-up, but instead represented an increasingly hybridised style of retail

experience. The shop's three centrally positioned island counters, which were similar to those adopted at Swansea and Plymouth, represented an advancement of the company's inter-war counter-service practices, with a greater quantity of merchandise condensed within their deeper, enlarged counter-topped troughs. As well as containing new lines of merchandise like photographic and stationery goods, the arrangement of such products encouraged a greater degree of customer interaction than had been possible with the old store's long, rectangular counters. Despite accommodating these more contemporary shopping experiences, the decision to revert to counter-service principles nonetheless underlined the diminished status of self-service within the company's immediate retail agenda. Despite having a local customer base in Burnt Oak that was accustomed to over three years of self-service trading, senior staff still regarded a full conversion to self-service principles to be an unworthy gamble. However, the hybrid retail methodologies deployed within these three stores demonstrated that Boots executives remained invested, at least conceptually, with modernised self-service techniques.

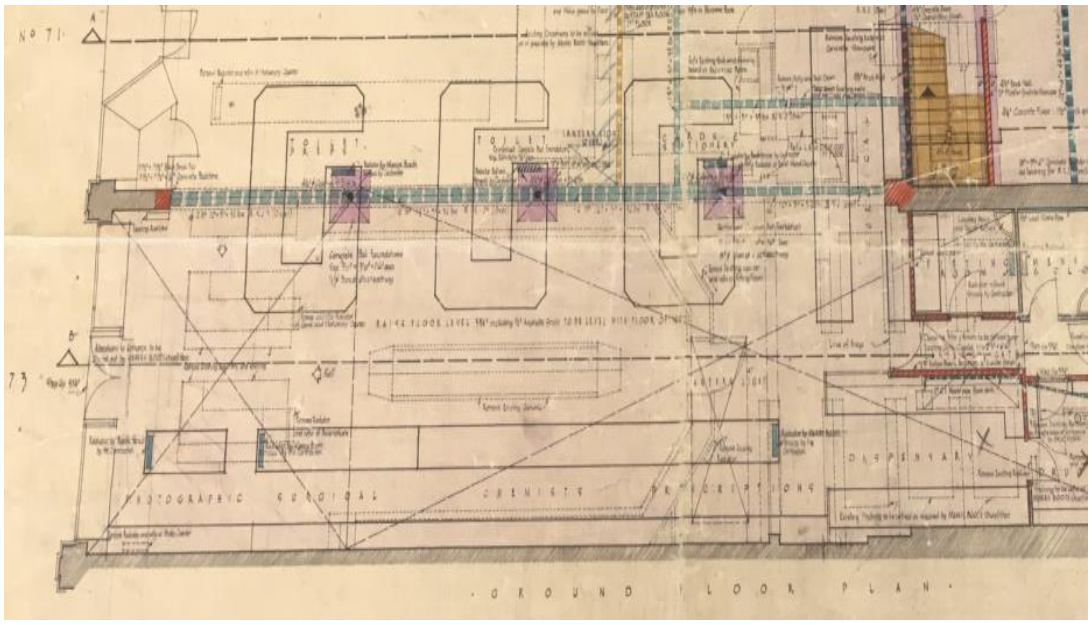


Image 1.5- Architectural floorplan drawings for the proposed alterations and editions of both Burnt Oak stores into one larger premises, 1954. (Uncatalogued *Boots Archive*).

The set-up of these new shops partly reflected the public's fluctuating ambivalence towards self-service techniques.[55] When reporting from Britain's first national conference of self-service methods in 1955, *The Guardian* noted the innovation was 'still on trial at the bar of public opinion'. Commenting that many customers regarded it as vastly more impersonal than counter-service models, the article asked whether self-service shops were becoming 'so streamlined, so clinically efficient' as to encourage dissatisfied customers to return to more 'social' forms of shopping.[56] Boots executives recognised this sense of uncertainty, with General Sales Manager, Mr. W.K. Oliver noting how the press regularly described the relationship between the post-war retailer and customers as 'something

[55] Alexander, Phillips, and Shaw, "Consumers' Reactions " 2211.
[56] Unknown, "Some Shoppers Still Like to Chat With the Grocer: Self-Service Quicker but Less Social", *The Guardian,* April 13th 1955, 12.

approaching a state of war'.[57] Alongside the warnings of the Pharmaceutical Society case, this uncertain public mood induced a delicate balance within Boots' retail operations, which sought to express modernity, whilst also offering reassurances about the reduced impact such changes would have to a customer's normal modes of buying.

The company's hesitancy towards self-service was demonstrated in the summer of 1956, when newspapers reported from the company's Annual General Meeting. *The Guardian* stated the company had, 'decided…to extend the self-service system to its branches all over the country', [58] while the *Financial Times* stated Boots were the 'latest major retail group to adopt this method of retailing'.[59] However, less than one week later, the company issued a statement to the *Chemist & Druggist* claiming they had 'no plans to open self-service branches'.[60] A few weeks later, in August 1956, an unspecified Boots representative conducted an interview with the trade journal *Self-Service and Supermarket,* within which they again denied the company was aggressively moving forward with self-service proposals and that press reports had been 'much exaggerated'.[61] The company maintained its cautious approach by suggesting it would be converting only 'two or three' of its stores to self-service, and even then only to a limited degree. In perhaps the first indication that the company was developing the confidence to modify self-service ideologies, the article emphasised that these in-store

[57] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Retail Pricing: with particular reference to sales volume", *Sales & Selling,* No. 29, September 1959: 3.
[58] "Self-Service Chemists", *Guardian*, July 20th 1956, 8.
[59] "Self-Service Takes Stock", *Financial Times*, July 24th 1956, 6.
[60] "Self-Service at Boots", *Chemist & Druggist*, July 28th 1956, 81.
[61] "Self-Service in Chemists' Shops", *Self-Service and Supermarket,* August 1956, 27.

methodologies would amount to 'semi rather than full self-service'.[62] The company therefore wished to investigate, rather than install, self-service models. Methods of enquiry included assigning a three-person committee to examine the 'possibility of self-service', as well as continuing with the company's longstanding policy of visiting North America to learn more about its retailing practices and applications.[63] The *Self-Service and Supermarket* article therefore highlighted the extent to which Boots executives were still grappling with the complexities that had emerged from the Pharmaceutical Society trial and the Burnt Oak experiment. It also illustrated that in a quest to demonstrate their modern credentials, executives were being thrust into open-aired, real-time negotiations with the public's impressions of self-service formats.

One of the 'two or three' shops converted to self-service methods was the store at Southampton Row in Central London. Demonstrating that the research methodologies originally deployed at Burnt Oak were now open to modulation, the trial focused solely on the store's toiletry department. Concentrated on the types of merchandise sold by rival self-service grocery chains, this restricted study was less conspicuous than the checkout counters, wire baskets and whole store conversion of the 1951 Burnt Oak trial. In 1957, *The Bee* articulated the aims of the experiment, noting they were firstly, 'to increase the rate of turnover', secondly, 'to save staff' and thirdly, 'to carry more stock in the shop and there-by reduce the time spent on 'fill-ups''.[64] Although American journal *Chain-Store Age* noted the test had

[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "'Big Shop' Managers in Conference", *The Bee*, Vol. 28 No.1, March 1957: 3.

increased sales 'by more than' 50%, they also stated that Boots executives were 'moving cautiously' before extending such sales patterns into other stores.[65] Although Southampton Row's partial conversion continued the company's incremental approach to self-service research, it also demonstrated that executives were gaining the confidence to moderate the format's prescribed methods. For example, as well as limiting the scope of the trial, the Southampton Row study represented a decisive rhetorical shift from the days of Burnt Oak, where managers had denied their ambition to reduce staff costs.

The 1957 chairman's message to shareholders demonstrated the company were continuing to move slowly with its programmes of modernisation. As well as mentioning how the company had 'embarked on a limited series of experiments in modified shop layout', the statement emphasised that the company were 'fully alive' to the increased use of self-service and self-selection methods across British retailing.[66] The statement portrayed the company's awareness of its customer's needs, as well as its willingness to reassure and assist their journey towards new styles of retailing. It claimed it would only implement changes that allowed the company to improve and 'keep up-to-date' the standard of personal service already on offer within its shops.[67] Boots executives were consequently demonstrating that they were conscious of, and aiming to resist, the commonplace accusation that self-

[65] The original *Chain Store Age* article from July 1958, written by Editor-in-Chief Mr Godfrey M. Lebhar appears in, WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Why Drug Chains Gain", *Sales & Selling,* Christmas Special 1958: 10.
[66] WBA/BT/4/15/2/16- Chairman's Statement, Chairman J.P. Savage, 69th Annual General Meeting, 17th July 1957, 4.
[67] Ibid.

service was an impersonal form of shopping.[68] The statement went on to highlight that the business had always taken 'special pride' in the level of service it offered its customers and that such relationships would not, under any circumstances, be lost to the lures of self-service.[69]

Boots' gradual research with self-service methods received support from the hybridised forms of selling introduced during the early post-war period, which facilitated similar sensations to those on offer within a modernised self-service system. In 1953, employees were asked to make it 'easy' for shoppers to 'to 'pick and choose'' merchandise from these island service counters.[70] A year later, retail workers were also informed of the 'basic principles' to establishing a good display, which included, 'clean, light-coloured backing', 'bright illumination', 'open counter displays' and the clear pricing of goods.[71] Such crossovers were advantageous, as they allowed the company to undertake low-key modernising experiments, at the same time as continuing to reassure customers that self-service methodologies would not transform their traditional retail experiences. As these surreptitious experiments functioned to allay customer fears, they unsurprisingly lacked the discrete rhetorical framing of the original Burnt Oak trial. This ensured that self-service and self-selection terminology incrementally and unofficially attached itself to the company's late 1950s retail experiments, even though the company had yet to commit to any formal relationship with the model.

[68] See for example, Alexander, Phillips, and Shaw, "Consumers' Reactions "; Adrian R. Bailey, Andrew Alexander, and Gareth Shaw, "Queuing as a Changing Shopper Experience: The Case of Grocery Shopping in Britain, 1945–1975," *Enterprise & Society* 20, no. 3 (2019): 670.
[69] WBA/BT/4/15/2/16- Chairman's Statement, 1957, 4.
[70] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Freedom of Choice", *Sales & Selling,* No.3, April 1953: *Front cover*.
[71] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Experiment and Test…Change- and Succeed!", *Sales & Selling,* No. 8, May 1954: 27.

An early and prominent example was the sale of greetings cards. In 1957, a semi-regular feature appeared within *Sales & Selling* outlining rising sales of this type of product.[72] Under the headline, 'Greetings cards are growing', the articles highlighted a number of different stores achieving success with this department. Crucially, the articles represented one of the first occasions when the concept of a moderated form of self-selection was openly discussed with company employees. For example, Southend's branch manager said his self-contained greetings card department allowed him to 'run a form of self-selection' that he claimed paid 'very definite dividends'.[73] The branch manager of the company's Southampton store also claimed greetings cards were 'ideal for a self-selection layout'.[74] Greetings card departments therefore represented one of the ways in which company executives quietly familiarised their shoppers with self-service techniques.

Sold via open display through a large and continually alternating range of products, greetings cards were the ideal testbed for Boots' wider experiments with the new format. For example, the department lent itself to customer handling and browsing, while the range's variety also encouraged shoppers to make bulk and impulse purchases. Staff from the Worcester branch claimed customers often delighted 'in ferreting quietly through' their displays, while a Birmingham branch manager said it was 'so easy to convince customers to have one or two cards in hand' to meet the regular stream of family birthdays and events.[75] A 1959 edition of *Sales & Selling* also argued

[72] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Greeting Cards are Growing", *Sales & Selling,* No. 20, April 1957: 33-36.
[73] Ibid., 34.
[74] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Greeting Cards are Growing: Part Two", *Sales & Selling,* No. 21, July 1957: 58.
[75] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Greeting Cards", *Sales & Selling,* April 1957: 36.

that greetings cards were analogous with the fashion industry, through their 'constantly changing' seasonal lines that continually enticed and attracted consumers.[76] Greetings cards also encapsulated rare, personalised forms of buying that contrasted sharply with the generic, mass-produced items like toothpaste and soap traditionally sold by Boots. Concepts that were highly valued within the self-service system, namely individual choice and personal freedom, were subsequently positioned at the heart of the greetings card buying process. It was therefore of little surprise that such merchandise featured within the original Burnt Oak experiment.

The product's suitability for self-service techniques was further underlined in a cartoon published within a 1959 edition of *Sales & Selling* (Image 1.6). As well as evoking the supermarket's long gondolas of open-displayed merchandise and cavernous warehouse environment, the cartoon quipped at the seemingly boundless commercial potential of the greetings card's seasonal nature. Nevertheless, the cartoon also underlined the public's ongoing nervousness with self-service formats, by depicting a dystopian retail future, where sales-floors were devoid of staff, and customers were left to satisfy their needs amongst a bewildering, and unnecessarily large range of goods.[77] These uneasy associations encouraged the company to stress how successful card selling relied on not only self-service techniques, but also its own long established practices of attentive personal service. For example, the manager of the Cambridge branch suggested that the most important factors in effective card selling was, 'to know the cards well and to

[76] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "It Pays to Plan", *Sales & Selling,* No. 29, September 1959: 48.
[77] See, du Gay, "Self-Service," 155.

take a personal interest in each customer'.[78] Cleanliness and well-ordered presentation were also highly valued requisites. Employees from the Newton Abbott branch noted 'the neat display and immaculate appearance of cards in the counter tray' were crucial factors in affecting good sales.[79] The sale of greetings cards therefore represented a delicate balance between tradition and modernity, with the process specifically harnessing the contemporary sensations of self-service techniques, whilst modulating them through the service of attentive, knowledgeable employees. The framework of Boots' distinctive approach to self-selection selling was beginning to take shape.

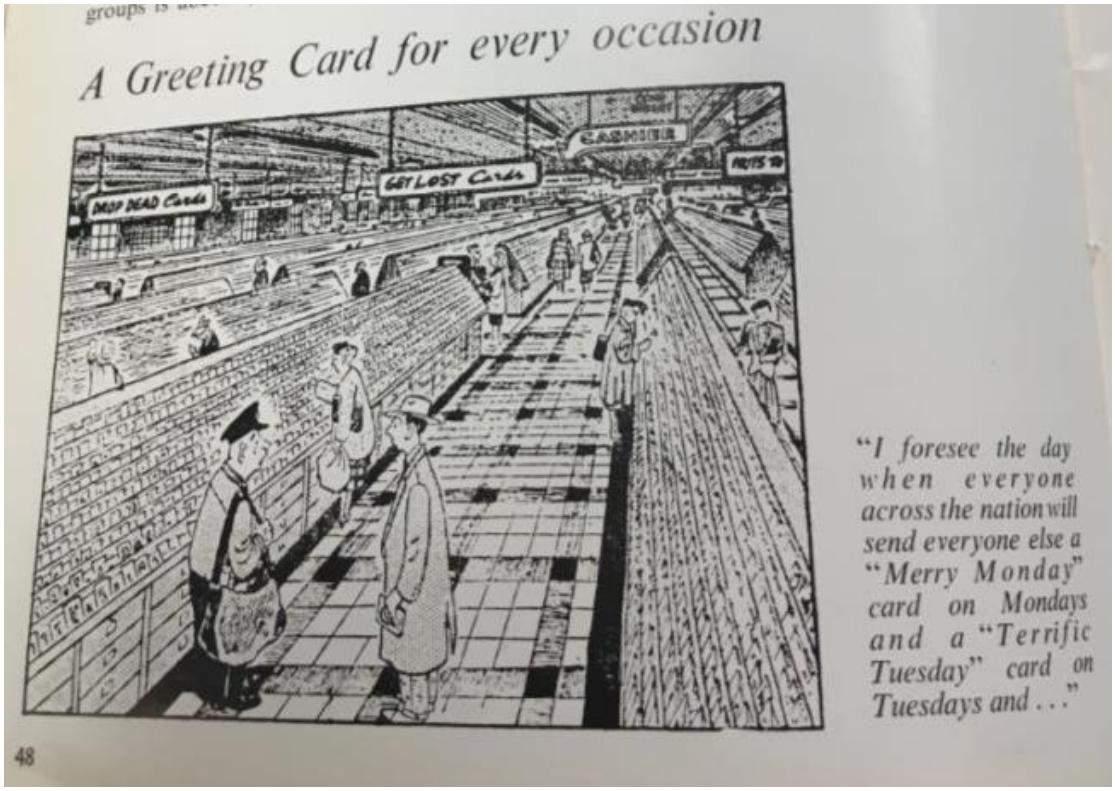


Image 1.6- 'A Greeting Card for Every Occasion', WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- *Sales & Selling,* No. 29, September 1959: 48.

[78] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Greeting Cards: Part Two", *Sales & Selling,* July 1957: 59.
[79] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Greeting Cards", *Sales & Selling,* April 1957: 34.

By 1958, modern retailing methodologies were slowly becoming embedded within almost every facet of the company's operations. Nonetheless, as executives had yet to announce the company's future sales strategy, these approaches continued to function without the formal rhetorical designation of either self-service or self-selection policy. While the 1958 Annual Report verified the company was 'extending [its] experience in self-selection and visual selling', it stopped short of fleshing-out its precise model of trading, stating only that bosses were 'moving gradually but definitely towards a new pattern of shopkeeping' that was 'in line with today's needs and conditions'.[80] Despite echoing self-service terminology with requests to display merchandise in functionally related, convenient groups that stimulated impulse buying, staff publications also largely avoided making explicit reference to the new sales format.[81]

As Boots had stepped back from introducing pure forms of self-service, both the greetings cards and Southampton Row experiments had largely explored the delicate balancing point between delivering on the public's expectation for modernised retail experiences and recognising their anxiety surrounding radical implementations of such techniques. Neither engaged directly with the impact self-service techniques would have upon the tone of the company's traditional healthcare operations. The American research visits undertaken during the late 1950s took place in parallel with Boots' store-based experiments and sought to understand how the company could

[80] WBA/BT/4/15/2/14- Chairman's Statement, Chairman J.P. Savage, 70th Annual General Meeting, 16th July 1958, 5.
[81] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Let's SHOW Them Where They SELL", *Sales & Selling,* Christmas Special 1958: 27.

modernise its modes of selling without offending its reputation and standing as professional pharmacists.

1957-1959 American Research Visits

Although the 1956 *Self-Service and Supermarket* article had highlighted using American research trips as a means of accruing self-service knowledge, this was not, in itself, innovative for Boots. The company's inter-war period under American ownership gave Boots' senior managers a valuable insight into transatlantic retail practices.[82] While it was standard practice for the company to visit America and report on innovative retailing ideas and approaches, after the middle of the 1950s the motive for, and intensity of, such visits altered. As the company's foremost advocate for self-service methodologies, W.R. Norman was responsible for establishing the tone and remit of these American ventures. As well as his visit in 1950, Norman had furthered the company's connections through a personal acquaintance with American retail pharmacy tycoon, Justin Dart.[83] This gave Boots' senior bosses access to Dart's empire of Katz, Cunningham's and Walgreen's chemist stores, allowing them to both observe contemporary retailing methods and discuss business strategies with individual store managers. Unlike the cohort of British grocery retailers, Boots lacked an equivalent multiple chemist store to measure and temper its self-service experiments against.[84] Access to Dart's stores was therefore invaluable, as it offered the company longer-term precedents for how retail pharmacy

[82] Whysall, "Boots under American Ownership," 161.
[83] Taken from, PSC/4/12/9/7- Chapman notes "Interview with R.M. Dickson".
[84] For an example of British grocery retailer visiting the US see, "Impressions from the U.S.A", *J.S. Journal, House Magazine of J. Sainsbury Ltd,* New Series, No. 27, June 1956: 1-15.

traditions had been disrupted by the arrival of self-service methods and, in particular, large-scale supermarket trading.

While the precise number of American visits is difficult to ascertain from the historical record, at least four separate trips took place between 1957 and 1959.[85] They occurred with such regularity that one senior manager was able to describe them as 'popular diversions' that staff at managerial level often 'clamoured' to attend.[86] The visits conformed to a distinctive style and pattern, with each trip normally taking place in the early autumn and constructed around a strict and extensive itinerary. Every trip culminated in the publication of an internally circulated report, which summarised key findings and shaped the company's evolving policy towards self-service techniques. Although centred on America's drug store culture, the reports also encompassed wider aspects of retailing practice like the department store and out of town shopping centre.

The visit of October 1957 comprised of three executive team members, including General Sales Manager Mr. W.K. Oliver, and the future head of Shop Planning, Mr. A.D Spencer.[87] Although no full archival record exists of the visit, what remains from the report represents perhaps the first recorded evidence of executive-level, procedural steps towards the company's distinctive model of self-selection. A concluding extract stated:

[85] There were almost certainly more than this during the 1950s. For example, see WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "American Snapshots", *Sales & Selling,* No. 11, January 1955. However as no reports of these visits survive within the archive, analysis has focused upon those with surviving documentation.
[86] Taken from, PSC/4/12/12/1/2- Chapman notes "Interview with Henry Fraser".
[87] Taken from, PSC/4/12/16/1/3- Chapman notes "Interview with W.K. Oliver, 23rd October 1976".

> We ought to be able to increase our sales and reduce our operating costs by applying voluntarily the methods of self-selection and self-service, which have been forced on the drug chains in America by the competition of the super-markets and the prohibitive cost of labour.[88]

In one sense, the report's interchangeable reference to self-service and self-selection underlined the indeterminate nature of Boots' late 1950s approach to retail modernisation, with executives still unable to define the precise extent to which their model would draw from the self-service and self-selection traditions. Yet, in another sense, the recognition that American pharmacists had been coerced into the adoption of self-service encouraged Boots executives to use the American visits as a means of maintaining control over their process of retail change. The report therefore recommended how Boots could dictate its terms of engagement with self-service techniques. It suggested exposing customers to the 'greatest possible variety of stock', with all new stores supplementing this offer by having 'the necessary personal service readily available…wherever and whenever it is required'.[89]

Such methods epitomised the approach to greeting card sales and reflected the company's growing confidence to devise its own versions of self-service, rather than relying upon the format's standardised modes of operation. When it opened in November 1957, local press reports described how the design of the new Exeter store had been informed by 'detailed studies' of American

[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

retail methods, with the company's architects able to 'embody and adapt' all that was deemed 'most suitable' from transatlantic approaches.[90] While the report borrowed heavily from contemporary terminology to describe how the enlarged, 'modernised' store contained a 'wide selection' of merchandise, it continued the company's policy of avoiding any direct reference to either self-service or self-selection methods. [91] It instead emphasised how the store's 'elegance and dignity' helped to retain the company's traditions in retail pharmacy.[92] This underlined how Boots managers were retaining tight controls over their process of retail modernisation, with customers gaining gradual exposure to modernised techniques whilst the recognisable framework of a traditional Boots shop continued to function largely as normal.

This modulated approach formed a central part of the company's 1958 American visit. While the report's foreword endorsed the next phase of the company's relationship with self-service techniques, Director of Merchandising Mr S. Harker-Smith, urged patience in how Boots initiated its programme of modernisation. He claimed that as Britain's grocery retailers were gradually moving forward with self-service conversions, it was likely that British shoppers would soon become 'indoctrinated' with its terminology and practices. This caused him to proclaim:

> We must be prepared for it and there is every reason we should be planning layouts and fittings for use in a self-selection system. At the same time I feel most strongly that we

[90] Taken from, WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Opening the New Exeter Branch", *The Bee*, Vol. 29 No.1, March 1958: 5.
[91] Ibid., 5-6.
[92] Ibid., 5.

> should not be ahead of the public and that we should let the grocers do the educating…and reap whatever benefits there maybe from it.[93]

While Harker-Smith noted that US drug stores had 'probably…been wise' to adopt self-service methods, he also highlighted that none had tried to 'set the pace' with the format.[94] He consequently recommended that Boots follow a similar course of action and affix themselves firmly to Britain's 'second wave' of the system. This meant shunning any sort of pioneering role that may have attached itself to the original Burnt Oak trial and instead begin to recognise that whilst the retail format was not theirs to introduce, it was, unquestionably, theirs to respond to as they saw fit.

The 1958 visit therefore concentrated upon *how*, rather than *if*, self-service methods could be appropriately modified for Boots stores. Tasked with investigating self-service operations 'in the round', the delegates queried the minutiae of America's retailing operations, with seemingly prosaic details like the height of gondolas, and the materiality of floor tiles, noted within the report. During the trip, bosses recognised that self-service techniques were open to interpretation, with managers commenting upon the divergent, flexible ways in which American chemists utilised the format. It noted there were no 'hard-and-fast' rules concerning the use of checkouts and that even the 'most advanced' of the new self-service stores continued to sell cosmetics from 'behind a counter'.[95]

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[93] WBA/BT/12/17/1/8- "Visit to United States of America: 16th September- 22nd October 1958": Report on a visit to America by Mr. S Harker- Smith and Party, 5.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 9.

This enhanced appreciation gave the company confidence to undertake an increasing number of small-scale self-selection experiments within individual branches. The recognition that American chemists were modulating self-service for their own-ends ensured the company's internal publications also became less guarded about describing such experiments as self-selection. In July 1958, a single freestanding self-selection gondola was introduced within the farm and gardens department of the Woking branch. Described as 'bright, attractive and profitable', *Sales & Selling* claimed the addition of self-selection methods were 'Working at Woking'.[96] In May 1959, Macclesfield's branch manager was said to be 'very pleased' with the increased sales achieved by installing a new 'do-it-yourself' self-selection fixture constructed from a 'discarded glass case'. [97] Although these experiments appeared ad-hoc and piecemeal in nature, they symbolised the company's exacting control over its process of modernisation and the ways in which bosses were seizing upon the flexible nature of self-service to explore the approaches that worked best for its established patterns of trade.

Retaining this element of control was vital to Boots bosses, particularly in light of their impressions of the majority of America's drug stores. Noting 'garish' and 'calamitous' displays contained within 'sordid surroundings', the 1958 report felt US retail-pharmacy presented 'a wholly deplorable picture' compared with the nation's modernised food chains and department stores.[98] Claiming drug stores had largely lost their 'sense of direction' under the intense competition of the supermarkets, the report noticed how self-service

[96] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Self-Selection Working at Woking", *Sales & Selling,* No. 25, July 1958: 16.
[97] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "'Do-it-yourself' at Macclesfield", *Sales & Selling*, No.28, May 1959: 22.
[98] WBA/BT/12/17/1/8- "Visit to United States of America", 14-15, 18.

grocery retailers had been allowed, 'to make off' with a high proportion of the drug store's 'soap and everyday toilet business'.[99] It also found that department stores were making similar inroads into the drug store's traditional provision of 'high-class' cosmetics ranges.[100]

The sector's plight at the hands of the self-service supermarket therefore offered a useful parable for Boots bosses, with the report focusing on how the company could avoid the mistakes made by US chemists during their earlier conversions to self-service methods. It argued the drug chain's pursuit of fast profits in the face of this mounting competition posed an existential threat to their traditional lines of business. It described how stores increasingly cluttered their sales-floors with poor-quality, 'extraneous merchandise' like silk stockings, underwear and novelty goods that bore no relation to the traditions of retail pharmacy.[101] According to delegates, this risked detaching the drug store from its core function as a health and wellbeing provider and turning it into 'just another variety store'.[102] The report concluded that it was only the drug store's 'strong native tradition', rather than its ability to provide good merchandise or 'congenial shopping conditions' that had enabled it to remain in business. Although the report carried an air of cultural snobbery regarding America's brash forms of retail merchandising, it nonetheless conveyed a genuine sense of anxiety about the disfiguring impact of self-service techniques. It therefore justified the company's approach in the wake of Burnt Oak and confirmed to bosses that

[99] Ibid., 14.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

the retention of pharmacological traditions was the best means of both controlling retail modernity and remaining in business.

Fuelled by this sense of anxiety, the two research visits undertaken in 1959 focused upon conserving the tone of retail pharmacy in the face of self-service pressures. Despite acknowledging that Boots would also face significant future competition from the supermarkets, the report of autumn 1959 suggested the company should heed the 'warning' from the American drug store by maintaining the more refined elements of its customer experience. Noting how the onset of both self-service and self-selection techniques 'had lost the drug stores the better end of trade', the report's author Mr F.A. Cockfield stressed, 'We must at all costs maintain the standards of our business and never allow our stores to deteriorate into cheap bazaars'.[103] Cockfield claimed it was 'painfully easy' for a submissive acceptance of self-service techniques to destroy the 'character' and 'goodwill' cultivated through Boots' traditional health and wellbeing offer. Although he supported the company's gradual move towards self-selection — claiming there was 'no merit' in implementing rigid checkout points — he also pushed the firm to do 'everything' it could to maintain its business in the 'better class of merchandise'.[104] Cockfield recognised that this approach ran contrary to contemporary self-service techniques and would impose 'some limit' on the extent to which modernised systems could be applied to Boots' post-war stores. He nevertheless encouraged his colleagues to be comfortable with this fact, claiming the company's knowledge of the 'American experience',

[103] WBA/BT/12/17/1/11- "Report on a visit to the United States of America and Canada: 10th September- 27th October 1959": Mr. F.A. Cockfield and Party, 21.
[104] Ibid., 23.

should offer them the confidence to manage and proactively compromise the system, in ways that retained Boots' traditional image and values.[105]

As the 1950s drew to a close, customer service principles, pertaining from the company's own pharmacological expertise and experience, came to be seen as the fulcrum around which any version of self-selection needed to be constructed. The exposure to post-war American retail-pharmacy had empowered the company's management to resist uncritical espousals of self-service trading and to speak with increasing confidence about the needs and desires of their own customers. Furthermore, its professional background also emboldened executives to seek ways of differentiating their business from Britain's increasingly homogenised set of self-service retailers.

1959-1960 Announcing Modernity

Although self-selection had still yet to be announced as official company policy, the brand-new stores opened at Bristol, Broadmead in September 1959 and Birmingham, Big Top one month later, represented the firm's 'soft-launch' with the format.[106] Unlike at Exeter in 1957, the modernised sensations available within these stores were officially recognised within local press reports. For example, the *Birmingham Mail* claimed the Big Top store made 'extensive use' of 'easy access wall fittings for self-selection', while the *Bristol Evening Post* suggested 'self-selection of goods by the customer' had been introduced to a greater extent at the Broadmead store

[105] Ibid.
[106] WBA/BT/4/15/2/15- Chairman's Statement, Chairman J.P. Savage, 71st Annual General Meeting, Wednesday 22nd July 1959.

than at any other Boots branch.[107] Showing the interior of the new Broadmead store, Image 1.7 illustrates the blended approach to retail selling initiated by Boots' model of self-selection. While traditional advice-driven service counters topped with 1930s-style troughs continued to occupy the perimeter of the sales floor, the central area was now interspersed with new-style gondolas that allowed customers to handle and select their goods without the intervention of sales personnel. While the Broadmead store retained certain features from Burnt Oak, such as the less rigid demarcations between departments and the use of signage above gondola fixtures, the prominent retention of service counters ensured the prestige of the company's pharmacological expertise remained a central aspect of the Boots retail experience.



Image 1.7: Interior of the new Bristol Broadmead Store, showing the combination between counter and self-selection methods. (Taken from WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- *The Bee*, Vol 30. No. 3, December 1959: viii)

[107] See, WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Birmingham 'Big Top' is Our Biggest", *The Bee*, Vol.30 No. 3, December 1959, ii; WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Broadmead, Bristol, Biggest in the West", *The Bee*, Vol.30 No. 3, December 1959: vi.

It was not until February 1960 that the term self-selection was given formal, discursive recognition as company policy. Announcing 'an intensified modernisation programme' of rebuilding and refitting, a press conference hosted at the company's central London offices sketched out the retailer's plans for its distinctive version of self-selection (Image 1.8). Hosted by Mr A.D. Spencer and Mr F.A. Cockfield, the conference listed five key design principles that would differentiate Boots' modernised stores from their inter-war predecessors.[108] One of these points of difference was that each new store would come 'equipped' with the company's 'own brand' version of self-selection that was always 'backed by personal advice'.[109] During the conference, Spencer stated that as Boots were in the 'very personal business' of retail-pharmacy, these newly modernised stores had to find the necessary balance between the continued distribution of respected health and well-being advice and the provision of contemporary self-service techniques.[110] The company's new variety of self-selection therefore instigated the 'semi' forms of self-service foreshadowed in the 1956 *Self-Service and Supermarket* interview, with both forms of shopping remaining available to all customers through a hybrid sales approach.

[108] Four of the five principles stated all new Boots shops would be more spacious, more colourful, more conveniently laid out, more brightly lit. A detailed discussion of these design ideas is undertaken in chapter two.
[109] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- Full form press release entitled, "New Look for Boots the Chemist: Biggest and Smallest shops lead nation-wide programme", February 1960, 2.
[110] Ibid.,6.



Image 1.8: Two example images from the press conference of February 11th 1960, entitled 'New Look for Boots the Chemist'. (Top image: WBA/BT/28/46/30/32; Bottom image: WBA/BT/28/46/30/33)

The press conference emphasised how the company had managed to move forward with retail change, whilst also remaining true to its traditions of personalised customer service and care. According to Cockfield, the country was about to witness an 'invasion' of a 'new kind of Boots shop' that retained

the company's longstanding 'personality', whilst also encapsulating the 'needs of shoppers in the years to come'.[111]Executives therefore focused on the ways in which their new sales system was uniquely capable of satisfying all types of customer. For instance, Spencer explained how he hoped audiences would not find the term self-selection 'misleading', with the company 'definitely not going in for the baskets and checkout points' that were 'normally associated with full-scale self-service' operations. [112] Such comments tapped into the public's ongoing fears about self-service, and sought to downplay any suggestion that the new sales system was poised to undermine the company's traditional focus on personalised customer care. Indeed, Spencer was eager to emphasise that the system's primary benefits lay in its ability to enhance the existing retail experiences already offered by Boots stores. He claimed that what all Boots 'understood by self-selection' was the placement of 'more merchandise within easy reach of the customer'.[113]

Nonetheless, despite clarifying the company's position on self-selection methods, the press conference did not resolve all outstanding questions pertaining to the new model. Primarily, the conference never outlined the exact ratio between its two styles of shopping or the departments it was intended to serve. By leaving the precise question of interior layout unanswered, executives hoped to accentuate the adaptive nature of their self-selection scheme, as well as its capacity to meet the divergent healthcare needs of its pharmacy customers. This was underlined by

[111] WBA/BT/28/52/4/66- Short form press release entitled, "£2M a Year Modernisation for Boots the Chemist", February 1960, 2.
[112] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist", 6.
[113] Ibid.

Spencer's comment that each store would be 'tailor-made to fit the requirements of its own district', rather than conforming to the rigid, homogenised patterns of self-service.[114] Such approaches also sought to underline how this new model of self-selection would continue to evolve in accordance with the patient, gradual methods of research utilised during its accession.

Although Boots' post-war stores would eventually look incontestably different from their inter-war predecessors, the form of self-selection they accommodated contained a deliberate tension and compromise. Despite deliberately modernising their suite of branches, Boots executives were partly utilising their own-brand version of self-selection as a rhetorical device, capable of embodying both the embrace and tempering of retail modernity. While the term demonstrated that the changes underway were more than a simple repackaging of 1930s methods, the company's refusal to adopt full self-service techniques also clarified that these traditional practices had not been completely jettisoned either. Company executives were therefore making it clear that the implementation of modernised retail sensations were never mutually exclusive from the retention of traditional methodologies. This ensured that even whilst announcing a future-facing programme of retail modernisation, Boots executives did not feel they were transitioning distinctly from one phase of their history to another.

The juxtaposition of continuity and gradual evolution were emphasised in an early 1960s staff-training film. Replicating the messages of the press conference, the training film aimed to convince the company's retail

[114] Ibid., 4.

employees of the merits of the newly installed self-selection system. The film's opening minute chose to depict a bustling exterior market place. It showed traders hawking their goods, as customers freely touched, inspected and exchanged merchandise as part of their regular buying routines. The camera then witnessed a man in a suit and bowler hat as he purchased vegetables from a stall. As the man placed the vegetables into his leather satchel, the camera tracked him out of the market place and across a busy urban high street towards the doorway of one of Boots' newly minted self-selection stores, where, upon entering the shop, a voiceover boldly exclaimed, 'Evolution; not revolution. There's nothing new about self-selection'.[115]

In one sense, the man's journey sought to justify Boots' modernised sales format by emphasising its connections with long-standing modes of market place vending. This sense of continuity was stressed further in a 1964 staff-training document, which claimed the format's association with the first markets meant that Boots stores were witnessing 'the completion of the sales method cycle'.[116] While this aimed to allay fears associated with retail modernisation by demonstrating that Boots' own-brand version of self-selection built upon, rather than obliterated, the company's values and identities, in another sense, it also displayed the scheme's underlying sense of rhetorical pliability. The evocation of a noisy, hurried and unstructured market place not only challenged the more refined traditions of retail pharmacy, but also sat awkwardly with the demands of the American visits to sell high-class goods and avoid the deterioration into cheap bazaars. The

[115] WBA/BT/5/34/60/3- 'Self-Selection' Staff-Training Department film, c.1961.
[116] WBA/BT/5/34/1/105- 'Number Two' Staff-Training Manuals, 1964.

film therefore demonstrated how the new model of self-selection could carry multiple, simultaneous meanings and that its compromise between tradition and modernity required ongoing negotiations in how it was articulated and rationalised to Boots customers. It also illustrated how executives were willing to utilise any means possible to promote their new system and make it acceptable to their customers and staff.

Conclusion

In late 1970, Boots opened its second fully self-service store at Wigston Magna, Leicestershire. The opening of the store marked the beginning of a new phase in company operations, which would eventually lead to more 'centralised cash-taking units' populating the shop-floor of the company's 1970s and 80s branches.[117] Although reports in the *Boots News* made no mention of the trailblazing efforts undertaken at Burnt Oak twenty years earlier, it was surprising how many similarities existed between the two projects. The fact they both took place in the suburbs and were undertaken on an experimental basis demonstrated that the company's installation of self-service methodologies had retained much of its watchful, patient approach. At the same time, the new Wigston Magna store also proudly (if rather quietly) wore the lessons from the preceding two decades. Most pointedly, the notion of good personal service was front and centre within the promotion of the self-service store. The company's role as trusted pharmacists was also given a prominent role, with the article stating that 'of course' the dispensary had been afforded the 'greatest importance' within the

[117] WBA/BT/5/17/5/9- Report to Group Board: "Staffing Policy and Practice in the Eighties", January 1980, 2.

new shop. Interestingly, the article went on to claim that the dispensary's dominant position lent the Wigston store a reassuring familiarity, as if to suggest that no form of self-service, however revolutionary or inventive, could ever come between Boots and its obligations as a chemist.[118]

Despite its pioneering nature, the new store avoided the jarring, revolutionary feel of the original Burnt Oak experiment. The British public had now received sufficient exposure to self-service techniques to be assumed to be relatively receptive to Boots' second full-scale experiment with the format. This was summarised by Wigston's branch manager, who said, 'we were concerned with how they would react to a self-service Boots shop, but in fact they are so used to this type of shopping that they accept it as a matter of course'.[119] While external trends had facilitated this seamless transition, Boots' capacity to keep pace with modern ideas, through its own version of self-selection, undoubtedly aided this process too. At the same time, its confidence to condition the format for its own ends had ultimately made it more compatible with its professional obligations, ambitions and traditions as a healthcare provider.

Boots' decision to remain faithful to its traditions and to resist altering its business model in the name of self-service was significant. After the lessons of Burnt Oak, it did not seek change merely because its competitors were also doing the same. Instead, in an effort to differentiate themselves from their rivals, Boots executives increasingly relied on the autonomy afforded them by their own professionalism and expertise. By gaining a better grasp

[118] "Self-Service-but there's still that personal touch" *Boots News*, January 1971, 8.
[119] Ibid.

on the model's workability, Boots had successfully carved a niche for itself that was underwritten by the cache of its own pharmaceutical profession. This allowed the company to embrace the future, whilst at the same time remaining faithful to its heritage and traditions. By persisting with this stable and accepted version of self-selection for over a decade, Boots were eventually able to capitalise on shifting market conditions and confidently trial complete self-service for a second time.

While Boots' progress towards a stable version of self-selection was complex, it serves as an example that challenges many historiographical interpretations of self-service. The company's fluctuating relationship with the format demands a more dynamic and developmental understanding that reframes self-service as a multifaceted 'tool-kit' of options, rather than the unyielding, formulated model promoted within the early guidebooks. At the same time, such approaches can encourage interpretations that move beyond segmented phases of retail history to allow for a more complex overlap between modern and traditional ideas.

Boots' journey towards a stable version of self-selection also encourages new perspectives on the concept of 'Americanisation'. The reports compiled during the 1950s make it clear that despite paying close attention to the nation's retailing cultures, executives never conceptualised American self-service formats as a simple set of physical apparatus that could be effortlessly inserted *into* their pre-existing retail culture. Thinking of self-service in these terms not only overlooks the fact that many self-service sensations were already present within Boots' inter-war retail offer, but also perpetuates interpretations of the system's new and revolutionary nature.

The reports portrayed a sense that despite America's role in pioneering self-service methodologies, Boots considered transatlantic retail cultures slightly unsuitable for the perceived refinements of British retail-pharmacy. Whilst it is clear that Boots were actively researching and learning from American practices, it is wrong to suggest the nation's procedures were copied, wholesale, and supplanted into a British context. The influence of the Pharmaceutical Society and the unique ways in which self-selection was adapted for a British audience, ensured Boots executives self-consciously downplayed the full, Americanising effects of the new retail system. This chapter has therefore demonstrated that more variety needs to be applied to understandings of the term Americanisation. By continuing to disrupt unitary readings of self-service and by viewing its implementation in a more contested and fragmentary light, it can be seen that American and British consumers experienced the system differently. This realisation can ultimately broaden understandings of the system, and the ways in which it altered the retailing patterns of these nations and others.

Boots executives retained an awareness of the needs and opinions of their customers, with the archetypal Boots customer consequently exerting a significant bearing on the retailer's adopted version of self-selection. The retailer's hybrid model of self-selection was in the complex and unique position of always prioritising the needs of its retail pharmacy customers over any unquestioned affixation to cutting-edged transformation. However, although the company had attached its model of self-selection to its own pharmaceutical traditions, the period of patient research leading up to the February 1960 press conference had nevertheless demonstrated that many

of its customers were now demanding rejuvenated retail experiences that assimilated with the patterns of modern living. By analysing the spatial designs of Boots' new self-selection stores, the next chapter therefore explores how this modernised customer expectation was balanced with the ongoing anticipation for the orthodoxies of personalised service and knowledgeable pharmaceutical care.

Chapter Two- 'A New Pattern of Shop-Keeping': Designing Self-Selection Stores for the Affluent Shopper c.1960-1969.

On 11th February 1960, seventy newspaper reporters gathered at Boots' Stamford Street offices in central London.[1] Hosted by six executive team members, the press conference informed journalists of the company's new programme of retail modernisation and its ensuing progress towards self-selection techniques. The conference venue aimed to symbolise Boots' retailing evolution, with a contemporary self-selection gondola and wall fixture intentionally juxtaposed alongside an old-fashioned wooden counter from the company's traditional stores. The accompanying set of talks also sought to emphasise the company's modernising zeal. Head of Shop Planning, Mr A.D. Spencer informed attendees that the retailer was now getting 'down to the task' of building the types of shops necessary for serving 'more people with the things they want'.[2] Financial Director, Mr F.A. Cockfield, also declared that by 1961, the modernisation programme would yield fourteen stores with a turnover above £0.5million per annum. By contrast, in 1955, only one of the company's branches had been capable of generating such incomes.[3] Although neither stated it directly, Cockfield and Spencer's comments demonstrated a clear response to the growing impact of post-war mass affluence. Their references to increased revenue and consumer demand, clarified that Boots executives saw self-service techniques as the ideal retail strategy for unlocking the era's nascent economic potential.

[1] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "New Look For Boots: Background to our press conference", *Sales & Selling,* No. 32, May 1960: 3-4.
[2] Ibid., 4.
[3] Ibid.

The 1964 self-service guidebook, authored by British retail and marketing strategist Ralph Towsey, made explicit connections between the sales format and rising levels of affluence. He argued rising prosperity, coupled with the increased selling power of manufacturers and advertisers generated a desire for consumer goods that 'traditional retailing systems' were incapable of handling sufficiently.[4] Towsey also claimed retailers needed to adopt self-service methods, in recognition of their new role as the 'mere' distributors of such goods.[5] While his work demonstrated their temporal and ideological overlaps, the novel, everyday patterns of shopping induced by rising affluence remain underexplored by scholars. Although Alistair Kefford has detailed the relationship between affluence and the spatial configuration of the domestic sphere, no equivalent investigation has yet been undertaken for how affluence transformed the facilities and design of individual retail spaces.[6]

With scholars including Lawrence Black & Thomas Spain framing self-service as an important catalyst of Britain's post-war consumer economy, the following chapter explores how the retail design and spatial provision of Boots stores helped to unleash the increased spending power of contemporary British shoppers.[7] It argues that while Boots' new self-selection shops allowed for the expression of more optimistically affluent lifestyles, their conceptualisation and arrangement also sought to uphold the company's middle-class outlook and sensibilities. It will illustrate that as well as receiving

[4] Towsey, *Self-Service Retailing*, 16.
[5] Ibid., 24.
[6] Kefford, "The Parker Morris Report."
[7] The abstract for Black & Spain's chapter (see note 9) describes self-service as the "heartbeat" of the consumer society. See publishers website at https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-71297-0_8 (accessed 01/12/2024)

modulation from the firm's own class-specific traditions, Boots' modernised facilities also gained shape from the specific version of health and wellbeing centred self-selection they had chosen to adopt. In addition, by demonstrating that the relationship between affluence and self-service techniques was always in a state of flux, the chapter provides a tangible set of examples to support Shinobu Majima and Mike Savage's claim that affluence was never a clearly defined entity, but rather something that was always 'contested, fraught and fragile'.[8] It therefore explores how various aspects associated with the age of affluence and the development of mass consumerism, such as individualism, personal fulfilment, choice and convenience, were given selective forms of expression with Boots' newly designed stores.

The chapter focuses on the decade after the Stamford Street press conference, with analysis divided into two main sections. The first section explores historical interpretations of affluence and how executives understood, and designed for, such a situation. It argues that these shops were shaped by new understandings of modern life, particularly the need to provide pleasurable, quick and convenient forms of shopping. It also details how store design choices in lighting, wall colouration, materiality and sizing sought to reflect contemporary aesthetics and thus offer greater appeal to modern, affluent consumers. Nonetheless, while these design features deliberately targeted the patterns of contemporary life, company executives were reluctant to see their self-selection stores entirely replicate the modernity of pure self-service environments. The relationship between rising

[8] Majima and Savage, "Contesting Affluence: An Introduction," 447.

affluence and self-service techniques was therefore always flexible, with the section emphasising how Boots executives catered for the rise in individual prosperity through the provision of divergent forms of retail space.

Section two examines how these modern design elements were moderated by Boots' middle-class values. It explores four elements of store design— visibility and lighting, layout, materiality and colour, and merchandising— to understand how Boots stores were capable of creating a more refined retail experience than the purely transactional environment described by Towsey. While each element facilitated contemporary modes of shopping, they also offered sensations that maintained and reaffirmed the company's middle-class reputation. The section therefore argues that Boots' self-selection stores were highly curated retail environments that facilitated a sense of abundance, autonomy and accessibility, alongside notions of orderliness, comfort and value-for-money. The chapter subsequently questions Black & Spain's suggestion that self-service systems were 'not consumer driven'.[9] It argues that Boots' approach to self-selection offered a spatially modified retail experience that answered the needs and desires of a largely pre-existing, and pre-understood, customer typology.

Building for the Future

Although there was no unitary affluent experience, there were common economic threads that marked the rough period between 1952 and 1969 as historically distinct. Britons largely enjoyed a better standard of living, with jobs and prosperity a common feature of the national landscape. Although

[9] Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 175.

not every tier of British society *became* affluent, from the mid-1950s it was nevertheless clear that standards of living were rising, with many working people benefitting from higher wages and an unemployment rate that rarely rose above 2%.[10] The era also encapsulated a wider definition of who exactly the working individual was, with greater quantities of married women undertaking paid employment to bolster family incomes. Figures suggested 35% of married women were employed outside the home in 1961, compared with 26% a decade earlier.[11] Dolly Smith Wilson also claimed that the post-war working mother was a phenomenon 'common to all classes' and a necessary requirement for families seeking to afford the 'accoutrements of affluence'. [12] During the 1960s, wages rose at an annual rate roughly double that of prices, breeding significant levels of consumer confidence for the purchase of new forms of domestic durables.[13] British consumers spent around £1,004 million on goods in 1957. By 1960, this figure had risen by 20%, encompassing a 25% rise in car ownership, a 32% growth in television purchases, as well as a 54% and 58% increase in the respective sales of washing machines and refrigerators.[14]

Boots' retail modernisation programme proceeded under the assumption that Britain's post-war shoppers had unprecedented levels of disposable income. This was made clear within a 1960 company brochure, which claimed:

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[10] Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-2000* (London: Penguin, 2004), 255; Andrew Rosen, *The Transformation of British Life, 1950-2000: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 11.
[11] Helen McCarthy, "Women, Marriage and Paid Work in Post-War Britain," *Women's History Review* 26, no. 1 (2017): 47.
[12] Dolly Smith Wilson, "A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 17, no. 2 (2006): 208, 28.
[13] Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, 255.
[14] Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, 110.

> Our national income is growing, the standard of living is rising, people have more money to spend. Commodities that were the luxuries of yesterday have become the necessities of today.[15]

Nevertheless, these economic realities only ever formulated the baseline expectations of the company's redesign strategy. Executives also wanted to look beyond the basic financial facts of affluence, to diagnose the novel behaviours and lifestyles it cultivated within individual shoppers. A growing appreciation for *how* contemporary shoppers wished to spend their money consequently influenced the design of Boots' modernised stores, with company executives embracing the role their shops could play in satisfying the needs of Britain's affluent consumers.

Principal among these needs was the understanding that contemporary, affluent shopping was a fun thing to do. A 1964 booklet on shopping centre planning, claimed the design of retail environments needed to be 'conducive to pleasurable shopping'.[16] The same booklet also declared, 'Shopping…should be fun'.[17] During the Stamford Street press conference, A.D Spencer remarked that thanks to the 'more exciting things' being sold, contemporary shopping was now 'more fun'. He also claimed that modernised shops enhanced their sense of pleasure by being 'gayer and more inviting' spaces than their inter-war predecessors.[18] The notion of

[15] WBA/BT/28/40/4/5- *Building for the Future; Reviewing the activities of Boots Pure Drug Co. Ltd* (Nottingham: Boots Pure Drug Company Limited, 1960), 4.
[16] Multiple Shops Federation, *The Planning of Shopping Centres* (London: Multiple Shops Federation, 1964), 11.
[17] Ibid.
[18] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- Press release, "New Look for Boots the Chemist: Biggest and Smallest shops lead nation-wide programme", February 1960: 3.

enjoyment stemmed from the confidence offered by rising standards of living, with customers assumed to be more financially secure to shop with a greater sense of uninhibited desire. The company's new store advertisements therefore heavily emphasised this element of fun. A 1961 newspaper promotion for the new Bolton shop claimed its surroundings made 'shopping a pleasure'.[19] In the same year, a newspaper advertisement promised customers of the new Bradford store would, 'be able to enjoy…shopping more than ever before!'.[20]

Executives recognised that these pleasures also hinged upon providing customers with purposeful, fast and convenient shopping experiences. Towsey's guidebook argued that due to the growing pressures of 'modern sophisticated life', shoppers were increasingly drawn to retail facilities that conserved their leisure and saved them time.[21] Boots had recognised the need for convenience as early as 1956, when Vice-Chairman W.R. Norman emphasised the importance of speeding up service to meet the 'snap everyday demands' of customers.[22] Spencer's press-conference speech also recognised the need to align retail experiences with the busy nature of a customer's daily life. He claimed that modern shopping was 'not the leisurely affair' it once was, with many customers now preferring to undertake 'routine shopping very quickly'.[23] By 1960, bosses understood that many of their customers were already shopping in ways that necessitated expedited retail

[19] Advertisement contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book. See, *Bolton Evening News,* Wednesday October 4th 1961: 5.
[20] Advertisement contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book. See, *Telegraph and Argus ,* May 9th 1961.
[21] Towsey, *Self-Service Retailing*, 21.
[22] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "'Big Shop' Managers in Conference", *The Bee*, Vol.28 No. 1, March 1957: 3.
[23] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist": 3.

experiences, with a transaction from the Colmore Row branch in central Birmingham, described in the following way:

> The city lunch hour rush is so often uncontrollable…We had noticed that regular customers…knowing where their particular needs were kept, would, if within reach, apologetically elbow their way to the counter, secure their needs, and with an equally apologetic smile, leave the right money in some convenient spot.[24]

Describing the situation as an 'in essence' representation of self-selection practices, the situation outlined how the company's modernised design ideas often occurred as a direct response to pre-existing customer behaviours.

The modernisation programme also recognised that contemporary individuals preferred to shop in concentrated pockets of time. The increased demands of modern life, coupled with the greater quantities of working wives, ensured fewer people had the ability to shop throughout the week in a piecemeal, laidback fashion. When the new Glasgow central branch opened in 1962, the trade press reported how its design reflected 'present-day shopping trends', with bosses anticipating that the majority of purchases would be made during the 'particularly busy period' of lunchtimes and weekends.[25] Crucially, both of these periods occurred when the majority of individuals were not at work.

[24] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Self-Selection at Branch 222 (Colmore Row, Birmingham)", *Sales & Selling*, No.28, May 1958: 20.
[25] "Self-Selection is a Feature of Boots' Biggest Branch", *Retail Pharmacy News,* May 2nd 1962: 11.

While the example from Colmore Row detailed the hastier forms of lunchtime trading, Saturday shopping was conceptualised as a more leisurely and discreet form of consumption, often undertaken with family and friends.[26] A contemporary shopping guide noted that 'one great change' in post-war shopping habits related to 'the way people now travel into large towns to shop at weekends'.[27] The guide argued that people preferred the bustling, 'very crowded' nature of modern shopping because it made their towns and cities more 'exciting'.[28] Alistair Kefford argued that efforts to accommodate affluence saw large swathes of Britain's urban centres 'reconstructed as consumer playgrounds', with pleasurable shopping recast as an 'entertaining leisure experience' crucial to the functionality of this new urban fabric.[29] While they were not leisurely, Saturday shopping outings were undertaken as a form of leisure, with individuals seeking to maximise their time away from work to indulge their own sense of affluence and participate within the urban economy's expanded spheres of retail consumption. [30] This ensured the expression and fulfilment of rising consumer spending power was predominately understood as an urban experience, with F.A. Cockfield's

[26] Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress*, 50-58.
[27] W. K. Brennan, *Shops and Shopping*, vol. 3, Background to Living (Leeds: E.J. Arnold & Son Limited, 1966), 14. In this context, "weekends" related to Saturday's only, with restrictions on Sunday trading relaxed from the 1980s, see Stobart, *Spend!*, 223.
[28] Brennan, *Shops and Shopping*, 3.
[29] Kefford, *Life and Death of the Shopping City*, 9-10, 11.
[30] See Janina Gosseye and Tom Avermaete, "Shopping Towns Europe, 1945-75," in *Shopping Towns Europe: Commerical Collectivity and the Architecture of the Shopping Centre 1945-1975*, ed. Janina Gosseye and Tom Avermaete (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). Peter Mandler, "New Towns for Old: The Fate of the Town Centre," in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964*, ed. Chris Waters, Becky Conekin, and Frank Mort (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1999). Peter Shapely, "Civic Pride and Redevelopment in the Post-War British City," *Urban History* 39, no. 2 (2012). Todd, "Phoenix Rising."; John K. Walton, "Towns and Consumerism," in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume Iii 1840-1950*, ed. Martin Daunton, The Cambridge Urban History of Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

press conference speech explaining how the company's new city centre stores came, 'equipped with as many as 45,000 different lines'.[31]

The ability of Boots to assimilate with modern trends did not mean they remodelled stores on a rigid, archetypal understanding of the affluent consumer. Spencer's speech declared the company had no desire to 'introduce a stereotyped shop' that was replicated throughout the country 'without change'.[32] This saw the company's design scheme incorporate two distinct versions of shopping experience. The first of these was the 'neighbourhood' chemists branches, which were smaller, 'nearer to home and equipped mainly with personal and household needs'. Secondly, the 'city centre' branches were 'comprehensive stores', furnished with plenty of browsing space and numerous lines of merchandise.[33] While they underlined that Boots understood the influence of affluence in multifaceted, flexible ways, the presence of the 'neighbourhood' and 'city centre' stores did not represent any rigid demarcations concerning where certain individuals were allowed to shop. Conceptually, both stores would be capable of serving the same customer. Rather, their dual existence reflected the increasingly modular and time-sensitive nature of modern life and the resultantly diverse ways in which post-war individuals were choosing and needing to shop. It also underlined the variegated nature of post-war affluence and the ways in which Britain's rising levels of prosperity were incapable of inducing uniformed design responses from retailers.

[31] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "New Look For Boots", *Sales & Selling*: 4.
[32] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist": 4.
[33] Ibid., 6.

While the city centre was envisioned as the hub of affluent shopping experiences, it was never assumed such activities would preclude the need for visiting 'neighbourhood' stores to acquire other everyday pharmacological provisions. In many respects, this diversity of store experience epitomised the sense of convenience longed for by contemporary shoppers, with executives simply making it as easy as possible for shoppers to satisfy their buying needs. Furthermore, neither one of the stores was subject to a rigid design philosophy. As well as declaring the company made 'changes and improvements' with every branch they built, Spencer emphasised how the 'process of modernisation' was 'constant'.[34] This demonstrated that executives wished to associate their new stores with the process, rather than the concept, of modernity, thereby enabling their design schemes to evolve in line with the fluctuating needs and desires of post-war affluent shoppers.

Certain design principles were considered essential in allowing customers to fulfil and express their heightened consumer confidence. Spencer claimed that the inclusion and reoccurrence of these design characteristics created a strong 'family resemblance' across all of the company's modernised stores.[35] These features broadly related to the categories of colour, light, space, materiality and merchandising. During his speech, Spencer announced that as well as containing a 'wider choice of goods', all modernised stores would be, 'more colourful', 'brightly lighted' and 'more spacious'. He also said they would feature 'light wood' wall fittings alongside 'convenient layouts' that placed products within 'easy reach of the customer'. Spencer also clarified that these features underwrote the company's entire sales strategy, by both

[34] Ibid., 5.
[35] Ibid., 4.

accompanying and facilitating the company's 'own-brand' version of self-selection. [36]

Spencer also intentionally contrasted these 'new look' features with the more oppressive 'brown teak' interiors of the company's past.[37] This strongly affixed the company's design choices to conceptualisations of modernity, with their crisper, iridescent feel, reflecting the wider aesthetic shifts of the post-war period.[38] This sense of freshness and rejuvenation was encapsulated within a 1960 promotional brochure, which claimed the company's new stores epitomised 'a new pattern of shop-keeping'.[39] Indeed, these features were so outwardly modern that they shared many similarities with the design precepts espoused within the self-service guidebooks. For example, Towsey's guide encouraged retailers to 'use as much space as possible for selling', to ensure the maximum volume of merchandise was presented to the customer.[40] The 1957 guidebook from retail expert Harry Hedges claimed 'bold lighting' was 'essential' in helping customers 'read labels and prices of articles'.[41] With respect to layout, Patrick Galvani's manual advised making it 'easy' for the shopper to get from 'section to section'.[42] Towsey also declared that 'generally speaking' units needed to be made of metal, and wooden shelves 'faced with either a plastic or linoleum surface', in order to convey the most up-to-date impression to customers.[43]

[36] Ibid., 2.
[37] Ibid., 1.
[38] Usherwood, "Mrs Housewife " 123.
[39] WBA/BT/28/40/4/5- *Building for the Future,* 6.
[40] Towsey, *Self-Service Retailing*, 40.
[41] Hedges, *This Way to Self-Service*, 15.
[42] Galvani & Arnell, *Going Self-Service?* , 35.
[43] Towsey, *Self-Service Retailing*, 79.

Nevertheless, by conceptualising their design scheme as held together by an 'own-brand' version of self-selection, company bosses were clearly signalling that their stores offered a distinctive interconnection with the forces of post-war affluence. This ensured that despite their evidential overlap in design, executives were loathed to see Boots stores visually replicate pure self-service environments like the supermarket. The company consequently attempted to formulate its own, unique retailing experiences that borrowed from contemporary aesthetics, whilst also maintaining Spencer's depiction of Boots stores as 'dignified and friendly' spaces.[44] The retailer's design strategy ultimately sought to meet the modern expectations of the affluent shopper, whilst also continuing to offer experiences that were recognisably within the mould of both its own pharmacological and middle-class traditions.

Features of Design

As Boots operated around 1,300 different branches by 1960, it was implausible for the modernisation programme to alter all of the company's stores immediately. The programme was not restricted to the construction of entirely new buildings, but also concerned the rebuilding and refitting of pre-existing shops. As such, it offers an alternative form of evidence to academic narratives of urban renewal and reconstruction, which have tended to dominate interpretations of post-war Britain. [45] The plans discussed by Spencer were understood to be universally applicable to all branches, albeit in ways that were slightly modified to accommodate specific architectural features. During his speech, Spencer claimed the company was planning to

[44] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist": 1.
[45] See for example, Simon Gunn, "The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism: Planning Bradford, Circa 1945–1970," *The Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010); Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities*.

modernise ‘at least 65 branches every financial year’, ensuring every shop would undergo renewal ‘not less often than once every twenty years’.[46]

Visibility and Lighting

The first half of the twentieth-century had seen retailers, including Boots, utilise the visual qualities and new found sales potential of the window display.[47] Before the 1930s, the dominant form of window dressing was the ‘dictionary’ technique, which demonstrated the store’s array of merchandise in an eye-catching catalogue style that enabled customers to choose and make sense of products before they entered the shop.[48] Although Bethan Bide has described how these techniques shifted during the 1940s towards a more pictorial and narrative style, window displays remained a dominant part of pre-1945 retail promotion, functioning as an enticing intermediary between passing customers and the shop’s interior goods.[49] The introduction of self-service saw the influence of window display techniques gradually decline, with Patrick Galvani & Arthur Arnell’s 1952 guidebook advocating for greater exposure of a shop’s internal modes of consumption. The authors argued that instead of cluttering windows with assortments of merchandise, retailers now needed to use windows as the ‘frame to the picture’ of the exciting new process of self-service shopping unfolding within the store.[50]

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[46] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- “New Look for Boots the Chemist”: 3.
[47] Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 56.
[48] Susan Lomax, "'The View from the Shop': Window Display, the Shopper and the Formulation of Theory," in *Cultures of Selling: Perspectives on Consumption and Society since 1700*, ed. John Benson and Laura Ugolini (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). Kerry Meakin, "Women in British Window Display During the 1920s and 1930s," *History of Retailing and Consumption* 7, no. 2 (2021).
[49] Bethan Bide, "More Than Window Dressing: Visual Merchandising and Austerity in London’s West End, 1945–50," *Business History* 60, no. 7 (2018): 988.
[50] Galvani & Arnell, *Going Self-Service?* , 45.

This change sought to offer customers a stronger sense of connection to the store's interior range of products. While the traditional dictionary style promoted interior goods, it only ever offered a partial impression the store's choice of merchandise and therefore ran contrary to self-service's desire to show more produce. Advocates for self-service also felt the traditional window display added an unnecessary layer of resistance between the customer and the product. With self-service seeking to narrow the proximities between shoppers and goods, a 1956 Harvard Business School report declared the open-displays of modern stores offered all the allure of window shopping, but 'with the glass partition removed'.[51] Boots employees noted these changes during their American research visits, with the 1958 trip claiming decorative window displays were 'non-existent' within the newest pharmacy shops and the 1962 visit arguing that such techniques were now 'a thing of the past'.[52] Reflecting Galvani & Arnell's encouragement to entice customers 'from the street into the store', Boots executives also described how American drug stores contained 'look-through glass' that offered passing customers a 'good view of the whole store'.[53]

The self-service store's heightened sense of visibility neatly assimilated with the emergent consumer politics of Britain's affluent age. Developments including the establishment of the Consumers' Association (CA) in 1957 represented the growing individualism of post-war consumerism, with

[51] Lawrence Rapport Robinson and Eleanor G. May, "Self-Service in Variety Stores", in *Bureau of Business Research Bulletin* (Boston: Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, 1956), 29.
[52] WBA/BT/12/17/1/8- "Visit to United States of America: 16th September- 22nd October 1958": Report on a visit to America by Mr. S Harker- Smith and Party, 9; WBA/BT/12/17/1/13/- "Visit to United States of America: 8th April- 8th May 1962": Report on a visit to America by R.M. Dickson and Party, 34.
[53] WBA/BT/12/17/1/12- "Visit to United States of America and Canada: 21st May- 8th July 1959": Report on a visit to America by Mr. W.R. Norman and Party, 5.

shoppers encouraged towards rational and judicious modes of purchasing that sought to offset the self-service store's absence of sales personnel.[54] The more open and visible methods of store frontage adopted by Boots during the 1960s was therefore part of a wider trend that aimed to empower shoppers towards more informed buying decisions. The artifice of the company's traditional window displays was therefore gradually removed, in favour of more authentic impressions of the store's abundant interior presentations. For example, the new self-selection store opened at South Shields in 1961 was equipped with 'armour-plated glass' that allowed passing customers to 'look straight into the store'.[55] The store's strips of florescent lighting, which ran perpendicular to the street to elongate the exterior viewer's perspective, also enhanced this sense of visibility.

While some Boots stores continued with traditional window display techniques into the early 1970s, a 1979 piece of market research undertaken by the company, confirmed that such sales methods were increasingly representative of old-fashioned, leisurely forms of shopping. By claiming window shopping was 'a form of amusement' predominately undertaken by wealthy, 'non-working' women, respondents underlined the format's increasing incompatibility with the modern desire for quicker, convenient and more discerning modes of shopping.[56] Boots found that customers were largely in favour of removing window displays, with an additional respondent

[54] Black, *Redefining British Politics*, 14-45; Gurney, *Consumer Culture* 157-78. Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain*.
[55] Article contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book. Taken from, "A Space Problem is Solved", *South Shields Gazette,* May 17th 1961.
[56] WBA/BT/11/17/2/23- "Group Discussion on Window Shopfronts", 26/09/1979. (Retail Market Research Report no. 919h): 8.

claiming the transition was acceptable because they could now 'see in the shop to see what goods they have to offer'.[57]

A series of 1960s newspaper advertisements commissioned by the company, positioned viewers at the threshold of a locked set of glass double-doors in order to offer a tantalising interior glimpse of an as-yet-unopened branch of Boots (Image 2.1). While the advertisement extended the transparent and accessible forms of retailing noted by Janice Winship of certain inter-war self-selection stores like M&S, it was clear that Boots were now using the notion of enhanced visibility to empower their customers towards more independent and informed modes of choice.[58] Reflecting the post-war era's individualist modes of consumerism, the advertisement therefore utilised vertical strip lighting to help shoppers conceptualise Boots' expanded range of merchandise and prepare themselves for the multiform buying opportunities that awaited them inside. The promise of a 'vast selection of goods' therefore not only offered prospective customers a sense that they were peering into a sleek, contemporary store, but also that they were the primed participants in their own version of modern, affluent forms of retail buying.

[57] WBA/BT/11/17/2/23- "Group Discussion on Window Shopfronts": 9.
[58] Winship, "Culture of Restraint," 30.



Image 2.1: Style of newspaper advertisement used by Boots in the mid-1960s. (Contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/24- Advertising Guard Book. See, *Nuneaton Observer,* October 29th 1965.)

Rather than having customers loiter outside merely looking into stores, company bosses were keen to facilitate a greater quantity of interaction with the internal self-selection units. Therefore, as well as making it easier to *see* inside, company designers also sought to simplify the customer's access to the interior through the addition of extra doorways. Designed to facilitate 'greater speed in shopping', the new South Shields store contained an additional entrance on Queens Street, while the Big Top store had entrances on 'New Street, Union Passages and the Arcades'.[59] *The Bee* also delighted

[59] See WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book, "A Space Problem is Solved" and WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Birmingham 'Big Top' is Our Biggest", *The Bee*, Vol.30 No. 3, December 1959: ii.

that the new Glasgow Union Street store had three entrances.[60] In order to facilitate fast and convenient customer admittance, these new entrances made extensive use of glass, with the new Wolverhampton store replete with a 'thirteen plate-glass…tangle-free customer entrance' and the branch within the Elephant and Castle shopping centre containing 'no windows, only sliding doors' that were left 'permanently open' during trading hours.[61] The new branch within Birmingham's Bull Ring centre also made 'maximum use of glass sliding doors', with the shop's design said to resemble 'an attractive glass box'.[62]

This widespread use of glass heightened the modern store's sense of transparency. By creating an almost imperceptible threshold between the customer and the store, Boots' designers offered a very broad invitation for customers to assess and understand the internal workings of the space, even before they stepped inside. Fixing the customer's gaze into the heart of the company's new stores nevertheless left some members of Boots' staff feeling exposed. Describing how the increased use of glass within the redesigned Lincoln branch left employees feeling like 'goldfish in a bowl', Manager Mr C. Firth claimed staff now needed to accept the reality of being permanently 'on view'.[63]

The company's interior design mechanisms also functioned on the principle of increased visibility. Positioning self-selection gondolas at the consistent

[60] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Biggest Boots: At Glasgow a Great Stride Forward", *The Bee,* Vol. 33 No. 3, July 1962: iv.
[61] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2-"New BR 225 Over Four Times the Size of the Old", *The Bee*, Vol.37 No.2, April 1966: 11; WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "New Style of Shopping at the Sign of the Elephant and Castle" *The Bee*, Vol.37 No.2, April 1966: 10.
[62] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Retail Expansion Moves On", *The Bee*, Vol.35 No.3, August 1964: 14.
[63] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Enough to Make Other Chemists in Lincoln Green", *The Bee*, Vol.35 No.2, May 1964: 17.

height of 4ft 6in, not only allowed merchandise to be situated at the eye level of most customers, but also offered shoppers and employees a full view of the rest of the interior space. When the brand new branch within central Birmingham's Big Top shopping centre opened in October 1959, the *Birmingham Mail* commented that the sales floor's low-slung self-selection gondolas lent the shop a refreshing 'open look'. [64] A photograph of the new Beeston branch in Nottingham, taken in around 1963, illustrates that such features became an ingrained part of the company's self-selection stores, with the grid formation of fixtures offering unbroken, linear lines of visibility across, and around, the interior (Image 2.2). As well as supporting self-service's imperative to exhibit more merchandise, this approach also facilitated the notion of choice, with no area of the store hidden or deemed inaccessible to the customer. This point was clarified within a 1960s staff-training document, which claimed that internal fixtures and displays needed to make it 'easy for them [customers] to see what we have to sell'. [65]



Image 2.2: The interior of Beeston store, Nottingham c.1963. (Taken from WBA/WG/1/1/22- 1964 Annual Report)

[64] See report in, WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Birmingham 'Big Top' is Our Biggest", *The Bee*.
[65] WBA/BT/5/34/1/13- Display and display equipment, c.1960s: 17.

Such processes were accentuated by the beautification of internal merchandise arrangements. A1960 document encouraged staff to transfer the spectacle and allure of the traditional window display onto the shop floor, with the end of self-selection gondolas recognised as the 'key selling position' for 'mass…stacked or tumbled' displays of goods.[66] This demonstrated that the visual sensations previously confined to the perimeter of a Boots shop had moved inside, whereupon they were reconditioned for direct purchasing by the process of self-selection. The visual allure of the interior, coupled with the buying confidence of the affluent consumer, ensured that one area manager could confidently claim, 'once they're in they will buy'.[67]

The process of payment was also subjected to heightened forms of visibility. Before the early 1950s, all of Boots' sales were recorded via the counter book system, which saw assistants handwrite a carbon-copied invoice, one of which was handed to the customer, while the other was sent to the company's Nottingham based auditors for verification. In line with the company's broader experimentations with self-service techniques, modernised stores such as the one opened at Swansea in 1952, began installing automated machines from the National Cash Register Company (NCR). As well as helping to quicken the pace of transactions in accordance with the imperatives of modern shopping, these machines also delivered consistent and efficient forms of stocktaking.[68] They also introduced the

[66] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", September 1960, 11.
[67] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "What We Want is Aggressive Merchandising", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 75, July 10th 1964. 8.
[68] "Boots Take Delivery of the Last (or Rather First) Word in Cash Registers", *Boots News*, October 10th 1974: 9.

concept of a shared transaction, with each machine using a small glass interface that allowed customers to follow and observe the sale in a more open manner than was previously possible with counter book methodologies (Image 2.3). The use of these registers became standard across almost all self-service retailers, with company's seeking to preserve the sense of transparency it offered their customers. For example, Tesco issued directives stating the till's 'customer detail reading must not be obscured', with it considered important that shoppers were able to 'observe the process of registration' at all available times.[69] While these directives aimed to engender trust and goodwill between the store and customer, they also offered information that reinforced conceptualisations of the empowered, rational nature of affluent post-war consumerism.



Image 2.3: Example of the glass windowed interface used within the NCR cash registers (Image and original caption take from 'Boots Take Delivery of the Last (or Rather First) Word in Cash Registers', *Boots News*, October 10th 1974: 9.)

[69] HO 287/1900- Working Party on Internal Shop Security: Eleventh Meeting, 14th November 1972.

Modern lighting also played a vital part in enhancing visibility. Alongside its role in stretching the store's interior, Galvani & Arnell's guidebook claimed that 'effective and planned lighting' could permit a 'close inspection of items'.[70] Boots designers wished to use lighting in ways that reinforced a customer's sense of choice, by enabling them to make informed and reliable buying decisions. A 1957 conference of branch managers and company executives, noted the importance of 'getting the right lighting' into their new stores.[71] This was to ensure customers could successfully match cosmetic colours with the fashionable handbags and jewellery that Boots also sold. Eschewing the harsh and unnatural forms of lighting associated with the self-service supermarket, executives agreed that 'something better than ordinary fluorescent lighting' was required for Boots' fashionable forms of selling.[72] A distinctive, tailored blend of tungsten and fluorescent lighting was consequently introduced by the company's designers, with the *Bristol Evening Post* declaring the approach used with Boots' new Broadmead store as the 'best in Bristol'. Noting how the two forms of lighting blended over the sales counters, the article praised its ability to provide the 'best possible colour appearance of merchandise on display'.[73]

According to Spencer's 1960 press conference, this innovative approach enabled customers to trust their own judgement, with 'the woman choosing lipstick' able to shop with the confidence that she was seeing the 'true colour

[70] Galvani & Arnell, *Going Self-Service?* , 38.
[71] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "'Big Shop' Managers in Conference", *The Bee* : 4.
[72] Ibid.
[73] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Broadmead, Bristol, Biggest in the West", *The Bee*, Vol.30 No. 3, December 1959: vi.

contrast' of merchandise.[74] *The Bee* also claimed that the lighting design of modernised stores enabled cosmetics to be chosen 'with the knowledge that whether they are to be worn by day or by night the colour will be right'.[75] As the discerning forms of consumption epitomised by the CA were, according to Lawrence Black, significantly weighted towards the concerns of the middle class, Boots' emphasis upon providing the true colour render of its products can be seen as an attempt to uphold the buying choices of a distinctive section of its customer base.[76] As well as demonstrating the luxurious types of buying the company wished to facilitate, the in-store lighting design placed a clear preference upon providing the fashion conscious, middle-class woman with trusted levels of visibility that would guide a wiser and more refined cosmetic selection. While this approach upheld the company's status as a reputable, high-quality cosmetics retailer, it also offered customers fresh indications that despite the changes wrought by self-selection methods, the buying habits of the middle class remained integral to the tone and appearance of Boots stores.

These middle-class projections were also visible within company's cutaway store advertisements of the early 1960s (Image 2.4). The cutaway motif was heavily inspired by contemporary trends in museum and technological displays, which unveiled the inner workings of machinery by presenting them in sectional form. Sectioned schematics featured regularly within the era's popular *Eagle* magazine, while London's Science Museum had an established heritage of displaying exhibits in an opened view so that visitors

[74] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist": 7.
[75] WBA/BT/27/39/2/4- "Harlow (Branch 719), Opened August 1st", *The Mixture*, Christmas 1958: 8.
[76] Black, *Redefining British Politics*, 15.

could study their internal working parts.[77] When faced with Boots' sectioned advertisements, customers would have been familiar with their incitement to explore and understand the store's internal dynamic. They would have also understood the implicit suggestion that Boots stores were meticulously designed retail spaces, requiring a deep appreciation for the precision with which they operated.





Image 2.4: Two close-ups of newspaper advertisements depicting new stores in sectioned view. Top:

[77] Wayne D. Cocroft, "The Rolt Memorial Lecture 2008 'Dan Dare's Lair' — the Industrial Archaeology of Britain's Post-War Technological Renaissance," *Industrial Archaeology Review* 31, no. 1 (2009): 5; Jane Insley, "Little Landscapes: Agriculture, Dioramas and the Science Museum," *Icon* 12 (2006): 8. See also Andrew Nahum, "Exhibiting Science: Changing Conceptions of Science Museum Display," in *Science for the Nation: Perspectives on the History of the Science Museum*, ed. Peter J.T. Morris (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 178-86. James Sumner, "Defiance to Compliance: Visions of the Computer in Postwar Britain," *History and Technology* 30, no. 4 (2014): 313.

Bolton store 1961. Bottom: Bradford store 1961. (Contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/24-Advertising Guard Book)

Heavily reliant on the concept of increased visibility, the cutaways also served to underline how the post-war retail economy had removed a number of the conceptual barriers to consumption. Because all aspects of the store were open to observation and scrutiny, the advertisements effortlessly conveyed a sense of accessibility and honesty. As such, they functioned as an ideal symbol for both the modern efficiencies of the self-service era, as well as the wider democratic ideals of the post-war affluent economy. With no restrictions on what customers could see and understand about Boots stores, the cutaways also epitomised modern retail's inducement towards greater consumer choices. They therefore functioned as a powerful ideological precursor for the increased levels of autonomy awaiting customers within the self-selection store.

Nevertheless, the advertisements also sought to influence the everyday conduct of Boots customers, by making it clear that its stores were a clearly defined, self-contained space that operated under its own principle of the free, but organised, movement of customers. The cutaways stressed that the rational, individualist modes of consumption promoted by these new stores functioned with a level of mutual oversight and supervision that aimed to regulate a shopper's behaviour in accordance with the largely middle-class outlook of fellow Boots customers.[78] This was clarified by the cutaway's presentation of a calm, pleasurable shopping experience, undertaken in functional, informed and orderly ways. The advertisements were

[78] Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 72-77.

consequently emblematic of how company executives wished to be seen and understood by the public, with the sectioned viewpoint offering customers a visual template for what shopping at Boots was, and needed to be, like. While they exuded a sense of inclusivity, the cutaways therefore contained certain behavioural preconditions that provoked individuals into considering how their modes of individualist, choice-based consumerism might assimilate with Boots' established methods of sale.

Layout

During a 1959 American research visit, delegates recognised that modernised self-service shops required 'much more space to transact' than a traditional counter-service store.[79] The report also noted how, in comparison with their American equivalents, the majority of Boots shops were 'not big enough' to handle the quantities of merchandise and trade required under a self-selection system.[80] To demonstrate their modernity, public promotions of Boots' new stores emphasised their more spacious nature. In November 1961, the *Northampton Evening Telegraph* claimed Kettering's new branch was 'five times bigger', while the *Telegraph and Argus* described the new Bradford store as the company's 'tenth biggest'.[81] When it opened in 1966, *The Bee* also heralded the new Wolverhampton branch as 'more than four times bigger than the former shop'.[82] The call for enlarged sales spaces often

[79] WBA/BT/12/17/1/11- "Report on a visit to the United States of America and Canada: 10th September- 27th October 1959": Report on a visit to America and Canada by Mr. F.A. Cockfield and Party, 3.
[80] Ibid., 24.
[81] Articles contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book. Taken from, "Boots Shop is Five Times Bigger: Self-Selection Introduced", *Northampton Evening Telegraph,* Thursday November 16th 1961; "Boots Store is Tenth Biggest in Country: New Bradford Branch Has Best Aspects of Shop Design and Planning", *Telegraph and Argus*, May 10th 1961, 4.
[82] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "New BR 225", *The Bee*, 11.

came at the expense of the Booklovers Libraries and Cafés that had traditionally featured within Boots' inter-war stores. [83] With every inch of sales space conceptualised as precious to post-war retailing operations, the longer, leisurely dwelling times these spaces commanded felt increasingly at odds with the demands of contemporary selling. By the time the company's last café was closed in 1970, the facilities already felt like a relic of a bygone age, with the *Boots News* commenting that stores without cafés better reflected the 'exciting image of the seventies'. [84]

In his 1960 speech, Spencer not only argued that Boots' larger 'city centre' stores provided more 'room to browse', but also that the modern, affluent customer wanted the 'freedom' to 'make their own choices' from the store's extensive selection of merchandise.[85] As the company's new stores operated under the principle of providing customers uninhibited opportunities to touch and examine shelved items, an abundance of products were featured within new store advertisements. A 1961 promotion for Bolton's new Deansgate store listed 27 different departments, spread across three levels of sales space. These included 'Pottery', 'Leather Goods', 'Watches and Clocks', 'Jewellery' and 'Stationery' on the lower ground floor; 'Cosmetics', 'Household' and 'Surgical needs' on the ground floor; and 'Calendars', 'Wrapping Paper' and 'Christmas Cards' on level one.[86] Claiming there was 'more to buy' within this newly modernised branch, the advertisement emphasised how Boots had expanded its range of domestic durables to

[83] Stobart, *Spend!*, 197.
[84] "Boots First-and-Last Café Closes at Burton-Upon-Trent", *Boots News*, May 1970: 9.
[85] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist": 6.
[86] Advertisement contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/24- Advertising Guard Book. See, *The Journal,* October 5th 1961: 5.

accommodate the growing shifting desires of affluent post-war consumers.[87] The size of Boots' new stores also embodied the growing consumer confidence of the affluent age, with branches capable of expanding in line with the burgeoning desires of Britain's shoppers. For example, the 1958 branch within Harlow New Town was specifically designed to 'allow for expansion as the town grows in size'.[88] The notion of constant modernisation expressed in Spencer's speech therefore encapsulated the capacity to service rising spending power through a continual process of merchandise expansion.

Designers began incorporating electric escalators within these enlarged branches, after a 1959 American research report deemed them a 'must' for larger stores.[89] In an effort to promote the store's modern credentials, many were placed conspicuously near entranceways, with London's remodelled Regent Street store enticing customers to enter by making its escalator 'visible from the street'.[90] Branch managers welcomed this modern technology, as it not only facilitated enhanced exposure to the store's merchandise, but also provided customers with a comfortable, easy form circulation through the store's interior. For example, Southport's branch manager hailed the technology a 'god send', claiming it 'smoothed out' traffic flow and effortlessly dispersed customers onto both floors of his newly enlarged branch.[91] Illustrating the two escalators within Glasgow's new Union

[87] Kefford, "The Parker Morris Report," 230-31.
[88] WBA/BT/27/39/2/4-"Harlow", *The Mixture*: 8.
[89] WBA/BT/12/17/1/12- "Visit to United States of America and Canada", 11.
[90] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Glimpse Inside our Big 'New Store' in London", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 70, June 5th 1964.
[91] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Southport's New Shop", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 159, April 30th 1966.

Street branch, Image 2.5 demonstrates the dual role performed by this modern technology. In one sense, their speeded, automatized nature both facilitated and reflected the hastened imperatives of modern-day affluent shopping.[92] Yet, in another sense, they also helped to uphold the functional middle-class atmosphere of Boots stores, as customers waited in a patient, orderly manner as they were serenely transported towards the store's expanded range of merchandise.

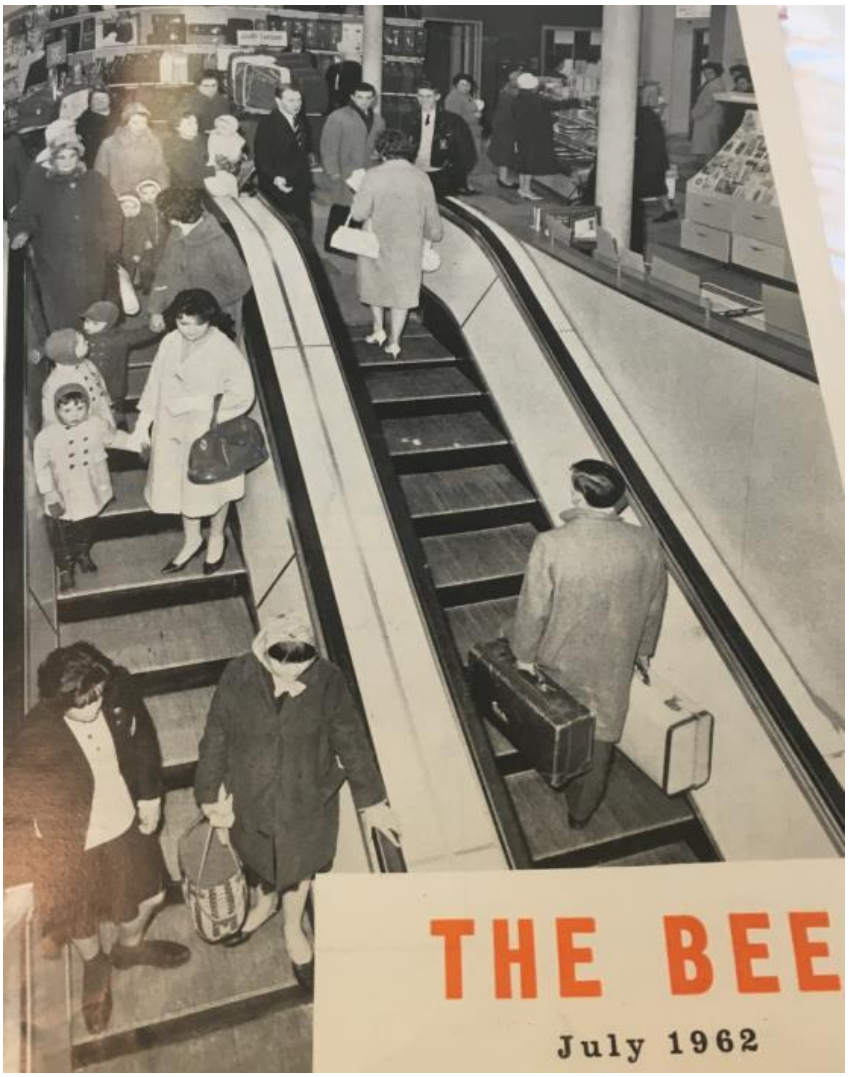


Image 2.5: Front page of The Bee magazine, depicting the two escalators within the new Glasgow Union Street Branch, opened in April 1962. (Vol. 33, No.3, July 1962)

[92] Sarah Elvins, "'A Stairway That Does Its Own Climbing': The Department Store Escalator and the Promises of Modernity, 1900–1950," *History of Retailing and Consumption* 7, no. 1 (2021).

The pleasure of browsing among merchandise was a distinct privilege of the self-service age, with storeowners making significant efforts to maintain a healthy flow of customers around their shops. Harry Hedges' 1957 guidebook claimed, 'any form of congestion, however slight' needed to be 'avoided like the plague'.[93] A Boots training booklet similarly implored staff not to 'clutter-up' self-selection units or 'put obstructions in the gangways'.[94] Boots valued freedom of circulation because it facilitated a sense of customer control, by allowing them to feel they were exercising choices in accordance with their own desires. These sensations were so deeply embedded within the company's retail experience that by the 1970s, customers had largely come to expect them. The findings of a 1975 survey commissioned by the company claimed, 'women often think of Boots as a very pleasant place in which to browse'.[95] Market research from 1979 also noted Boots shoppers enjoyed 'unmolested' browsing, as well as the freedom to try out 'perfumes and cosmetics at will'.[96] It also found customers 'would feel quite comfortable to wander about, picking things up without being 'bothered' by sales assistants'.[97] The retailer's stores were therefore infused with a dynamic, ambulatory nature, which had of course been given a prominent position within the cutaway advertisements.

The interspersed service counters, gondolas and cash-and-wrap kiosks that accompanied the retailer's model of self-selection quietly upheld these browsing freedoms. Choosing not to fix pay desks at regular points around

[93] Hedges, *This Way to Self-Service*, 32.
[94] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 15.
[95] WBA/BT/11/17/2/4- "Boots Image and Shopper Study", Summary of Qualitative Research undertaken by Taylor, Nelson and Associates Ltd., September 1975: 3.
[96] WBA/BT/11/17/2/23- "Group Discussion on Window Shopfronts": 10.
[97] Ibid.,13.

the shop floor created an increasingly freeform shopping experience. Represented by a 'C.R.' symbol, Image 2.6 shows where the cash registers were positioned within the original 1961 architect's drawings for Glasgow's Union Street branch. Intermixed within separate departments at seemingly random points, the plans indicate that customers were not required to take a programmed route around the store and that they were largely left free to decide where they paid for their goods. This approach stood in stark contrast with the efficient, almost scientific rationales underpinning self-service stores.[98] For example, Towsey's guidebook suggested shop layouts needed to 'encourage customers to flow in the desired direction', while 1950s self-service Woolworth's stores had in and out signage that attempted to 'control the route taken by shoppers' and 'guide them around the store'.[99] By contrast, the 'airy', 'spacious' and breathable descriptors attributed to the new Regent Street store, reflected how a Boots shop was governed by much more diffuse circulatory logics.[100]

[98] Usherwood, "Mrs Housewife " 120-21.
[99] Towsey, *Self-Service Retailing*, 42; Morrison, *Woolworth's*, 143.
[100] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Glimpse Inside", *Merchandise News*.

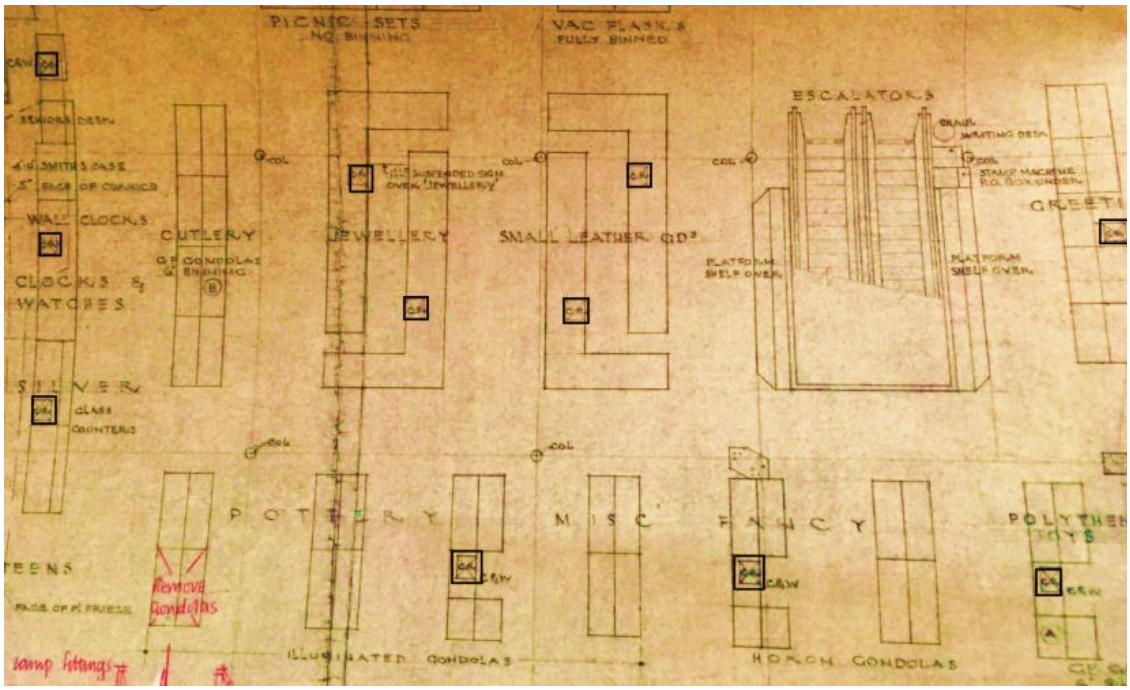


Image 2.6: Original 1961 architectural drawings for the layout of a section of the first floor of Glasgow Union Street branch. The cash registers are marked with a C.R. The image has been altered to make their position more prominent on the plan. (Uncatalogued drawings within the Boots Archive)

The store's interspersed plan received support from the design of the cash-and-wrap stations, which positioned pay points at one end of self-selection gondolas (Image 2.7). This ensured self-selection fixtures functioned as a compressed service counter, with customers able to move freely around the units, interacting with merchandise, while remaining in close proximity to staff. Politely worded signage declaring, 'Please make your selection and pay the assistant' and 'If you require help or advice, please ask the assistants', was positioned on the unit's shelving to encourage shoppers to engage with staff if they needed help. [101] While this wording retained the sense of customer agency, it also made it clear that an element of the personalised counter-service experience had been retained, albeit within a framework that prioritised the increased pace of modernised shopping.

[101] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1-"These Cards", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 126, August 6th 1965.



Image 2.7: A cash-and-wrap point within the Bury St. Edmunds. Taken from WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- *Sales & Selling*, No 42, July 1962: 24.

The adaptive ways in which customers were encouraged to use these fixtures, reflected the increasingly modular, fast-paced nature of contemporary life. A 1960 staff-training booklet suggested Boots stores created a form of retail self-expression, with shoppers free to 'take their own time over choice- quickly or leisurely according to their wish'. [102] Spencer's 1960 press conference also emphasised that customers had the opportunity to 'linger' around the self-selection units making up their minds, if they so required.[103] New store advertisements from the early 1960s clarified to customers that Boots' retail experience was uniquely discretionary. The regular use of the phrase 'as you wish' emphasised that in contrast with the

[102] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 4.
[103] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist": 4.

modern, self-service supermarket, the choice between either rapid self-selection or slower personalised service remained in the hands of the shopper.[104] This element was deemed particularly important to the maintenance of the company's health and wellbeing responsibilities, as it encouraged customers to recognise they could still seek the personalised help of assistants in relation to new or more complex healthcare needs.

However, while Boots customers were afforded a significant degree of agency, the company's emphasis upon optional methods of shopping was never absolute. The retention of service counters for certain product ranges ensured the notion of choice was always determined by the product, rather than the customer's desires. While everyday items like toothpaste and shampoo were transferred into the dualistic sales experience of self-selection, 'certain classes of fancy and luxury goods' remained exclusively and permanently tied with personalised forms of counter-service.[105] This 'better quality merchandise' included cosmetics, fancy goods, fountain pens and cameras, with company bosses believing such items would always require the attentive, personalised sales skills of assistants. Much of the merchandise preserved for counter sales methods came from the 'Number Two' departments introduced during the late nineteenth-century to broaden the company's appeal to middle-class class consumers.[106] By continuing to sell *to* customers, the service counters retained an air of exclusivity that bolstered the middle-class credentials of both Boots stores and the customers who frequented them. Furthermore, the maintenance of the

[104] See advertisement for new Corn Street Store in Belfast, *Belfast Telegraph,* March 2nd 1966 in WBA/BT/11/45/1/24- Advertising Guard Book.
[105] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist": 6.
[106] Chapman, *Jesse Boot*, 86-87. Scott and Walker, "Large-Scale Retailing," 104.

counter experience served to esteem certain customers by protecting them from having to make the entirety of their merchandise choices and further underlined that Boots' modernised stores had been conceived with the habits of middle-class consumers firmly in mind. Nevertheless, during his 1962 Annual Statement, chairman W.R. Norman was forced to clarify that it was 'not the case' that Number Two merchandise was taking a 'predominant position' in Boots' newly enlarged stores.[107] While this demonstrated that Boots remained focused upon its retail-pharmacy traditions, it also emphasised that company bosses remained conscious about providing an appropriate balance between the provision of everyday chemist goods, while also meeting the expanding demands for domestic consumer products brought by rising levels of affluence.

The company's dual modes of selling created contrasts in the customer's pace of movement though the store. In an effort to aid customer choice and quicken the pace of shopping, the merchandise on offer within self-selection shelving contained improved product label information and a greater sense of 'eye appeal'. While these forms of merchandising extended the inter-war 'silent salesman' techniques noted by Rachel Bowlby, Boots bosses recognised the modern imperative of placing their self-selection goods in direct communication with customers.[108] A 1960s leaflet encouraged employees to use 'talky' sales cards, while another declared that self-selection goods would 'speak for themselves' and 'come alive' if they were

[107] WBA/BT/3/1/48- Reports and Account for the Year Ended 31st March 1962.
[108] Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 30-48.

displayed correctly.[109] Part of this appropriate display involved the individual pricing of each self-selection item, with employees told that such methods would not only reduce the need for time-consuming staff mediation but also increase the sense of customer convenience by helping to avoid delays at the pay point.[110]

The pace of self-selection buying was further accelerated by strengthening the connection between television advertising and store layouts. Company bosses were initially cautious about this novel form of promotion, stating in 1958 that the genre was still in the 'early stages of development' and reliant upon the 'advantage of novelty appeal'.[111] Nonetheless, from the late 1950s, bosses began issuing directives encouraging branches to 'anticipate demand' by responding to the provocations of this 'vast advertising machine'.[112] In order to ensure branches prioritised the display of heavily advertised lines, the *Merchandise News* started issuing listings that detailed the various proprietary goods receiving ITV promotion during that week.[113] Employees were encouraged to position such goods in high impact positions such as the end of gondolas, on eye-level shelving or in their own discrete area denoted with bold signage or showcards. Such placements enabled customers to draw immediate connections between the advertisements and the store, with one mass display in Manchester's Royal Exchange branch making this link explicit by carrying the tagline of 'you've seen them all

[109] WBA/BT/11/38/2/4-"Self-Selection in the Surgical and Home & Garden Sections"; WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 4, 16.
[110] WBA/BT/5/34/1/105 – Staff-training on Self Selection c.1964: 6.
[111] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "'I Saw it on the Telly'", *Sales & Selling,* No. 23*,* January 1958: 3.
[112] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 7.
[113] See, for example WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Advertising, February 1964, Television", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 53, February 1st 1964: 8.

before'.[114] Television advertising was therefore the perfect accompaniment to self-selection selling, as it not only minimised the employee's intermediary role in the sales process, but also transformed shopping into a quick and convenient experience where customers were simply reintroduced to familiar products.

To maintain this sense of pace it was important that branch managers heavily modulated the sense of choice they presented on the shelves. In 1962, representatives of the Sweda Cash Register Company instructed retail pharmacists to strike a balance between offering customers insufficient choice and overwhelming them with an excessive product range.[115] While Boots employees were instructed to always keep shelves fully stocked in order to project the image of a 'thriving and successful business', they were also encouraged to ease the customer's flow around the store by not making displays 'too difficult' or confusing for them to select from.[116] Sales assistants were therefore told that displays needed to be 'simple, bold and easy to follow', but importantly not so regimented and overly partitioned that they conjured impressions of the supermarket's more structured buying experience.[117] This saw bosses discourage rigidly stacked towers of goods in favour of more informal arrangements like small piled troughs or flat, open trays of stock. In offering this sense of 'orderly disorder', managers hoped customers would find selecting their goods easier, quicker and more

[114] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "On I.T.V- You've Seen the all Before", *Sales & Selling,* No. 20*,* April 1957: 62.
[115] "Introducing Modern Methods into the Pharmacy: Self-Selection Meant Big Increase in a Chemist's Turnover", *Retail Pharmacy News,* June 20th 1962: 10.
[116] WBA/BT/5/34/1/105 – Staff-training, 4.
[117] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 7.

comfortable.[118] This was underlined by a mid-1960s staff-training document, which claimed, 'If customers are going to be doing some of our work then we must make it easy for them to do so'.[119]

While this emphasis upon ease of choice neatly aligned with the pleasurable, convenient conceptualisations of modern-day affluent shopping, Boots managers wanted to ensure that such activity did not proceed in a frenzied or haphazard manner. Although the Pharmaceutical Society had long-standing concerns with Boots' utilisation of self-service techniques (see chapter one), the early 1960s saw the Society continue to express its disquiet for the ways in which self-service risked creating an 'open market' and 'fair' like environment that diminished the prestige of pharmacy.[120] Boots executives took these concerns seriously and during the early 1960s used their moderated version of self-selection to carefully choreograph the pace and movement of shoppers through their stores. Moves to uphold the professional character and high standards of retail pharmacy were also of significant worth to the company's wider ambitions, as they nourished the firm's middle-class sensibilities by making it clear that its retail experience functioned in dignified, well-mannered ways.

It was therefore important that Boots stores established the appropriate tone as soon as customers entered. Bosses relied upon the perceived social background of customers to govern their merchandise layouts, with the store in Basildon New Town placing surgical needs directly to the left of the

[118] Ibid., 13.
[119] WBA/BT/5/34/1/105 – Staff-training, 6.
[120] The comments related to Boots operating a concession with the GEM superstore, a pioneering out-of-town mall at West Bridgeford, Nottingham opened in November 1964. Parts of the Boots store used self-service techniques. See, WBA/BT/2/26/32- "Papers Concerning Dispute with Pharmaceutical Society".

doorway to allow the town's 'very numerous young mothers to obtain all of their baby needs'.[121] By contrast, when Europe's largest Woolworth's store opened at Wolverhampton in 1968, managers placed 'plastic jewellery' and 'vividly coloured sweets' immediately inside the door in ways that evoked the feverish, hurried atmosphere of the working-class marketplace feared by the Pharmaceutical Society.[122]

Once inside, the layout of departments functioned with a logic that gently propelled customers around the store. Branch managers were encouraged to provide a coherent relationship between departments of self-selection goods, with stock arranged in 'natural' groupings that would 'mean something to the customer'. [123] Toothpastes were therefore positioned adjacent to toothbrushes and mouthwashes, while baby foods were positioned at the start of an aisle containing bibs, baby lotions and creams.[124] When Nottingham's Victoria Centre store opened in 1972, its regional manager declared that the merchandise groupings within the toilet and home departments had been planned in accordance with the needs of a 'women's weekly shop'. [125] As well as managing the customer's pace, such interlinking of merchandise created the impression that their buying experience was unfolding in a 'sequence of shopping convenience' that matched their individual needs and desires.[126] Although this approach acted as a tacit prompt towards impulse purchases, it nonetheless reassured customers that

[121] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "A Good Start at Basildon New Town", *The Bee*, Vol.32 No. 2, July 1961: 39.
[122] Prudence Glynn, "A Link in the Chain", *The Times*, November 12th, 1968, 12.
[123] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 9.
[124] Ibid.
[125] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Victoria Centre: a new concept in shopping, our biggest and best", *Boots News*, June 21st 1972: 8.
[126] Ibid.

Boots were not deceiving them into unwanted purchases and that layouts had been tailor-made to enable their heightened forms of spending to be expressed in appropriate ways.

Although the self-selection units allowed for the expression of customer agency, Boots stores continued to provide help and support in ways that were befitting of its pharmacy remit. Branch managers were encouraged to keep goods in the same shelving positions for a 'considerable time', so not to frustrate regular customers by leaving them to hunt for goods in a frantic, uncontrolled manner.[127] Bold signage denoting different departments and groups of products was also used to help customers 'pinpoint' their required merchandise. Nevertheless, to ensure the retail experience did not feel overly programmed or directed, managers were told to find the appropriate balance between 'not too little', or 'too much' signage.[128] Such approaches reflected the wider approach to self-selection selling, for while they helped to retain a sense of customer self-expression, they also ensured Boots stores operated with a sense of refined interior calm that upheld both the wider expectations of the pharmacy profession as well as the company's own reputation for providing appropriate and trusted health and wellbeing advice.

Materiality and Colour

In March 1960, *The Bee* described the shifting interior appearance of Boots' modernised self-selection stores. As well as claiming 'linoleum', 'thermoplastic' and 'imitation terrazzo' was 'rapidly' replacing the company's old-style wooden floors, the article also suggested that 'these days', the

[127] WBA/BT/11/38/2/4- "Self-Selection in the Surgical and Home & Garden Sections for Small Branches", Sales and Sales Promotions Department, March 1965.
[128] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 17.

preferred style was to envelope the interior with 'bright colours'.[129] While the new materiality and colour of Boots stores expressed a clear sense of modernity, the article's contrast with the dark, absorbing qualities of a traditional chemist only served to heighten the shop's innovative feel. Nevertheless, by demonstrating that Boots stores sat at the forefront of an invigorated post-war design aesthetic, *The Bee* article also quietly conveyed new class-coded understandings of what qualified as dignified and tasteful interior environments.

By replacing its traditional wooden fittings with easy to clean fixtures of metal, plastic and glass, the contemporary self-service supermarket was able to position itself as the epitome of modern retailing experiences.[130] Its lustrous, hygienic appearance was one of the main reasons why British shoppers warmed to self-service methodologies, with a 1963 British Market Research Bureau investigation finding that 80% of respondents were 'impressed' by its sense of cleanliness.[131] Furthermore, when conducting its experiments into self-service systems, grocery chain Sainsbury's was reassured with the 'very cleanly manner' of contemporary supermarket design. They believed such features would help to convince British shoppers that self-service stores were 'clean and quick' environments.[132] These developments underlined that the appearance and feel of old-fashioned chemist stores was increasingly at odds with the post-war era's modernising impulses. In April 1962, *The Retail Pharmacy News* claimed many smaller, independent pharmacists were persisting with 'out-dated' fixtures that

[129] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Switch to…Mechanical Cleaning"*, The Bee*, Vol.31 No. 1, March 1960: 17.
[130] Usherwood, "Mrs Housewife " 123.
[131] Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 167.
[132] "Sainsbury's Sample Self-Service", *J.S. Journal*, Vol. 3 No.4, September 1950: 3.

conveyed a sense of 'drabness' and 'inferiority'.[133] It claimed customers associated 'dark and dingy' wooden fixtures and counters with 'antiquated' sales methods and even drew connections between these cluttered, unattractive spaces and the apparent 'apathy and smugness' of its proprietors. According to the report, the installation of 'bright, efficient, attractive' fixtures was the only way to 'banish the gloom', and cure these dusty, absorbing spaces of their malady.[134]

Spencer's 1960 press conference speech reflected these trends by claiming the company's old-fashioned appearance had, 'served…its purpose'.[135] Although executives were proud of the company's pharmaceutical traditions, it was clear that its modern, affluent appeal relied upon rejecting the pharmacy's traditional materials and embracing the up-to-date design aesthetic of the post-war era. Boots' modernised stores were therefore flooded with contemporary materials, such as the 'crisp, bright', 'decorative plastic tiles' that adorned the floor of the new Northwich branch and the illuminated 'Perspex signs' within the new Loughborough shop.[136] The shelving within the refurbished Lincoln store also featured units, frames and brackets of metal.[137] While the counters continued to be made out of wood, designers intentionally distanced themselves from the oppressive characteristics of the traditional pharmacy, by stating their facilities were constructed from 'walnut' and 'light sycamore'.[138] Manufactured by Boots'

[133] "A Shopfitting Expert Says: Chemist's Shops are in the Lead for Drabness", *Retail Pharmacy News,* April 18th 1962: 1.
[134] Ibid.
[135] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist": 1.
[136] WBA/BT/27/39/2/4- "Northwich (Branch 1164), Opened August 16th", *The Mixture*, Christmas 1958: 4; WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "New Branch at Loughborough", *The Bee*, Vol.31 No. 1, March 1960: 9.
[137] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Chemists in Lincoln Green", *The Bee*: 15.
[138] See, for example, WBA/BT/27/39/2/4- "Northwich", *The Mixture*: 5.

own shopfitting department, the self-selection wall fittings also featured 'spurred metalwork', 'translucent Perspex', and 'wire baskets' as key elements of their modular, flexible design.[139]

New systems of air conditioning worked alongside this materiality to emphasise the store's sense of hygiene. In 1962, the new Wheeler Gate branch became Nottingham's first 'fully refrigerated' shop.[140] The new system maintained the store at a comfortable 65°F by automatically changing the air eight times an hour. This counteracted the 'locally created heat' generated by the store's mass of modern lighting and growing customer numbers. In the same year, Glasgow's new Union Street store also included air-conditioning systems intent upon keeping the 'atmosphere fresh, even at the busiest times'.[141] The systems were a means of creating temperate, ventilated spaces that dispelled any association with the drab, fusty environment of traditional pharmacy shops. Furthermore, they also helped to foster pleasurable retail spaces that were conducive to uninterrupted, affluent consumption. For example, the systems within Harlow's new branch guaranteed an 'equable temperature at all seasons', whilst also safeguarding customers from the 'effects of the strong winds' that blew across the shopping district.[142] The new systems of air-conditioning and ventilation therefore created comfortable buying environments that allowed customers

[139] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Shopfittings by Boots, No.5, Wall Fittings (Self-Selection), *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 176, August 26th 1966.
[140] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Cool Welcome", *The Bee,* Vol.33 No. 4, September 1962: 12.
[141] Article contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book. Taken from, "Spotlight on Scotland's Latest and Brightest Shopping Centre: £550,000 Space Age Store Opens in Glasgow", *Evening Citizen*, September 26th 1961: 5.
[142] WBA/BT/27/39/2/4- "Harlow", *The Mixture*: 8.

to shop without the distractions of external stimuli and to concentrate on the fulfilment of their own buying needs.

As well as conveying a strong sense of modernity, Boots' design choices also sought to encapsulate the growing design literacy of the post-war British public. Much of the public's consciousness for interior design stemmed from the 1951 Festival of Britain that took place on London's South Bank. Serving as both a celebration of the nation's victory in World War Two and a declaration of its future facing capabilities, the event promoted a strongly modernist agenda in the fields of art, industrial design and architecture. The Festival offered the government-funded Council of Industrial Design (COID) an opportunity to influence the event's aesthetic and to convey its message concerning the democratisation of design principles amongst a wider section of the British public.[143] As well as describing the COID as arbiters of middle-class taste, Becky Conekin argued that the group were entrusted to oversee the large-scale transformation of the British public's appreciation for the concept of 'good', tasteful forms of modernist design. [144] For Richard Hornsey, this notion of good design was encapsulated within the COID's advocacy of both clean and functional interior styles and its rejection of traditional forms of Victorian opulence and excess.[145]

In 1955, architectural authors Bryan and Norman Westwood claimed the design aesthetic originating from the 'South Bank Exhibition' was producing a

[143] Adrian Forty, "Festival Politics," in *A Tonic to the Nation: The Festival of Britain 1951*, ed. Mary Banham and Bevis Hillier (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 37.
[144] Becky E. Conekin, *'The Autobiography of a Nation': The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 49.
[145] Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect : Unruly Life in Postwar London* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 211-16.

'clear' and 'strong' effect over contemporary retail spaces.[146] Whilst noting an increase in the 'range of materials used' by retail designers, the Westwoods also acknowledged that colour was an increasingly important part of the modern shop aesthetic. They also claimed that 'lighting, wall surfaces and fixtures and fittings' all showed evidence 'of the exhibition designer's flair for attracting attention'.[147] The parallels between Boots' own post-war design decisions were therefore clear, with the company's retail spaces standing at the vanguard of projecting and sustaining new conceptualisations of taste and refinement. In his 1964 annual statement, chairman W.R. Norman stressed how the company's newly modernised stores were awash with 'gayer colours'.[148] On one level, Norman's emphasis sought to underline that Boots' stores were modern, fun places within which to shop and express one's affluence. Yet, on a deeper level, his comments demonstrated that designers were attuned to contemporary understandings of colour and interior decoration and the ways in which these features could project distinctly middle-class ideas of quality and style.

Made available for the first time during the 1950s, paint colour ranges including the 'Archrome' and the 'British Standard Colours for Buildings and Decorative Paints', greatly expanded the colour options available to British designers and architects.[149] Their use within interior design benefitted from adjacent studies in colour psychology, which increasingly emphasised the

[146] Bryan Westwood and Norman Westwood, *The Modern Shop* (London: The Architectural Press, 1955), 3.
[147] Ibid.
[148] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "The Chairman's Report to Shareholders", *The Bee*, Vol.35 No.3, August 1964, 7.
[149] Department of Education and Science, *Colour in School Buildings*, 4th ed., Building Bulletin No.9 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969), 5.

importance of harmonising such shades within a cohesive internal scheme. In a booklet discussing school building colour schemes, the Department of Education and Science suggested contemporary coloured paint did 'much more' than simply cover a wall, arguing it also made a 'direct and positive contribution' to both the design of a building and the behaviour and mood of its occupants.[150] The same booklet proposed a 'systematic approach' to the deployment of internal colour schemes, arguing they were not merely the 'final stage' of a building's construction, but an entire 'medium' through which ideas and concepts were communicated.[151]

Although architectural authors Ellis Somake and Rolf Hellberg recommended that chemists' adopt colour schemes that reflected their 'clean scientific approach', pure-white walls were considered too monochromatic to achieve the necessary schematic harmony.[152] While stores needed a neutral backdrop to emphasise the various, technicoloured product labels offered within a self-selection system, white rendered a stark appearance that lacked the sensitivities prescribed within the COID's forms of taste. As white also drew strong associations with clinical settings, its use was deemed inappropriate for a company seeking to indulge affluent modes of consumption.[153] The walls within Boots' Burnt Oak concept store were therefore decorated a 'pale yellow', with pastel colours becoming a regular, and heavily promoted feature, of the company's subsequent design

[150] Ibid., 4.
[151] Ibid., 6-7.
[152] Ellis E. Somake and Rolf Hellbery, *Shops and Stores Today; Their Design, Planning and Organisation* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1956), 79.
[153] See, Victoria Bates, "Cold White of Day: White, Colour, and Materiality in the Twentieth-Century British Hospital," *Twentieth Century British History* (2022).

schemes.[154] In 1961, Kettering's new store featured 'modern pastel shades', while Basildon's new branch contained 'pastel shades' on the walls and ceiling panels that appeared blue when viewed from one direction and 'daffodil yellow' from the other.[155] In contrast to white walls, pastels offered an expansive colour remit that helped to bind the interior scheme in various, subtle ways. Instead of deploying pastels as a unitary, block colour, Boots designers used their relational qualities to cultivate a more comfortable and relaxing retail space. For example, in 1961, the Willesden Green branch achieved a modernised, brighter atmosphere with '*different* pastel-shaded emulsion paints'.[156] Likewise, Glasgow's new shop achieved 'a gay light décor' through the use of '*alternating* pastel shades', while Bradford's new branch attained a 'pleasant shopping atmosphere' by using '*various* pastel shades'.[157]

Using pastels in this manner also sought to provide a more elevated and refined retail experience to that on offer within self-service supermarkets. This was demonstrated through the explicit parallels bosses drew between the new Bradford store and both the 'glitter' of New York's Fifth Avenue and the 'elegance' of the Champs Elysees.[158] Such descriptors illustrated that unlike the supermarket's hyper-modern, synthetic lustre, Boots stores had tastefully applied both the precepts of modern design and self-service

[154] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "An Experiment in Selling: Self-service shop opened at Burnt Oak, Edgware", *The Bee*, Vol.22 no.2, April 1951: 2.
[155] WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- "Boots Shop is Five Times Bigger"; WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Basildon New Town", *The Bee*: 39.
[156] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Brightening up the Branch", *Sales & Selling,* No. 31, February 1960: 11. (my emphasis)
[157] Article contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book. Taken from, "Big New Glasgow Store Opens. Largest 'Boots' in Britain", *Evening Times*, September 26th 1961, 8; WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- "Boots Store is Tenth Biggest". (my emphasis)
[158] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "New Bradford Branch is our 'Tenth Biggest'", *The Bee*, Vol.32 No. 3, September 1961: 11.

methodologies, in ways that appealed to middle-class desires for a more luxurious retail experience. Furthermore, by aligning this sense of luxury with the prestigious character and sensibilities of the pharmacy profession, Boots stores were able to sustain their own tradition of providing appropriate destinations for the middle class to frequent and be seen within.

While Boots' retail modernisation programme employed various architectural and interior design strategies to avoid the homogenised feel of self-service supermarkets, its thoughtful use of colour helped maintain a refined character by establishing a distinctive and cohesive corporate identity. This was articulated most clearly through the introduction of the new blue fascia, which from the early 1960s began to replace the red branding that had been in place since the beginning of the twentieth-century. Replacing a dark, heavy red colour with a cooler, crisper and more hygienic blue encapsulated the company's movement towards the modern. One 1960s self-service guide reflected contemporary trends in colour psychology by stating red was an 'advancing' colour that could exaggerate a store's lack of depth and create a 'crowded' atmosphere. It went on to claim that it was 'of little use' enticing customers with eye-catching red's if they made store's look more congested than the 'quieter-hued rival down the street'.[159] Therefore, as well as accentuating the sense of openness longed for as part of Boots' wider design programme, the switch to a new Persian blue façade reflected the calm, sophisticated ideologies underpinning its model of self-selection. Furthermore, in justifying the colour change, executives claimed they were attempting to cultivate a 'national image', which signified to customers the

[159] Tickopres Ltd, *Thinking of Self-Service? Here's a Guide to Success* (London: Tickopres Ltd, 1959), 18.

'quality and value…and service' that awaited them within all of the company's stores.[160] Therefore, as well as providing a powerful sense of coherency to Boots' modernisation programme, this new style of blue colouration also helped to uphold the notions of excellence and good taste embedded within the company's wider design scheme.

Merchandise

As chapter one demonstrated, the 1959 American research visit enabled bosses to understand the importance of appropriate merchandising and the vital role it could play in regulating the higher-class standing and character of Boots stores.[161] Although bosses acknowledged that the public could now commit more expenditure to consumer durables, this did not simplistically translate into a willingness to provide more goods for sale. Managers recognised that doing so would potentially diminish the firm's reputation, by undermining its ability to provide the middle class with esteemed and tasteful modes of consumption. The company's offer of 'More to Buy' and its relationship with the broader ideas of Britain's post-war affluent economy was therefore always heavily controlled.

The company's late nineteenth-century expansion had partly relied on the manufacture of its own pharmacological and chemist products. The capacity to sell these 'own-goods' at a reduced cost saw the company's earliest branches become synonymous with notions of quality and good customer

[160] WBA/BT/29/31/1/1- "The Greatest Year Ever for the Modernisation and Expansion of Boots Retail Shops", April 1965- March 1966: 1.
[161] WBA/BT/12/17/1/11- "Report on a visit to the United States of America and Canada: 10th September- 27th October 1959": Mr. F.A. Cockfield and Party, 21.

value.[162] These traditions were expanded during the inter-war period, with the 1935 release of premium cosmetic brand Number Seven, a prominent example of how the company increasingly geared its own-goods to middle-class markets and tastes.[163] The company's range of own-goods became even broader during the post-war period, as bosses sought to cater for the needs of rising affluence through the provision of more 'elegant' and 'luxuriously' packaged goods.[164] Examples including, 'Freece' toothpaste, 'Tussil' cough lozenges and 'Sweetex' concentrated sweeteners were introduced during the late 1950s and early 60s, with bosses hoping to use their 'first class' branding and merchandising to further the company's reputation for quality and affordability.[165]

During the first fifteen years of the post-war era, all British retailers sold their merchandise under the government mandated system of Resale Price Maintenance (RPM). This system constrained price competition by requiring retailers not to sell a supplier's product below a specified price.[166] From the early 1960s, the bigger grocery chains lobbied hard for the scheme's abolition, arguing it inhibited the customer's sense of choice by keeping prices at an unnaturally high-level.[167] Although the abolition of RPM reduced the gross profit margin on a number of goods, the larger grocery chains sought to compensate for these losses by utilising the economies of scale associated with self-service techniques. Customers were therefore enticed

[162] Chapman, *Jesse Boot*, 40-41.
[163] Hornsey, "Modern Way to Loveliness."
[164] WBA/BT/28/40/4/5- *Building for the Future,* 10-11.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Helen Mercer, "Retailer-Supplier Relationships before and after the Resale Prices Act, 1964: A Turning Point in British Economic History?," *Enterprise & Society* 15, no. 1 (2014).
[167] Morrison, *English Shops*, 284.

into stores with the offer of heavily discounted, 'loss-leading' goods that were designed specifically to increase the retailer's rate of turnover.

The implementation of self-selection, coupled with the smaller size of Boots stores, ensured the company lacked the ability to cut-prices to the same extent as the supermarket. [168] This imperilled the company's motto of 'Boots for value'— in place since the early 1940s— as most shoppers could now purchase branded goods like toothpaste and shampoo from supermarkets at a slightly cheaper price.[169] Boots executives therefore supported RPM's retention, with chairman W.R. Norman using his 1962 Annual Address to argue that the solid profit margins facilitated by the scheme were vital in maintaining the high 'standards of training and service' demanded by the pharmacy profession.[170] Nonetheless, as Norman foresaw the political headwinds of RPM's removal, he also used his speech to outline how the company was planning to safeguard both its profits and high-standards. He argued this could be achieved by further extending the range of own goods sold within its self-selection stores, with the company's control over the manufacturing and price-setting of goods both compensating for the loss of profits wrought by RPM's removal while also allowing the business to 'faithfully maintain' its policy of 'Boots for value and service'.[171]

The eventual abolition of RPM in 1964 led the company to adopt a more concertedly comparative approach to merchandising, with the most popular branded goods retained for sale alongside a Boots' own-goods equivalent. This new strategy was emphasised within the era's new store press

[168] Stobart, *Spend!*, 212.
[169] Kerridge, "Reconceptualising Organizational Identity," 182.
[170] WBA/BT/3/1/48- Reports and Account 1962.
[171] Ibid.

advertisements, which claimed, 'You'll be amazed at the high quality and low cost of Boots products. And, of course, you can buy the well-known proprietary brands too'.[172] Maintaining the sale of popular proprietary lines was vital to the company's ongoing projections of prestige and respectability, as it demonstrated that customers could continue to service their established health and wellbeing needs within the traditional framework of Boots' advice-based retail culture. Branded items therefore continued to be sold in high-quantities, to both anticipate and reflect the increasing demands wrought by rising consumer spending power. Furthermore, as bosses understood the logics of self-service would significantly increase the turnover of such items, employees were told to allocate them within a quantity of shelving space that was proportionate to the volume of their pre-existing sales.[173]

At the same time as maintaining a heavy promotion on the most popular and forcibly advertised lines, Boots stores also underwent a parallel policy of ruthlessly culling the slowest selling branded lines from their inventory. For example, in 1963, Burton-Upon-Trent's branch manager reported positively that 35% of his takings had come from just 60 lines of merchandise. [174] He claimed that stock yielding less than £1 a year had been gradually 'relegated' to the drawers at the boundaries of the self-selection system, with these 'tail enders' and 'dead' lines subject to an on-going process of rationalisation that would eventually see many entirely removed from sale. The *Merchandise News* lauded these efforts, claiming it indicated the need for all branches to

[172] For example see WBA/BT/11/45/1/24- Advertising Guard Book, *Belfast Telegraph,* March 2nd 1966
[173] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 12.
[174] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "He Decided to SELL…MORE!"*, Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 18, May 10th 1963: 8.

undertake similar 'inventory restrictions' in the near future.[175] These messages were reinforced within later editions, such as the 1964 suggestion that there was 'nothing to lose from removing slow selling lines from prominent display' and the 1965 encouragement for staff to 'go on selling more and more of less and less'.[176] Boots' offer of 'More to buy' consequently did not mean selling more of everything, with this consolidated approach solidifying the popularity of certain branded goods and creating a paradox whereby customer choice was limited towards a narrow range of products that were increasingly predetermined by the popular buying patterns of fellow Boots customers.

The rationalisation of stock ensured the customer's sense of value-for-money and cost-effectiveness became increasingly concentrated within the company's range of own-goods. As the notion of value-for-money, rather than simply low-cost, was central to the model of post-war consumerism promoted by the CA, Boots bosses insisted their own-goods did not sacrifice their traditional sense of quality.[177] While they were meant to be affordable, bosses contended that their own goods needed to be 'at least as attractively presented…well publicised…and forcefully merchandised' as their branded competitors. [178] This approach was demonstrated with Freece toothpastes, which as well as being colourfully packaged, also used a high standard of

[175] Ibid.
[176] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "A Bold Approach to Merchandising", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 62, April 10th 1964: 8; WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Cue…For Your Toilet Department", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 98, January 15th 1965: 1.
[177] Black, *Redefining British Politics*, 33.
[178] WBA/BT/28/40/4/5- *Building for the Future,* 10.

branding to display its product name more prominently than the smaller, adjacent Boots logo.[179]

Avoiding the product's direct recognition as a Boots own-brand sought to minimise associations with inferiority, and demonstrated how company executives were delicately handling the concept of customer affordability through both the item's branding and unit cost. Rival retailer Woolworth's adopted a contrasting approach, with a large number of own-goods collated under the single 'Winfield' brand name. This policy served to segregate the notion of low-cost discounting from the rest of Woolworth's retail experience and, according to Paul Seaton and Kathryn Morrison, was pivotal in the brand's incapacity to accrue notions of quality. [180] Furthermore, the American trips had made bosses acutely aware how low standards in own-goods risked deteriorating the character of pharmacies, by making them feel like tawdry, 'cheapjack' discount houses.[181] As such, the company's focus on high quality branding sought to position own-goods as an integrated aspect of the Boots retail experience and a cost-effective alternative, rather than a compromise to, the leading proprietary lines.

After the repeal of RPM, the advisory element retained within the company's model of self-selection was increasingly channelled towards emphasising the qualities and exclusivity of Boots own-goods. Assistants were expected to always refer to own-goods by their brand name and to discuss such products

[179] For example of packaging see, WBA/BT/11/42/5/4/12- Example Freece boxes, c.1950s.
[180] Paul Seaton, *A Sixpenny Romance: Celebrating a Century of Value at Woolworths* (London: 3D and 6D Pictures Limited, 2009), 109. Morrison, *Woolworth's*, 154.
[181] WBA/BT/12/17/1/13- "Visit to United States of America", 37.

with ‘pride and confidence’ when advising customers.[182] They were also told to help customers cultivate a confidence in own-good products that mimicked their relationship with the popular proprietary brands. As own-goods were only available within Boots stores and were conceptualised as discrete, standalone brands, executives hoped that the faith customers showed in these products would also be transferred to the customer’s wider impressions of Boots as a business. Assistants therefore received instructions about how to prioritise the recommendation of own-goods, with one document explaining that if shoppers asked for ‘Brand X toothpaste we willingly serve him with Brand X…But when he just asks for toothpaste we offer him one of our own brands’.[183]

In order to emphasise their product’s sense of integration, company bosses ensured own-goods were positioned within the store’s most visible, and hence most profitable, display spaces. This saw own-goods placed alongside their main branded equivalents within self-selection shelving, rather than being isolated in their own discrete areas of the store. The policy was designed to enable customers to appreciate the value and quality of the company’s own-goods, by offering them an immediate and direct contrast with the popular alternative brand. [184] Being able to handle and study goods as part of the self-selection process aided this system of comparison, with bosses confident that the visible qualities of own-goods would encourage customers to recognise they were achieving value-for-money, rather than simply selecting the cheapest available product.

[182]WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- “Give Own Goods Top Priority”, *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 36, September 13th 1963: 1.
[183] WBA/BT/27/39/3/1- *About Boots,* 1970: 7.
[184] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- “Self-Selection Sells”, 12.

Although it was an illustrative training example, Image 2.8 demonstrates how Boots bosses envisaged their integrated merchandising approach functioning in practical terms. Representing a typical run of toiletry department self-selection shelving, it shows the priorities bosses afforded to the sale and promotion of own-goods. The overlaps in branding between Freece and the popular brands like Colgate or Signal is clearly visible and illustrates the ways in which the customer's sense of choice was not diminished or compromised by the availability of own-goods. The product's status and quality was also communicated through its massed, eye-level positioning at the centre of the toothpaste grouping. This not only sought to drive sales by attracting the most amount of customer attention, but also heightened the sense of convenience associated with own-goods, by making them easier to retrieve from the shelves. The offer of a free Boots toothbrush with every purchase of Freece also demonstrated how offers and promotions were reserved for the company's own-goods. Such offers were cleverly targeted towards the sensibilities and tastes of middle-class consumers, because, as well as accentuating the product's sense of value-for-money, it served to illustrate that deals were proportionate and beneficial to the needs of the consumer, rather than being solely concerned with crass notions of low-cost and cheapness. These offers had the added effect of building the customer's trust and familiarity with a wider range of Boots own-good products, which helped to encourage shoppers to return to the company's stores for the continued support of their everyday health and wellbeing needs.



Image 2.8: The recommended display of own-good toiletry items with self-selection shelving. (Taken from WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- 'Special Offers in Self-Selection', *Merchandise News* (no.1), Supplement to Issue 49, January 3rd 1964: 2.

The sense of value was supported by a further own-goods promotion known as the Triple Sales Discount. Introduced in parallel with the repeal of RPM and running until around 1965, this promotion gave customers a 1d discount in every shilling, when purchasing own-goods in quantities of three. [185] While the promotion encouraged bulk buying and supported the modernised imperative of increased stock turnover, it was nevertheless designed to appeal to a more prudent form of middle-class purchasing. As the discount was only applied via the sequencing of customer selection, it offered shoppers a sense of empowerment that they were making their own judicious, cost-effective product choices rather than simply being presented with the ubiquitous forms of cost cutting associated with the supermarket. The promotion therefore focused upon the sense of convenience it offered

[185] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1-"Now is the Time to Mass Display and Talk About T.S.D", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 20, May 24th 1963: 8.

customers, with one showcard playing down its low-cost associations by highlighting how utilising its discounts saved shoppers time—rather than money—by not having to make an additional, unnecessary journey to Boots stores.[186]

Conclusion

On March 2nd 1975, Boots opened a brand new store within Britain's first regional shopping centre at Brent Cross in north London. Described as 'magnificent' and 'very special' by the company's bosses, the new store sought to emulate the centre's luxurious design and its wider sense of 'opulence and grandeur'.[187] Although operating within an out-out-town shopping centre represented a novel venture for the company, the new shop relied upon many of the design features introduced during its earlier programme of retail modernisation. For example, the store contained a varied colour scheme of 'mid-brown, cream and royal blue'; its lighting was soft to accentuate the 'depth and quality' of merchandise; its 24,000 sq. ft. of sales space featured an 'exceptionally wide' glass frontage; while the 'standardised' height of its self-selection gondolas offered the interior space a simplistic, orderly feel.[188] By claiming these features had afforded the branch a 'distinctly up-market' and refined feel that was akin to London's fashionable West End, bosses highlighted their continued ability to provide modern retail experiences that retained a conspicuously middle-class outlook and appeal.

[186] Ibid.
[187] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5-"Spotlight on Brent Cross…The Shopping Centre with a West End Image", *Boots News*, April 14th 1976: 3.
[188] Ibid.

This chapter has explored how Boots designers responded to rising affluence and the growth of mass consumerism to forge new types of retail experiences for their customers. The company's post-war stores were altered in significant ways, with the provision of larger branches that allowed customers to browse independently amongst an expanded range of domestic durables, aiming to fulfil the public's increased levels of spending power. The newly designed stores also answered the customer's expectation of quicker and more convenient forms of shopping, with the expansion of self-selection methods not only according with the patterns of modern, time-pressured working life but also reflecting wider consumerist trends for more individualised, judicious forms of choice-based buying. The chapter has therefore provided an important new perspective on the ways in which particular consumerist notions associated with the affluent era, such as rationality and individualism, were actualised within Boots' post-war retail spaces.

Nevertheless, despite responding to modern economic and social circumstances, the company's post-war retail experience was purposely governed by a different set of imperatives and logics to those on offer within full-scale self-service operations like the supermarket. These concerned the creation of less overtly pressurised sales environments that continued to uphold the company's traditional pharmacy remit by placing the customer's needs for personalised service, care and support at the heart of the retail experience. Branch designs and layouts were therefore heavily informed by more socially esteemed notions including orderliness, comfort, tastefulness, value and quality, which aided the moderation of the store's modernity in line

with the desired character and values of the retail-pharmacy profession. Examples of this tempered approach included how the ‘own-brand’ version of self-selection overlooked notions of complete customer independence, with the retention of staff advice within both the self-selection and counter experience symbolising how executives had uniquely extended the concept of choice to cover the entire way in which customers chose to shop. Furthermore, by avoiding the crasser elements of modern self-service retailing like hurried impulse buying and cheap, cut-priced forms of merchandising, Boots stores offered reassurances to middle-class consumers that its model of self-selection represented a mode of shopping that was both more refined and tailored to their individual tastes and sensibilities.

The concepts of middle-class refinement and the provision of personalised health and wellbeing service therefore mutually reinforced each other to uphold the entire system of ‘own-brand’ self-selection underpinning the company’s programme of retail modernisation. Such a distinctive deployment of self-service techniques demanded that bosses looked beyond the largely archetypal conceptualisations of the affluent consumer, to accommodate the needs and experiences of their own, long-standing customers. Therefore, even in an age that appeared to be dominated by the standardising imperatives of self-service methods and the ‘figure’ of the affluent consumer, Boots stores managed to diversify the everyday shopping experiences of affluent Britons through their tempered facilitation of both modern and

traditional retail methodologies.[189] As well as underlining the flexible nature of self-service techniques, the chapter has also contributed to historiographical understandings for the ways in which major British retailers selectively applied contemporary conceptualisations of affluence and mass consumerism. The next chapter explores the company's moderated balance between the traditional and the modern in more depth. Utilising the case study of teenage own-brand cosmetic product, Seventeen, it investigates how Boots accommodated the buying habits of this newly enfranchised group of affluent consumers, in ways that echoed the tasteful, orderly and quality focused nature of its self-selection stores.

[189] Peter Gurney, "The Battle of the Consumer in Postwar Britain," *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 4 (2005): 959.

Chapter Three- 'The Seventeen Story': Selling Own-Brand Cosmetics to the Affluent Teenager in the Age of Self-Selection c.1960-1972.

On November 16th 1967, Boots' Merchandising Committee received a report on Britain's burgeoning teenage cosmetic market.[1] It noted that while girls aged between 12 and 19 represented 16% of the adult female population, they purchased around a quarter of all U.K. cosmetics. Furthermore, this group bought 'over 40% of all eye products', making this line of merchandise the 'fastest growing' sector within Britain's entire cosmetic market. Led by brands including Miners, Outdoor Girl, Mary Quant, Rimmel and Woolworth's-own Baby Doll, the teenage market was growing at around 14% per annum, which amounted to around 'twice the rate' as that witnessed for other cosmetic products.[2] However, despite the company's existing share of adult cosmetic business and its claims to being 'specialists' in the field, the report noted that Boots stores were currently 'taking very little' out of this growing market.[3] The report therefore recommended an 'Own Goods Brand' of teenage cosmetic as the principle means of capturing this market and attracting affluent teenagers into Boots shops.

In July 1968, Boots unveiled 'Seventeen', an own-goods cosmetic range targeted at teenage girls aged between 12 and 19.[4] Due to the teen-girl's affinity with eye cosmetics, the range was launched with a 'comprehensive'

[1] See, WBA/BT/9/22/3/2/32- 17 Lipsticks (various), "Teenage Cosmetic Range Report, November 16th 1967": 1.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] WBA/BT/11/38/1/12-"The 17 Story", *Sales Talk*, No. 2, April 12th 1972: 10.

offer of 'twelve different products for the eyes'.[5] It also included lipsticks, nail polish and false eyelashes. Rather than covering Seventeen's launch within the mainstream adult press, Boots executives chose to promote their range within teen-only magazines like *Jackie*, *Go Girl*, *Honey* and *Petticoat.* These age-specific publications were 'specially chosen' to endorse the new range, with a series of 'all colour' whole, double and triple-page advertisements appearing between August and November 1968.[6] On the eve of the product's launch, a report was sent to the Merchandising Committee, which reminded staff that the affluent teenage cosmetic market continued to hold 'tremendous' and 'substantial' opportunities for the company.[7]

Part of the previous chapter illustrated how own-goods were an important part of the company's post-war identity and customer appeal. Using the case study of Seventeen, the following chapter examines this process in greater detail, exploring how middle-class values embedded in the company's broader design philosophy—such as tastefulness, value, and orderliness—were also reflected in the promotion and sale of the own-branded product. It foregrounds the role retail experiences played in refining Seventeen's appeal, with particular focus paid to the ways in which the own-brand assimilated with self-selection techniques to project certain cultural and bodily expectations upon its buyers. In doing so, it confronts the question of how Boots were able to attract this new type of affluent shopper, whilst deploying a sales system that deliberately upheld aspects of traditional service-based retail culture. Ultimately, the chapter reveals that in much the

[5] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6- "Colour Me Cash; Colour me Seventeen" launch information booklet, June 1968: 5.
[6] See, WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- 17 cosmetics: part 2 of 2, "Seventeen Cosmetics: a run down": 4.
[7] Ibid., 1.

same way as the company's moderated self-selection system, the Seventeen product range carefully blended elements of the traditional with aspects of the modern.

Although scholars recognise both shopping and make-up application as crucial elements in how British girls formulated and expressed their identities as modern, affluent teenagers, there are currently no studies on how teenagers shopped for cosmetics.[8] The 1959 research of British sociologist Mark Abrams was one of the first studies to both conceptualise and quantify the enhanced spending power of post-war teenage girls. [9] Noting the teenager's social, rather than domestic patterns of expenditure, Abrams claimed adolescents spent the majority of their disposable incomes on popular music, cinema admissions and 'dressing up…to impress other teenagers'.[10] Perhaps in response to these claims, analysis of teenage shopping experiences has focused upon fashion and clothing, with the majority of studies concentrating upon the fashionable boutiques of 'Swinging' 1960s London and the role they played in formulating novel youth cultures. [11] Despite this analytical attention, fashionable boutiques like Biba were never the archetypal youth retail experience, with Bethan Bide arguing that their 'outsized cultural legacy' fails to reflect the fact they were 'short-

[8] Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Abacus 2006), 238.
[9] Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, 5-7.
[10] Ibid., 10.
[11] Pamela Cox and Annabel Hobley, *Shopgirls: True Stories of Friendship, Hardship and Triumph from Behind the Counter* (London: Arrow Books, 2015), 202-32; Felix Fuhg, *London's Working-Class Youth and the Making of Post-Victorian Britain*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Subcultures and Popular Music (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 245-88; David Gilbert, "'The Youngest Legend in History': Cultures of Consumption and the Mythologies of Swinging London," *The London Journal* 31, no. 1 (2006); Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counterculture* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 69-86.

lived, small-scale and geographically limited' in nature.[12] The majority of post-war teenage shopping experiences were therefore cultivated away from these fashionable emporiums, in shops offering a more humble and quotidian retail culture. Although Bide has separately explored how the 'Junior Miss' department within early post-war Bentalls stores cultivated fashionable teenage buying habits, there remains limited understanding of the ways in which the everyday shopping habits of teenage girls were also shaped by established high-street retailers.[13]

The omission of cosmetics from teenage retail histories is surprising given Abrams' acknowledgement that spending on these products was 'heavy and widespread' amongst post-war teenage girls.[14] Furthermore, Angela McRobbie's analysis of *Jackie* magazine has argued that cosmetics and beauty formed a central strand of the publication's offer, with readers given regular messages, tips and routines regarding the achievement of contemporary modish looks.[15] While McRobbie demonstrated the importance of cosmetics to the formulation of contemporary girlhood, the obverse of her study, namely how the promotion and retail experiences associated with these cosmetic products also shaped post-war teenage culture, remains underexplored by scholars. The chapter therefore connects two distinct strands within the literature to demonstrate that Boots moulded the cosmetic habits of teenage girls through Seventeen's distinctive in-store retail offer.

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[12] Bethan Bide, "Be My Baby: Sensory Difference and Youth Identity in British Fashion Retail, 1945–1970," in *Shopping and the Senses, 1800-1970: A Sensory History of Retail and Consumption*, ed. Serena Dyer (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 208.
[13] "The Fashion City and the Suburb: How Bentalls of Kingston Upon Thames Helped Rebuild Cultures of Fashionable Consumption in London after the Second World War."
[14] Abrams, *Teenage Consumer*, 11.
[15] Angela McRobbie, *Jackie: An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity* (University of Birmingham, 1978), 38-42.

The post-war era's popular teen-girl publications have received a significant amount of scholarly attention, with authors including McRobbie assessing how they formulated distinctive notions of girlhood through their promoted patterns of consumption and suggested life experiences. [16] According to Penny Tinkler, these publications anticipated and shaped the lifestyles of their readers by containing a 'dynamic idea of young womanhood' that emphasised 'independence, fun, experience and opportunity'.[17] Such characterisations have led some scholars to describe the heightened affluence and consumption of post-war teenagers as emblematic of social democratisation and progress. For example, Bill Osgerby described how certain social commentators embraced post-war adolescents as the 'embodiment of a classless society', while Selina Todd and Hilary Young noted the large sections of post-war society who regarded the teenager as a 'symbol of meritocracy, affluence and classlessness'.[18]

While the following chapter argues for a synergy between the mood evoked through Seventeen products and that displayed within most contemporaneous teen-girl publications, the history of Boots' own-good cosmetic complicates claims for meritocratic, classless forms of youth

[16] For example, Fan Carter, "A Taste of *Honey:* Get-Ahead Femininity in 1960s Britain," in *Women in Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption*, ed. Rachel Ritchie, et al. (London: Routledge, 2016); Sarah Kenny, ""We Are No Longer Certain, Any of Us, What Is "Right" and What Is "Wrong": *Honey, Petticoat* and the Construction of Young Women's Sexuality in 1960s Britain," in *Let's Spend the Night Together: Sex, Pop Music and British Youth Culture, 1950s-80s*, ed. Matthew Worley, et al., The Subcultures Network (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023); Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (London: Rivers Oram, 1987).
[17] Penny Tinkler, "'Are You Really Living?' If Not, 'Get with It!': The Teenage Self and Lifestyle in Young Women's Magazines, Britain 1957-70," *Cultural and Social History* 11, no. 4 (2014): 597-98.
[18] Bill Osgerby, "'Well, It's Saturday Night an' I Just Got Paid': Youth, Consumerism and Hegemony in Post-War Britain," *Contemporary British History* 6, no. 2 (1992): 296. Selina Todd and Hilary Young, "Baby-Boomers to 'Beanstalkers': Making the Modern Teenager in Post-War Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 9, no. 3 (2012): 456. See also, Felix Fuhg, "Did Britain Rule the World Again? The International Fashion Market and the Continental Look in 1960s London," *Contemporary British History* 35, no. 3 (2021): 366.

consumption. Instead, this case study shows how Seventeen was a heavily class-coded product that sought to both project and protect Boots' middle-class values. In ways that mirrored their self-selection system, Boots executives used the Seventeen range to control the shopping habits of teen-girls and formulate a particular type of young female consumer that was heavily reliant upon mainstream values and practices. As Seventeen was positioned in opposition to certain aspects of contemporary youth culture, and in particular the crasser forms of make-up application perceived to be undertaken by working-class girls, the product intended to reaffirm the pre-existing, middle-class traits upon which Boots shops had always relied.

Focused upon the first four years of Seventeen's sale (1968-72), the chapter is divided into three thematic sections. Section one explores how Boots sold cosmetics to young women prior to Seventeen's launch. It argues that despite acknowledging the heightened spending power of young women, Boots stores failed to attract significant teenage custom. Misunderstanding the teen-girl's cosmetic needs caused disquiet among the executive team, particularly after Woolworth's launched its own-brand teen cosmetic, Baby Doll, in August 1967. Section two therefore describes the traits of the Seventeen brand, and the ways in which the product sought to reverse the company's fortunes with the teenage shopper. It argues that as Seventeen was sold via a partial implementation of self-selection techniques, its success relied not on the thorough reorganisation of the company's established retail offer, but rather its formulation as a product with a distinctly mainstream, respectable appeal. Section three addresses how the Seventeen range succeeded in being relevant and contemporary, whilst continuing to be sold

within a tempered, service-based retail environment. As well as demonstrating how the product selected from a variety of extant youth cultures, the section acknowledges Seventeen's contradictions, viewing it both as a tool for potential teenage agency and as a mechanism for applying class-coded control over adolescent girls. In doing so, it further underlines the company's flexible application of self-service techniques, with managers astutely managing the system's rollout to ensure it was compatible with both the needs of its new teenage customers and the wider ambitions and identity of the business.

The final section explores three aspects of Seventeen's sale; firstly, how it encouraged experimentation; secondly, how it facilitated a collective buying experience and thirdly, how it delivered advice to its young users. Each subsection emphasises how Seventeen captured elements of contemporary youth culture, whilst also recalibrating them for a Boots audience. Embracing Seventeen's contradictory nature therefore allows the chapter to challenge feminist analyses of the beauty industry, which have viewed its products as either a symbol of patriarchal oppression or, conversely, as a celebrated form of female self-expression.[19] Although it was a complex cosmetic product, shopping for Seventeen and the experience of using it amongst friends was an important part of how young girls understood themselves and others. The chapter therefore diversifies current understandings of who this young female consumer—conceptualised by Abrams and the teen magazines—

[19] For examples of these opposing perspectives see, Linda Scott, *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005); Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990).

actually was, whilst also elucidating the ways high-street retailers targeted her newfound wealth.

Selling Cosmetics prior to 1968

Boots' awareness of, and engagement with, teenage girls did not begin in 1968, as young, unmarried women bought and used cosmetics well in advance of the 1960s influx of teen-only brands.[20] Ventures initiated during the early post-war era made it clear that Boots were attuned to these established markets and growing adolescent spending power. In May 1950, senior staff held a conference in Gleneagles, Scotland that sought to determine the company's early post-war retail strategy (also see chapter one). A speech given by Territorial General Manager, Mr J. H. Hurley foretold the developments the company might face in its toiletry business. Hurley noted that spending within this department was 'increasingly in the hands of young girls', who had grown up to regard the use of toiletries as 'an essential to life'.[21] Conceptualising the young teenage consumer as those in employment and aged between 15 and 21, Hurley claimed 'work and office girls' were 'extravagant users' of personal adornment products and were capable of spending 'fairly large sums' on themselves every week.[22]

While it created a sense of opportunity, the teen-girl's heightened spending power also generated significant levels of anxiety amongst the company's senior employees. Hurley stressed that since the 1930s, competition from

[20] Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women* (London: Zed, 2013), 105-07; Selina Todd, "Young Women, Work and Leisure in Interwar England," *The Historical Journal* 48, no. 3 (2005).
[21] WBA/BT/5/34/3/1- "Territorial General Managers' Conference at Gleneagles, May 15th-19th 1950": 5.
[22] Ibid., 6.

Woolworth's, the Co-operative and other ''walk-round' stores' had 'increased very considerably'.[23] Hurley's reference to 'walk-round' stores did not, in this context, equate to full self-service methodologies, but rather the facilitation of unimpeded browsing created by Woolworth's large opened-end counters, topped with troughs of easily accessible goods. [24] Hurley's comments demonstrated that Boots' managers were closely assessing the potential interrelationship between the newly affluent teen and newly initiated forms of modernised shopping. Consequently, he emphasised that the nearly 360,000 girls leaving education each year to enter the workforce, 'should not be allowed to develop the 'walk-round' store habit,' as such routines would ultimately be 'difficult to break'.[25]

Hurley's speech offered important insights into how the company's early post-war executive conceptualised the young female cosmetic buyer. As well as being in paid employment rather than full-time education, the teenage customer was understood as a fledgling, unmarried adult, who was about to embark upon a life-long relationship with the conventional branded beauty products sold within Boots stores. These characterisations were evident within a 1960 *Sales & Selling* article entitled 'You've got to catch them young'.[26] Bringing attention to the significant number of teenage girls who left British schools every year, the article suggested that now these girls were earning money they were, 'quite prepared to spend it on improving their appearance'. Furthermore, the article encouraged toilet department

[23] Ibid., 5.
[24] Morrison, "The Great New Shopping Idea," 2. See also, *Woolworth's*, 109-10.
[25] WBA/BT/5/34/3/1- "Managers' Conference at Gleneagles": 6.
[26] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "You've Got to Catch them Young", *Sales & Selling,* No. 31, Feb 1960: 26-27.

employees to see 'every young teenager' as a potential 'Boots cosmetic customer for life'.[27]

The same article also illustrated the ways in which Boots' sales assistants sought to slowly immerse the young female consumer within the company's established modes of selling. Although the article emphasised that older staff were not expected to understand every aspect of the teenager's lifestyle, it was nevertheless made clear that employee skill and salesmanship had a crucial part to play in retaining adolescent custom. It suggested the young cosmetic buyer wanted someone to 'look up to' who would 'always listen and try to help her'.[28] This illustrated how executives expected all of these kinds of transactions to be generated via counter-service methods, with employees instructed to offer patient, sympathetic advice that avoided condescension. Such was the importance of the counter-service interaction that the article described the cosmetic sales assistant as the teenager's 'passport to the adult world of glamour'.[29]

As the majority of these teenagers were understood to be in paid employment, the quotidian structures of working life featured prominently in Boots' conceptualisations of the cosmetic buying process. A 1962 edition of *Sales & Selling* featured an article entitled 'Friday Lunch', which detailed the time of the week when 'teenagers from office and factory came flocking to Boots for their hair preparations and their cosmetics'.[30] Describing a scene in Scotland, the article claimed young workers 'spilled out' from the mills and

[27] Ibid., 26.
[28] Ibid., 27.
[29] Ibid.
[30] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Friday Lunch", *Sales & Selling*, Teenage Number, No. 42, July 1962: 6.

factories ‘clutching their pay packets’, ready to besiege their local beauty counters.[31] It also noted how the ‘rush around the counters’ was intensified when ‘office workers’ also entered the store. Determined to attain the latest styles, the article described how many of these young workers were attempting to replicate the glamorous looks featured within contemporary magazines, films and television advertisements.[32] The article therefore described a form of cosmetic consumption that strongly aligned with the rising affluence of post-war Britain.

During Hurley’s 1950 speech, he claimed teenage cosmetic spending was not homogenous and that, as such, Boots stores needed to allow girls to shop according to their ‘own price levels’ and individual budgets.[33] By the beginning of the 1960s, company executives believed they had responded to these needs by supplying a diverse range of merchandise that was able to sustain a teen-girl’s buying habits throughout a lifetime of shopping at Boots. This was reflected within the ‘Friday Lunch’ article, which suggested, ‘young girls congregated around cheaper lines’, while ‘sophisticated 18’s’ spent upwards of ‘10/- on a single item’.[34] As well as demonstrating that Boots stores had captured the assorted spending power of young women, the article underlined that executives considered the range of cosmetics then sold within stores to be diverse and appealing enough to satisfy the contemporary cosmetic tastes of teenage girls.

Linking cosmetic desire to patterns of employment reflected the view that adolescence was part of a continuous life cycle that connected childhood to

[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] WBA/BT/5/34/3/1- “Managers’ Conference at Gleneagles”: 6.
[34] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- “Friday Lunch”: 6.

adulthood and the world of marriage and a family. In both *Sales & Selling* articles, teenagers within full-time education, or at the cusp of employment, were excluded from any understanding of cosmetic aspiration or usage. This approach reflected traditional psychological conceptualisations of youth noted by Laura Tisdall, within which younger adults were subsumed into the category of childhood and were only assumed to progress into adulthood by commencing significant life-stage processes such as paid-employment and sexual relationships. [35] Such conceptualisations dismissed, on principle, anyone younger than sixteen and rejected, out-of-hand, the part school-aged interrelationships may have played in guiding a young woman's cosmetic purchasing decisions. Relatedly, such framings demonstrated that any notion of shopping being a fun teenage social activity had yet to be understood, or even considered, by Boots' senior team. The articles therefore contained a tacit admission that the early post-war years had failed to offer Boots' teenage customers anything particularly new.

This tendency was evidenced in two Number Seven promotions of the early 1960s. Although the company's attempts to attract younger customers extended beyond the Number Seven brand, the promotions nevertheless revealed Boots' tendency to couch its teenage appeal alongside the mores of its conventional 'adult' merchandise offer. A showcard carrying the strap-line 'Beauty for the Modern Miss' was distributed for in-store use in 1963 (Image 3.1). Its depiction of a glamourous model, with voluminous shaped hair, stencilled lipstick and neatly made-up eyes evoked the refined notions of beauty popular during the late 1950s, rather than the cutting-edged ideas of

[35] Laura Tisdall, "'What a Difference It Was to Be a Woman and Not a Teenager': Adolescent Girls' Conceptions of Adulthood in 1960s and 1970s Britain," *Gender & history* 34, no. 2 (2022): 500.

appearance drawn from contemporary youth culture.[36] While such depictions were in keeping with Number Seven's middle-class appeal, the showcard's suggestion it was suitable for the 'Modern Miss' and 'the young in heart and moderns' nonetheless sat somewhat awkwardly with its imagery.[37] Furthermore, by concentrating this reinvigorated youth appeal on the release of new colours and shades of lipstick—rather than eye make-up—the showcard demonstrated that its contemporary appeal remained overly reliant on traditional notions of beauty and appearance.



Image 3.1: Example of Number Seven showcard, Taken from, *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 22, June 7th 1963: 1.

An additional 1965 showcard also played upon Number Seven's supposedly youthful appeal. Intended for Number Seven's service counters, the card suggested the cosmetic was a 'must for moderns', due to its capacity to

[36] Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (London: Zed, 2011), 81-89.
[37] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1-*Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 22, June 7th 1963: 1.

encapsulate the 'new IN-mood of fashion'.[38] While it was possible that some affluent young women were purchasing Number Seven and welcomed its sophisticated feel, the product's appeal to tradition ensured it was never as reflective of contemporary tastes as it liked to claim. For the young female consumer about to embark upon her life-long journey with adult beauty cultures, there was therefore a distinct incongruity between what Number Seven was attempting to sell and what the majority of her age-group considered cool and interesting to buy.

A sense of nervousness about whether Boots stores were adequately catering for teenage desires was perceptible from as early as 1962, when the staff magazine *Sales &Selling* ran a competition to determine what the young teen consumer actually wanted from their cosmetic buying experience. The magazine asked its young readers, 'do teenagers, yes you, shop at Boots for make-up and all that jazz?'.[39] As well as questioning whether the company stocked the lines teenagers used, it also asked, 'How can we try to keep up to date with the newest and latest?'.[40] The competition was won by a rather twee poem submitted by two female sales assistants from the company's Barrow-in-Furness branch. The poem contained a number of recommendations on how Boots could provide teens with a more relevant shopping experience. For example, one line suggested removing older cosmetic assistants and replacing them with fashionable teenage employees. It said, 'so leaving youth to take the floor; our greying heads we

[38] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 126, August 6th 1965: 1.
[39] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Help!", *Sales & Selling*, Teenage Number, No. 42, July 1962: 39.
[40] Ibid.

would withdraw'. In addition, the first of seven verses included the suggestion:

…A teenage 'make-up bar' we feel
Would have a very wide appeal
To bright young things who cross our door
The world of make-up to explore
A youthful figure near at hand
Whose language they will understand
Who knows the uses of her stock
Who doesn't gasp in sudden shock.[41]

As well as expressing a tension between traditional and contemporary retail methods, the poem implied that Boots executives had been largely misinformed when attempting to subsume teenage cosmetic desires within the structures of adult, working life. It also demonstrated that many of the firm's younger employees believed managers had failed to grasp the teenager's status as an entirely new type of retail consumer with distinctive tastes and needs from the previous generation of cosmetic users.

This feeling of disconnect was compounded by the actions of Boots' chain-store competitor, Woolworth's. In May 1967, the retailer launched Baby Doll, an own-brand line of cosmetics supported by a bright series of fun, psychedelic advertisements. According to Woolworth's Director, this new, 'full colour range' contained 'specially gimmicky stuff' for the eyes, face, lips and hair.[42] Baby Doll's ascription to the bright, fast-moving world of contemporary fashion not only articulated something of how teen-girls understood

[41] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1-"Our Teenage Clientele", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 126, Aug 6th 1965: 8.
[42] Unknown, "Woolworths Launch 'Baby Doll' Cosmetics", *The Daily Telegraph*, Friday April 28th 1967: 2.

themselves, but also offered them, and their friends, renewed excuses to shop at Woolworth's. Four months after Baby Doll's release, Boots' Head of Retail Sales John Hann, wrote to colleagues to express how the new product had allied with Woolworth's non-service based retail culture to make it the most popular 'section of the toilet department'.[43] Although Hann believed the 'considerable amount of money' spent advertising the range within the teen-girl magazines had played a role in Baby Doll's popularity, it was becoming increasingly clear to Boots' senior employees that the brand's 'up-to-the-minute look' and allied self-service methodologies were forging powerful connections with the teen-girl consumer. [44]

While Hann urged his colleagues to consider launching their own teen-specific brand, research undertaken by Boots in November 1967 further compounded the impression that their company was significantly out-of-touch with modern trends. It found 33% of teenagers considered Woolworth's their cosmetic 'outlet of choice', with its perception as an exciting American retailer with 'all the latest things' augmented by the sale of cheaper, teen-appropriate cosmetics like Evette, Miners and Outdoor Girl alongside its new Baby Doll product. [45] Teenagers also claimed they favoured the 'bazaar' like retail atmosphere offered within branches of Woolworth's, as they felt freer to make their cosmetic choices without the interference of an (often-older) sales assistant. This was highlighted within an additional piece of market research,

[43] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- 17 cosmetics: part 1 of 2, "Memo from H.J. Hann, September 12th 1967".
[44] Ibid.
[45] WBA/BT/9/22/3/2/32- "Teenage Cosmetic Range Report": 1.

which discovered that teenagers enjoyed Woolworth's stores because they were allowed to 'stand and stare' without being hurried into a purchase.[46]

By contrast, the research found that only 4% of youths preferred Boots, with many stating 'spontaneously' that the company's stores were 'dull, old-fashioned and lacking in variety' for the sorts of brands they wished to buy.[47] Respondents viewed the lack of teenage appropriate products as demonstrative of the fact Boots took no 'special interest in teenagers', with many considering its product range to be specifically targeted towards the needs of 'older women'. [48] Despite previously directing some of its Number Seven advertisements towards the needs of the modern female consumer, one study even discovered that none of its participants had 'ever heard' of the brand because 'they never shopped at Boots'.[49] The scale of the task facing Boots executives was therefore considerable, with efforts at targeting the teen-girl consumer needing to overcome the 'general dowdy' impression of its stores and the engrained understanding that it was a space 'more used by their mothers' than themselves.[50]

'Colour Me New; Colour Me Seventeen'

Two-months after Hann's visit, on 16th November 1967, Boots' Merchandise Committee approved the development of an own-brand 'range of colour

[46] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- 17 Advertising 1968-1969: part 1 of 2, "Exploratory Research on a Copy Approach for Boots 17 Range, March 1968": 7.
[47] WBA/BT/9/22/3/2/32- "Teenage Cosmetic Range Report": 1.
[48] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Exploratory Research": 8-11.
[49] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- 17 cosmetics: part 2 of 2, "Further tests on the name Seventeen, January 10th 1968".
[50] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Exploratory Research": 10.

cosmetics suitable for teenagers'.[51] Seventeen's development should therefore been seen as reactive, with the impetus for the brand's establishment arising from a point of dilemma, rather than from a long thought out strategy formulated upon an inherent understanding of teenage tastes. The immediate problem facing Boots bosses in the aftermath of their research was whether teenage appeal could only ever be achieved by relying upon contemporary bazaar cultures and the provision of cheaper, gimmicky make-up products. This was awkward for the company, both because its new system of self-selection had deliberately sought to avoid the frenzied bazaar-like atmosphere seen at Woolworth's and the fact its post-war strategy had strived to continue providing quality, value-for-money own-goods. It was therefore out of the question that Boots bosses would seek to generate teenage appeal through a direct replication of the established modes of teenage cosmetic selling and merchandising. They alternatively chose to negotiate Seventeen's appeal to ensure it captured distinct aspects of contemporary youth culture, while also upholding the company's more refined and tasteful middle-class values.

This negotiation was evident in how bosses conceptualised the Seventeen product range. While they claimed it was 'not average' and was 'way, way out', such descriptors only ever applied within the context of Boots' own traditions, with the product deliberately placed in opposition to the more extreme aspects of youth culture perceived to be represented by Woolworth's Baby Doll brand.[52] Bosses were therefore fracturing

[51] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- 17 cosmetics: part 2 of 2, "Teenage Range of Colour Cosmetics, December 14th 1967": 4.
[52] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6- "Colour Me Cash": 2.

conceptualisations of the post-war teenage market and targeting Seventeen's products at a distinctive *type* of girl who was more representative of the mainstream, rather than the fringes of, contemporary youth culture. For Boots executives, Baby Doll's luridly coloured advertisements represented a continuation of the crass and ostentatious forms of cosmetic sexual self-expression long associated with the working class.[53] Fears that a new generation of juveniles were becoming exposed to cheaper and more gimmicky forms of cosmetic display were only accentuated by the fact Woolworth's were making its products available through largely unchecked modes of self-service. Seventeen was therefore targeted towards the more socially conservative girl represented within the era's popular teen-girl magazines, with bosses theorising that modifications to their system of self-selection were the perfect way to guide her cosmetic experience in accordance with wider company values.

After recognising that their previous sales efforts had driven teenagers to shop 'elsewhere', Boots executives saw the introduction of Seventeen as an opportunity to 'start again'.[54] Launched with the tagline, 'colour me new; colour me Seventeen' the product's earliest advertisements captured this sense of rebirth by promising teens 'a whole new look' that was simply unachievable with 'yesterday's make-up'.[55] At the product's July 1968 launch, company executives outlined their three objectives for the brand. These included attracting 'teenage traffic into Boots', updating the company's

[53] Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman: And Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (London: Virago Press, 1994), 219-24; Dyhouse, *Glamour*, 64-65; Matt Houlbrook, "'The Man with the Powder Puff' in Interwar London," *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 1 (2007): 169-70.
[54] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6- "Colour Me Cash": 2.
[55] WBA/BT/11/45/2/293- "Colour Me New; Colour Me Seventeen", Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, c.1969.

'image' amongst adolescents, and expanding 'the level of teenage cosmetic purchases' undertaken within branches.[56] Made available in over 1000 of the company's stores, the original range contained 60 variously coloured cosmetic products for the lips, nails and eyes. Despite initially concentrating on the eyes, the collection was always earmarked for expansion, with products including make-up creams and foundations, scheduled for inclusion once the brand had established itself amongst its core audience.[57]

Almost every facet of the Seventeen brand was considered and curated. For example, after a series of tests incorporating close to twenty possible brand names, product developers found that Seventeen was the overwhelming favourite with teenage focus groups.[58] In a reflection of the product's tempered modernity, the Seventeen brand name was not, in fact, original, having been used as the title for an American teenage magazine since 1944.[59] It was also the name of a teenage and young-adult line of cosmetics produced by US manufacturer Colgate-Palmolive-Peet in 1928.[60] Perhaps because of these pre-established teenage associations, youths considered the name Seventeen a 'swinging title for trendsetters'.[61] Instead of limiting its appeal to seventeen-year-old girls, executives recognised that seventeen was the age when many girls began to outgrow teen-only cosmetics and transition towards more mature products. The name Seventeen thus encapsulated the 'breakpoint' or 'terminal age-group', when the lives of

[56] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- 17 cosmetics: part 1 of 2, "Seventeen Cosmetics: Summary of Plans and Status": 1.
[57] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- "Seventeen Cosmetics: a run down": 1.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Kelley Massoni, ""Teena Goes to Market": Seventeen Magazine and the Early Construction of the Teen Girl (as) Consumer," *Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 1 (2006).
[60] I am grateful to Hilary Belzer, Founder and Curator of *The Makeup Museum*, for this information. (See, https://makeupmuseum.org/- Accessed 16/01/2025).
[61] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6/- "Colour Me Cash": 3.

teenagers became increasingly suffused with opportunity, with one focus group report noting simply, ‘seventeen is the horizon’.[62]

Roughly targeting those aged between 12 and 19, the Seventeen brand sought to capture the excitement and sense of personal progression that accompanied adolescence. Mirroring the era’s teen-girl magazines, the name Seventeen therefore aimed to capture the sensation of ‘being’ a teenager, rather than the process of ‘becoming’ of an adult.[63] Covering both school-aged girls and employed young women, Boots executives hoped the Seventeen brand would cover the broad spectrum of the teenage experience and symbolise much more than a prescribed journey of maturity towards adulthood. Instead, company bosses hoped to use the Seventeen name to demonstrate that, as well as indulging the distinct status of the teenager, the product would also endorse such years as a time of individual fun, discovery and opportunity.

On the face of it, selecting another numerically related brand name ran the risk of deepening the associations between the teen-girl shopper and the company’s premium own-good cosmetic, Number Seven. However, company bosses insisted that any similarities had occurred ‘by accident’, and that Seventeen’s name merely reflected fresh attempts to capture the distinctiveness of youth and the sense of potential contained within adolescence. Bosses also claimed it was ‘no bad thing’ for the brands to have similar names, as this would enable teenagers to ‘follow-through’ and purchase Number Seven once they were ready to switch to ‘more adult

[62] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- “Exploratory Research”: 4.
[63] Tinkler, "‘Are You Really Living?’," 601.

products and packaging'.[64] These ideas ran contrary to some of the sales efforts of the early-1960s, which had attempted to envelop the cosmetic desires of the 'Modern Miss' within the adult-focused conventions of Number Seven. Segregating the product from adult tastes therefore allowed Seventeen to operate within its own cultural enclave that both rejected associations with adulthood and accentuated the fun, affluent identities of its young female consumers.

When exploring the feasibility of Seventeen, Boots discovered that despite taking a substantial share of the market, a large proportion of young girls failed to identify with the extant teen-only cosmetics like Miners, Outdoor Girl and Rimmel and were 'extremely critical' of their perceived low-quality.[65] While Seventeen's price range compared favourably with these rival products, executives sought to build upon research findings that saw teenagers associate their company with notions of 'good value' and 'reliability'.[66] One focus group respondent claimed 'you can't go wrong' at Boots, while another suggested she was open to trying things from its shops as, 'you know they're good value'.[67] An emphasis upon quality therefore became an important factor in how Seventeen was differentiated from its competitors, with one brochure telling employees that 'ALL' of Seventeen's preparations had been made in its Beeston and Airdrie factories and were therefore assured of the company's 'usual high standard of quality control'.[68] Seventeen's advertisements accentuated these statements of excellence by

[64] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- "Seventeen Cosmetics: a run down": 1.
[65] WBA/BT/9/22/3/2/32- "Teenage Cosmetic Range Report": 1.
[66] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Exploratory Research": 10.
[67] Ibid.
[68] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6/- "Colour Me Cash": 5.

making repeated claims about how the product had been suitability engineered for its customer's young skin.[69] This attempted to solidify understandings that while Seventeen was cheap, it was never low quality, and was thus a cosmetic product worthy of the association with the good reputation of Boots.

The emphasis upon quality played an important role in how Seventeen appealed to its target audience. Despite suggestions that the affluent teen represented the classless, meritocratic values of post-war Britain, Boots executives did not conceptualise Seventeen as a product capable of reflecting these egalitarian ideas. For example, a 1969 brand strategy document stated Seventeen was for 'nicely brought up' girls, who desired a 'gentler, less frenetic and more recognisably pretty' product than was presently available on the market. [70] These comments implicated Baby Doll, whose advertisements commodified the lurid, psychedelic visual cultures of the 1960s countercultural movement. Although Seventeen's launch advertisement contained a stylised 'Dolly' motif that evoked similar notions of countercultural escapism, such imagery was quickly replaced by depictions of real-life models by early 1969. Executives were therefore seeking to distance themselves from Baby Doll's Biba-esque depictions of youth culture, and position Seventeen firmly within the realist middle ground of the post-war youth experience.

Seventeen's positioning in opposition to Baby Doll was further highlighted within a 1969 brand strategy document. While it did not name the product

[69] For example, see, WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/1- Advertisement for Seventeen Make-up, 1970.
[70] WBA/BT/11/22/3/1- Seventeen Advertising, 'Seventeen Creative Philosophy'.

directly, its claim that Seventeen's users were not 'drug-taking, gum-chewing teenyboppers' encapsulated the rebellious, low quality characteristics Boots bosses felt were represented by Woolworth's own-brand. Both condescending and highly value-laden, the term teenybopper evoked notions of bad taste and working-class promiscuity associated with the new pop music cultures of the post-war era. [71] It also drew explicit connections with the emergence of countercultural music and club venues, which appeared to threaten the morality of British youths through illegal forms of drug-taking, delinquency and inappropriate sexual relations.[72] While Baby Doll represented a more playful take on these countercultural elements, its stylised psychedelic and pop art imagery did little to allay fears it was targeted towards these specific forms of youth culture (Image 3.2). Furthermore, by making a connection to Woolworth's American heritage, the gum-chewing comment also sought to demonstrate how Baby Doll was inappropriately aligned with America's obnoxious, trashy commercialised cultures, rather than the more demure tastes of normal British girls. This was emphasised in the product's choice of brand name, which conjured memories of the 1956 Hollywood film 'Baby Doll' that was laden with a coquettish sexual impropriety entirely at odds with Seventeen's appeal to respectable, well brought-up girls.[73]

[71] Norma Coates, "Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques: Girls and Women and Rock Culture in the 1960s and Early 1970s," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15, no. 1 (2003): 68. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Resistance through Rituals : Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 186.
[72] Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble*, 144-45; Green, *All Dressed Up*, 173-201; Louise A. Jackson, "'The Coffee Club Menace': Policing Youth, Lesiure and Sexuality in Post-War Manchester," *Cultural and Social History* 5, no. 3 (2008).
[73] Gillian A.M. Mitchell, "The Jerry Lee Lewis Scandal, the Popular Press and the Moral Standing of Rock 'N' Roll in Late 1950s Britain," in *Let's Spend the Night Together: Sex, Pop Music and British*



Image 3.2: Example of Baby Doll advertisement, c.1969, Taken from, WBA/BT/11/22/3/1- Seventeen Advertising

In an effort to allay fears that contemporary youth cultures had been imported from America's more affluent, leisured society, Boots bosses presented Seventeen as a more relatable and homely British product.[74] A 1972 pamphlet exploring Seventeen's early history described how, in 1968, there were 'two different types of teenage girl'.[75] While one, represented by Baby Doll, conformed to edgier understandings of teen-culture by being 'trendy' and 'very interested in new fashion, pop music and boys', the other,

Youth Culture, 1950s-80s, ed. Matthew Worley, et al., The Subcultures Network (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023), 50.

[74] Marwick, *The Sixties*, 42-45.

[75] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/7- "The 17 Success Story" staff leaflet, February 1972: 3.

represented by Seventeen, was only 'fairly interested in clothes, music and boys' and was largely 'less confident, full of problems and anxious for advice on how to make herself look pretty'.[76] Promising advice, confidence and a 'pretty' new look to this shy, second cohort of girls, Seventeen was therefore offered as a distinctive alternative to the fashionable, self-assurance of rival cosmetic brands like Baby Doll or Mary Quant. This message was reinforced within the product's advertisements, with one example from 1971 claiming Seventeen users did not need to be 'freaky to be trendy', while another said the typical Seventeen customer only liked to be daring 'now and then'.[77]

Seventeen's connection to the mainstream gained reinforcement through its propensity to borrow from the figure of the 'nice girl'. According to Hannah Charnock, the 'nice girl' was an idealised form of femininity that promoted traits like chasteness, kindness, cleanliness and graciousness, alongside its call for girls to act in ways that were noncontroversial and above suspicion and reproach. [78] Described by Charnock as a 'potent' and 'prevalent' trope, the 'nice girl' was able to exert a powerful moral influence over the behaviours and identities of post-war teenage girls, particularly those of the middle class.[79] As it endorsed notions of respectability, the 'nice-girl' not only aligned perfectly with Boots' middle-class values, but also challenged the wider rebellious youth cultural motifs embodied by Baby Doll. This was made clear within a 1968 advertising strategy document, which claimed Seventeen

[76] Ibid.
[77] WBA/BT/11/45/1/35/36- "You Don't Have to be Freaky to be Trendy", Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics 1971; WBA/BT/11/45/1/35/33- Advertisement for Seventeen Lip 'n' Stick, 1971.
[78] Charnock, "Teenage Girls," 1041. See also, Rosalind Watkiss Singleton, "'(Today I Met) the Boy I'm Going to Marry': Romantic Expectations of Teenage Girls in the 1960s West Midlands," in *Youth Culture and Social Change: Making a Difference by Making a Noise*, ed. Keith Gildart, et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[79] Charnock, "Teenage Girls."

advertisements should feature the 'unmistakable teenage 'nice girl'', as this 'idealised version of the face' was what archetypal Seventeen users aspired to project 'for the greater part of each day'.[80]

Once executives had dropped the original 'Dolly' character from their advertisements, the 'nice girl' began to feature regularly as the face of the Seventeen range. Market research undertaken in 1968 had discovered many young girls responded with envy to the 'professional looking models' depicted within stereotypical cosmetic advertisements.[81] In order to help Seventeen's inexperienced cosmetic users forge stronger identifications with the brand, the product's advertisements therefore featured the more credible and relatable faces of real-life, young female models pictured in a tight close-up. Although they posed with boldly made-up eyes that evoked contemporary models like Jean Shrimpton, their appearance was always carefully managed to ensure they conveyed an 'extremely sophisticated' look that was, at the same time, non-threatening, recognisable and reassuringly traditional.[82] They therefore mirrored the tempered look of the teenage 'nice-girls' within *Jackie* magazine's comic-strip love stories, which Angela McRobbie argued were neat and conventional interpretations of 'mod' that never risked appearing too 'way out'.[83]

In order to enhance the element of familiarity, Seventeen's advertisements offered brief biographies of their subjects. These were convivial in tone and demonstrated both the model's age and that she hailed from a comfortably

[80] WBA/BT/11/22/3/1- Seventeen Advertising, dated October 17th 1968.
[81] WBA/BT/11/22/3/1- Seventeen Advertising, 'Boots 17 Advertising Research' December 1968.
[82] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- 17 Advertising 1968-1969: part 2 of 2, "Boots Seventeen: Advertising Strategy, Lennen & Newell Wolsey Gee Advertising, July 23rd 1969": 1.
[83] McRobbie, *Jackie: An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity*, 17.

middle-class, suburban milieu. For example, audiences were told, 'Debbie is 14 and comes from Hampstead', while other examples introduced, 'Linda Stevens…15 from Walton-on-Thames', and 'Jenny…17…in Cheam, Surrey'.[84] This approach sought to foster a distinctive cohort of Seventeen users, by illustrating to young girls that the cosmetics had been tailored towards individuals like her, and not some abstracted, implausibly cool figure associated with Carnaby Street's swinging boutiques. This broader appeal was underlined within an additional advertisement featuring 'Kathy', who audiences were told, was a 'student in Hull'. [85] This clarified that Seventeen's appeal was provincial, as well as suburban, and that Boots were utilising its network of shops to extend the values of moderated, everyday make-up usage to teenagers situated throughout the country.

The decision to segment the teenage market and align Seventeen products with Boots' pre-established, middle-class sensibilities ultimately proved popular with young girls, with the brand reaching its initial three-year sales target inside its first twelve months.[86] Furthermore, by 1972, Seventeen had outperformed the combined sales of rival brands Miners, Rimmel and Outdoor Girl.[87] Its success therefore underlined how the recalcitrant, edgier understandings of contemporary youth culture were uncharacteristic of how the majority of Britain's post-war teenagers experienced their everyday lives, with many welcoming the opportunity to express their newfound buying

[84] WBA/BT/11/45/1/35/33- Advertisement for Seventeen Lip 'n' Stick, 1971; WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/15- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, 1971; WBA/BT/11/45/1/35/34- Advertisement for lipstick and nail polish, July 1971.
[85] WBA/BT/11/45/1/35/36- "You Don't Have to be Freaky to be Trendy", 1971.
[86] WBA/BT/11/38/1/12-"The 17 Story": 10.
[87] Ibid.

power through products that both upheld and furthered the 'nice-girl's' more conventional ideologies and values.

Selling Seventeen

Although Seventeen had identified a distinctive subsection of the teen-girl market, its appeal also relied on a carefully curated process of in-store selling. The Seventeen customer was enveloped into a unique style of retail experience that was neither a direct replication of the company's wider self-selection model, nor an exact replica of bazaar, self-service shops. Selling Seventeen was therefore a complex, contradictory process that selectively adapted both contemporary youth experiences and the company's service-based cultures, to create a form of shopping that furthered the brand's underlying values and identity. Seventeen's line of advertising and in-store sales techniques therefore continued the company's post-war strategy of providing moderated in-store sales experiences that delicately balanced the modern and the traditional.

Experimentation

As ideas of experimentation were regarded as a defining feature of post-war adolescence, teen-girl publications such as *Honey* sought to empower their cohort of readers with regular representations of an ambitious, fashionable and self-expressive form of young womanhood.[88] Many of Seventeen's advertisements also presented the application of its products as a route towards identity formulation and self-fulfilment. The product's 1968 launch

[88] Carter, "A Taste of *Honey*," 193.

advertisement accentuated the range's sense of promise, with collated images of nail polish, false eyelashes, lipstick and eyeliner suggestive of the multiform opportunities awaiting Seventeen's customers.[89] By claiming Seventeen had 'everything you need', executives were indicating to their prospective young customers that the own-brand's outlets for self-expression could only ever be defined, or contained, by the individual user's own sense of fun and exploration.

A 1969 advertisement entitled 'Who'd you like to be today?' made this sense of experimentation and personal discovery even clearer (Image 3.3). Reflecting the teen-girls attraction to eye cosmetics, the advertisement presented six modish styles of application, including the 'Isadora' and 'Barbarella' designs.[90] As well as emphasising the teen-girl's sense of empowerment, the advertisement's use of female heroines from contemporary film illustrated that Boots were seeking to connect its product with wider spheres of youth culture and consumption. It offered users the opportunity to match their look with these different female figures, depending upon their fluctuating desires for experimentation and identity formulation. The advertisement's copy claimed users could 'put on a new personality' that suited 'where' they were, 'who' they were with, or 'what' they felt like. It thus acknowledged the teen-girl as an independent, affluent consumer with a lifestyle that demanded the availability of these increasingly modular personalities. Yet, such advertisements largely failed to explore the types of activities these affluent teenage girls would actually undertake. Instead, their

[89] WBA/BT/45/1/2/9- Seventeen Launch Advertisement, 1968.
[90] WBA/BT/11/45/1/2/4- "Who'd You Like To Be Today?", Advertisement for Seventeen Eye Cosmetics, 1969.

intense focus upon the individual model offered strong indications that the product was meant for the nourishment of the self, with no boys, or other female friends, appearing within Seventeen's pre-1972 advertisements. Therefore, by showcasing the user's opportunity to experiment with different looks, the advertisement demonstrated that using Seventeen was not only about expressing one's identity, but also about helping some individuals discover who they had *yet* to become.



Image 3.3- 'Who'd You Like to be Today?', Advertisement for Seventeen Eye Cosmetics, 1969. (*Boots Archive* WBA/BT/11/45/1/2/4)

In 1971, Seventeen released its new Face Kit sets. Promising to show users 'how to make faces', the kits underlined how Seventeen focused on allowing teenage girls to explore versions of their personality while also enhancing their sense of maturity.[91] Boots executives were driven towards these approaches by a 1968 piece of market research, which claimed cosmetic experimentation was 'motivated by desire to find one's personality and to provide confidence'.[92] One respondent even suggested that the purpose of exploring different cosmetic looks was to find ways of making oneself feel 'significant'.[93] Therefore, while it did not prescribe the specific social context within which Seventeen needed to be used, the advertisements nevertheless demonstrated that teenage girls were being empowered with the confidence and agency to explore which versions of their personality best aligned with the demands of their increasingly affluent, leisure-filled lives.

As well as having a competitive pricing structure, Seventeen included a number of in-store sale mechanisms that encouraged teens to engage more widely with the product. Research undertaken before Seventeen's launch indicated that teenage girls considered larger-sized cosmetics, a 'positive disadvantage' to individual exploration.[94] A 'try-size' lipstick was therefore included within Seventeen's initial range of products. Made available in seven different colours and sold for half the price of a full-sized swivel stick, this item allowed girls to adopt an explorative approach to shopping and to quickly amass a core collection of Seventeen's brightly coloured products.[95]

[91] WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/15- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, 1971.
[92] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Exploratory Research": 4.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., 5.
[95] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6- "Colour Me Cash": 12.

These items were also placed on a special 'buy-one-get-one-free' deal during Seventeen's launch to encourage girls towards experimental consumption.[96] As teen-girls enjoyed 'matching and combining clothes with make-up', it was also important for Seventeen to assimilate with contemporary youth fashions.[97] Boots consequently sold small-sized nail polishes in 'all sorts of interesting colours' that matched the ever-changing shades of high street fashion and were affordable enough to be thrown away or forgotten about once they went out of style.[98] The range also included an affordable bottle of nail polish remover, which enabled the teen-girl to easily reset their cosmetic experimentations if such modes of self-discovery ever got 'out of hand!'.[99]

As the Seventeen user was conceptualised as inexperienced and lacking in confidence, this sense of empowered personal experimentation always functioned within Boots' wider framework of personalised service and advice. A 1968 piece of market research found that the Seventeen user's sense of experimentation and need for information were closely bound together. It suggested that as girls were 'still involved in a learning process' they required help in both 'choosing…and applying make-up'.[100] Seventeen's advertisements and merchandising consequently used a didactic framework to help teenage girls 'clarify the purpose and likely effect' of the range's various products.[101] For example, after finding teenage girls felt 'confused' about 'exactly how and where to put' make-up, the Face Kit boxes included a

[96] Ibid.
[97] WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, "Poster Colours leaflet, March 10th 1972": 2.
[98] WBA/BT/11/38/89- Learning to Look Good Poster, Lesson Four, "A Guide to Lip & Nail Colours, c.1972."
[99] WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, "*Seventeen and Things*, *edition three,* November 1971": 6.
[100] WBA/BT/11/22/3/1- Seventeen Advertising, 'Boots 17 Advertising Research'.
[101] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Boots Seventeen: Advertising Strategy": 1.

facial ‘diagram’ that instructed users on the correct position of each cosmetic product.[102] Claiming the kits had been designed to ‘help girls…like you’, the advertisement suggested the instructions were ‘so simple’ that users could ‘not go wrong’.[103] The market research also found that girls responded well to an initial mock-up of the ‘Who’d you like to be today?’ advertisement, claiming it was ‘attention-getting’ while also allowing them to ‘pick up beauty hints’.[104]

Extending this inclination towards cosmetic pedagogy, in the early 1970s, Boots released a series of six instructional posters, which aimed to guide the wellbeing and cosmetic habits of young girls (Image 3.4). Entitled, ‘Learning to Look Good’, the posters offered guides and tutorials on beauty topics including skin care, lip and nail colours, personal hygiene, and the use of blushers and foundations. As well as promoting the range of Seventeen products, the posters featured easy-to-follow, sequential instructions. For example, the skin care poster directed readers to apply cleansing toner with a ‘pad of cotton wool’, whilst offering reminders that diet was an ‘all important factor’ in skin appearance and health. [105] The hygiene poster even instructed girls on the basics of taking a ‘daily bath or wash’, claiming no amount of deodorant could replace a consistent hygiene routine.[106] Helpful tips were scattered through each of the posters. For example, the eye colour guide suggested applying mascara with ‘sweeping strokes from root to tip’, while

[102] WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, “*Seventeen and Things, edition two”*: 1.
[103] WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/15- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, 1971.
[104] WBA/BT/11/22/3/1- Seventeen Advertising, ‘Boots 17 Advertising Research’.
[105] WBA/BT/11/38/87- Learning to Look Good Poster, Lesson Two, “A Guide to Skin Care, c.1972”.
[106] WBA/BT/11/38/91- Learning to Look Good Poster, Lesson Six, “A Guide to Personal Hygiene, c.1972”.

the lip and nail poster told girls to ‘always’ apply nail polish in ‘thin coats’ and to wait for each layer to dry, ‘before adding the next’.[107]



Image 3.4- Learning to Look Good Poster, Lesson Four of Six, ‘A Guide to Lip & Nail Colours, c.1972.’ (*Boots Archive* WBA/BT/11/38/89)

The ‘Who’d you like to be today?’ advertisement utilised a similar instructional framework. Despite encouraging experimentation, the advertisement suggested its users required a ‘little help’ in achieving the

[107] WBA/BT/11/38/90- Learning to Look Good Poster, Lesson Five, “A Guide to Eye Colours, c.1972.”; WBA/BT/11/38/89- Learning to Look Good Poster, Lesson Four.

contemporary, modish looks it contained. It consequently contained sequential instructions for the application of eye make-up. For example, girls wishing to apply the 'Barbarella' design were instructed to paint liquid shadow 'in an arch above the crease of the eye', while those exploring the 'Isadora' style were coached to rub black liquid liner 'all around the eye' while 'smudging it at the outside corner'.[108] This illustrated that while Seventeen was offering its users looks that aligned with popular youth culture, they always functioned under a level of guidance that upheld the brand's tasteful, mainstream values. Although such hints helped the uninitiated cosmetic user, they equally structured usage in ways that avoided the crasser, ostentatious modes of application bosses associated with brands such as Baby Doll. The advertisements therefore operated as a dictated template for how girls could achieve the same tempered 'mod' of the Seventeen models who populated their teen-girl magazines.

The use of diagrams, facial maps and instructional illustrations demonstrated that Boots executives considered Seventeen to have 'correct' and 'incorrect' forms of application. This was further underlined within a 1969 advertisement entitled 'Painting by Numbers' (Image 3.5). While it evoked the joyous simplicity of a childhood paint-by-numbers game, the advertisement also implied that the application of Seventeen's kaleidoscopic 'spectrum' of colours needed to abide by certain, predetermined rules. While suggesting fun, simplistic experimentation, the advertisement also doubled as a restrictive set of instructions that demanded cosmetic application remain

[108] WBA/BT/11/45/1/2/4- "Who'd You Like To Be Today?"

within the lines of conventional femininity.[109] It therefore dismissed any overt experimentation with expressive corporeal shapes and styles, with teenagers expected to use Seventeen with an orderliness and neatness that matched the wider design ethos of Boots' post-war self-selection stores.

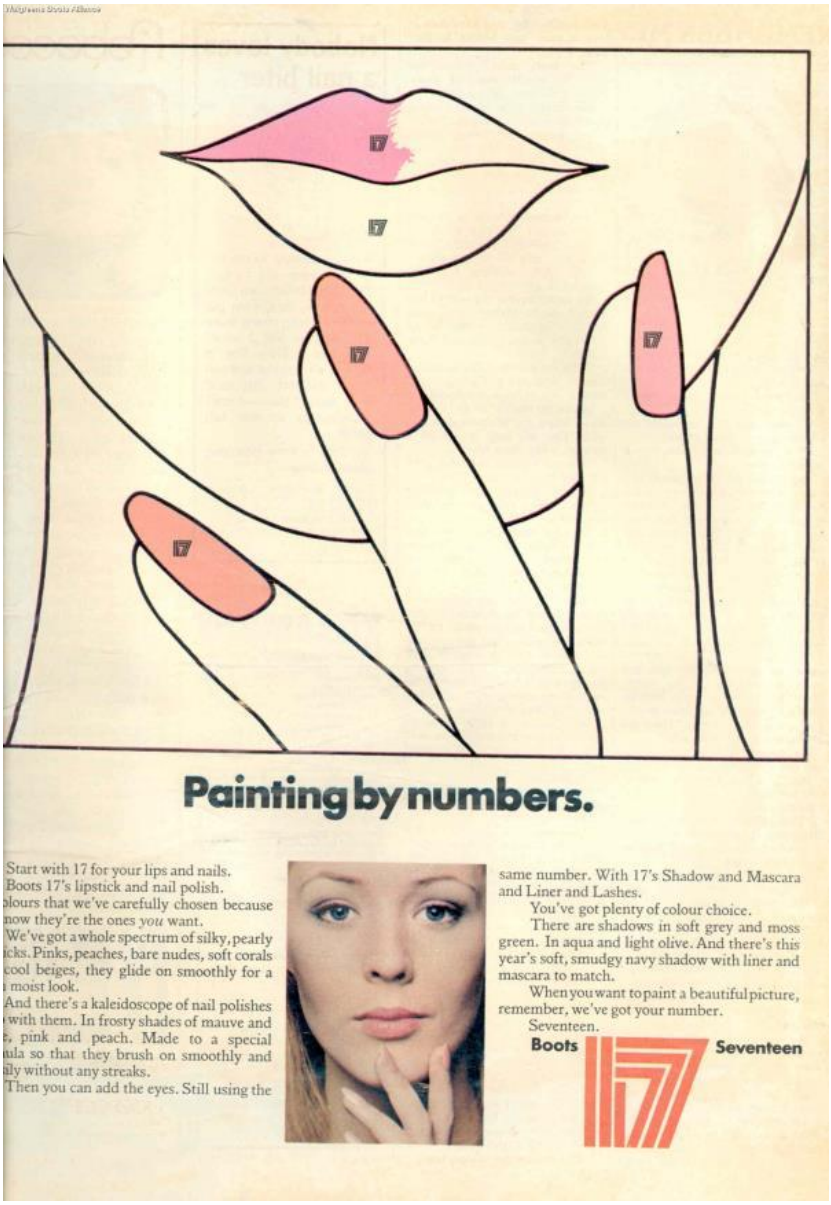


Image 3.5- 'Painting By Numbers', Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, c.1969. (*Boots Archive* WBA/BT/11/45/1/2/14)

The material composition of Seventeen products also regulated a young woman's cosmetic usage in accordance with the company's middle-class sensibilities. Items within the Seventeen range regularly carried descriptors

[109] WBA/BT/11/45/1/2/14- "Painting By Numbers", Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, c.1969.

such as ‘frosted’; ‘translucent’; ‘soft’; ‘light’ and ‘undetected’ which emphasised how they had been purposely engineered to limit crass or tasteless forms of cosmetic display.[110] While these physical qualities were promoted as the ideal complement to the young wearer’s skin, they also aimed to stop girls coating their faces with ‘stark outlines or harsh colours’ that risked affronting the brand’s respectable image.[111] Seventeen’s Water Paints range exemplified how these material limiters functioned in practical terms. Its advertisement focused on the naivety of ‘Kate’, whose misunderstanding about ‘where to draw the line’ when first experimenting with eye-cosmetics saw her make mistakes that were humiliating to both her and the brand’s wider ideologies. [112] However, the Water Paint range was presented as the ideal antidote to such wayward experimentation, as by applying the product with just a ‘little water’, girls like Kate could moderate their cosmetic usage and avoid ‘pilling on loads’ of heavy make-up that darkened their eyes and dampened their ‘sparkle’.[113] Users were told that the range was available in a variety of ‘lovely colours’ that could be made as strong or as weak as they liked, depending upon their specific social situation or their own level of cosmetic prowess. While the product was presented within the brand’s wider pastoral framework, it nonetheless demonstrated how executives were using the Seventeen user’s desire for information to not only control where teens were placing make-up, but also the intensity and tone with which they did so.

[110] See, WBA/BT/11/45/2/293- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics; WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/1- Advertisement for Seventeen make-up, 1970; WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/2- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, 1970; WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/7- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, 1970.
[111] WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/2- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, 1970.
[112] WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/7- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, 1970.
[113] Ibid.

Seventeen's didactic framework also extended to the teenager's status as an immature retail shopper. While Boots had recognised the teenager's heightened spending power, they also sought to ensure Seventeen upheld the same notions of value-for-money represented within the company's wider range of own-goods. For example, the eye colour 'Learning to Look Good' poster encouraged teenagers to economise by purchasing a 'three colour' palette of powder eye shadow, complete with 'long lasting' brush applicator. Making its recommendations in the name of 'good value', the poster also reassured teenagers that many of Seventeen's Eye Sheen and Stick Shadow products were 'quite inexpensive'.[114] It also highlighted the 'extra value' of Seventeen's 'Double Ender' eye pencil, which gave customers two different eyeliner colours in one compact stick.[115] As well as empowering teens with the sense they were undertaking prudent forms of retail buying, these tips also served to underline Seventeen's broad appeal, by highlighting that the product was accessible and affordable to girls throughout the country. [116]

Collective Experience

While girls were encouraged to shop freely among Boots' new own-brand range, executives believed they needed to learn the values and processes of middle-class retail consumption before they could effectively utilise their newfound forms of affluence. They therefore put measures in place to ensure cosmetic buying and experimentation was a collective experience, which

[114] WBA/BT/11/38/90- Learning to Look Good Poster, Lesson Five.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Janice Winship, "New Disciplines for Women and the Rise of the Chain Store in the 1930s " in *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth Century Consumer Culture*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot (London: Cassell, 2000), 27-29.

took place amongst a teenager's wider social network of friends. Market research undertaken in advance of Seventeen's launch indicated that teenage girls established and refined their identities in relation to other girls. An important passage of a 1968 report noted:

> Products bought by one girl are tried by her friends— often during the dinner hour at school— on a reciprocal basis and from a mutual understanding of each other's need for experiment.[117]

According to the brand's strategists, the friendship group of the typical Seventeen customer had 'specific' conformist behavioural traits that heightened the opportunity for supportive cosmetic experimentation.[118] Bosses reasoned that the orientation of the Seventeen user was always 'towards the group, rather than outside it', meaning that no member would experiment with a cosmetic product unless the entire friendship circle did so as well. Believed to lack 'any conscious thought of rivalry', Seventeen customers were therefore understood to crave 'the security' offered by the make-up's 'more or less uniform' look.[119]

Perhaps with these findings in mind, from November 1970, bosses introduced an innovative range of products, designed to enable teenage girls to spend money on their friends. After a gift voucher scheme proved to be an 'instant success' with Seventeen customers, bosses announced the sale of two new pre-packaged gift sets for the 1971 Christmas market.[120] One of

[117] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Exploratory Research": 4.
[118] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Boots Seventeen: Advertising Strategy": 1.
[119] Ibid.
[120] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 83, March 5th 1971: 5.

these sets was the instructive Face Kits box, whilst the second was a small, decorative cardboard pouch, containing a variety of Seventeen's most popular make-ups and colour ranges. At the time of their launch, Seventeen was the only teenage cosmetic brand to offer gift packs. According to the *Merchandise News*, this offered the company a 'tremendous opportunity' to grow the product and enhance its sales. Executives consequently targeted the products at all Seventeen users, including both working and school-aged girls.[121] The Face Kits advertisement used a model in the middle of the brand's target age range, while the cardboard gift packs were made available 'in all prices' that started from as little as 28p.[122] Employees were also encouraged to promote the product's broad appeal, with internal staff leaflets highlighting how the Face Kits made an 'ideal all-year-round gift' that was 'excellent value for anyone'.[123]

The marketing for both of these products emphasised their suitability as Christmas presents for friends. For example, after suggesting teenage girls normally found Christmas gift buying 'a problem', the advertisement for the small cardboard packs proclaimed Seventeen made 'all the difference to you. And your friends'.[124] By encouraging their customers to engage in generous gift buying, Boots executives were manipulating the fact that much of the teenager's social and cultural world was now heavily embedded within a consumerist logic. The gift packs thus positioned the Seventeen brand, and the opportunities for cosmetic exploration it foretold, at the forefront of how groups of affluent girls built and sustained their friendship networks, with the

[121] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 119, November 12th 1971: 7.
[122] WBA/BT/11/45/1/14/15- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics, 1971.
[123] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 90, April 23rd 1971: 6.
[124] WBA/BT/11/45/1/35/37- Advertisement for Seventeen Christmas Gift Sets, 1971.

cardboard pouch's encouragement to 'spread a little prettiness this Christmas' underlining how the relationships of contemporary middle-class girls were increasingly defined by such acts of cosmetic consumption.[125] The packs therefore served as a useful means of continually redirecting the cohort of Seventeen users back to the brand, while at the same time solidifying perceptions that the product was ideally suited to their collective needs and tastes.

The Seventeen range was able to facilitate experimentation and exchange, even if girls chose not to participate in these gift buying schemes. As Sarah Kenny explains, the concept of sharing was already an important factor in how youths used and read teen-girl magazines, with many of these publications 'consumed with and shared between friends, taken to school and work, read on buses and trains, in bedrooms and in bathtubs'.[126] The Seventeen range followed similar patterns and came in slender, hard-plastic containers that accentuated the product's portability amongst groups of friends. These design choices responded to a 1968 report, which claimed that teenage cosmetic experimentation often occurred 'outside the home', away from the watchful eyes of parents and within the safe enclave of girl-only groups.[127] Seventeen's diminished size aided discretion, allowing items to be concealed within school or handbags rather than exhibited on a teenager's dressing table or mantelpiece.[128] From 1971, Seventeen's Pearly Eye Shadows removed the free applicator brush given with previous versions of the product, with the packaging updated into a thinner, more compact

[125] Ibid.
[126] Kenny, ""We Are No Longer Certain"," 77.
[127] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Exploratory Research": 6.
[128] Ibid.

circular container.[129] This redesign reflected how Seventeen users were increasingly demanding less bulky products that could be integrated within their own smaller set of 'on-the-go' cosmetics.

The company had found the majority of adolescent girls gained their cosmetic knowledge from 'shops and shop displays', rather than the popular teen-girl magazines.[130] As bosses recognised that shopping was a fundamental component of youth culture and something teenage girls utilised for the formulation of both their own identities and those of their friendship group, much of Seventeen's collective experience centred upon the shopping experience it offered to teenage girls. While London's fashionable boutiques cultivated consumer identity and loyalty through an edgier and uniquely bewildering sensory experience of mixed lighting and music, Boots executives chose to construct their youth appeal in more conventional, structured terms.[131] The retail experiences on offer to Seventeen's customer thus shared many similarities with the broader conceptualisations of affluent, fun, urban shopping discussed in chapter two. For example, Saturday mornings were identified as the peak time for purchasing Seventeen products, with executives also concentrating the brand's promotions and sales methods around their larger, city-centre stores.[132] This approach mirrored that adopted by Woolworth's, who claimed when launching Baby Doll, that the product was 'unsuitable' for branches within 'quieter country areas'.[133]

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[129] WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, "Pearly Shadows, September 22nd 1971".
[130] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Exploratory Research": 7.
[131] Bide, "Be My Baby."
[132] Ibid.
[133] "Woolworths Launch 'Baby Doll' Cosmetics", *The Daily Telegraph*, Friday April 28th 1967: 2.

Nonetheless, Seventeen's retail experiences never sought to replicate those on offer to Boots' adult customers. Authors including Alistair Kefford and Guy Ortolano have demonstrated how the growing presence of teenagers within Britain's post-war urban spaces raised questions about their status as consumers, with many contemporary commentators attributing their increased visibility to rising rates of shoplifting and delinquency. [134] By modifying the precepts of their own model of self-selection, Boots bosses cultivated retail experiences that, while feeling unique to the needs of contemporary teenage girls, also provided structured forms of shopping that allayed anxieties around unsolicited groups of youths and preserved the organisation's refined sensibilities.

This modified approach is exemplified in Image 3.6, which depicts the advertisement for the new 'Teenage Bar' opened in 1972 within Boots' large city-central Brighton store. The advertisement's use of cute, bubble print lettering immediately symbolised how the space was targeted towards the needs of teenage-girls. This was reflected in the claim that the bar's pretty 'carnival of colours' and 'sweet scents' were 'strictly for the birds'.[135] The image also offered hints that the sales experience was more informal than those provided within traditional Boots stores. For example, the stand of draped scarves lent the counter a relaxed market-stall feel and suggested to teens that they could browse through fashionable items in ways that evoked the desirable bazaar shop experiences. This was enhanced by the

[134] Kefford, *Life and Death of the Shopping City*, 277. Guy Ortolano, "Planning the Urban Future in 1960s Britain," *The Historical Journal* 54, no. 2 (2011): 496. See also, Kate Bradley, "Juvenile Delinquency and the Public Sphere: Exploring Local and National Discourse in England, C. 1940–69," *Social History* 37, no. 1 (2012).
[135] WBA/BT/11/45/1/40/27- Advertisement for Teenage Bar, June 1972.

advertisement's suggestion that customers could 'shop around' the new bar. Furthermore, calling it a bar, rather than a counter, partly disguised its service-based traditions and promoted the space as a cool, teen-only destination engineered for socialising alongside cosmetic experimentation and buying. The bar's wide area could conceivably accommodate numerous teenagers at once and demonstrated that the saloon aspect of youth-cultural spaces like the coffee club and music bar had been carefully reconstituted to provide a discrete in-store space where teenage girls could have fun and develop their personalities in relation with like-minded girls. [136] It therefore offered girls an experience that was the antithesis of the atomised ways in which adult consumers were expected to use self-service systems. The bright spotlights positioned above the counter created a convivial, open space that offered more glamourous experiences to the dark, oppressive atmosphere of London boutiques. By promoting a variety of teen-only cosmetic brands alongside Seventeen, the advertisement clarified to teens that the bar sold the latest and trendiest products. In addition, as these products were made available in enticing value-for-money offers, it underlined how the bar's sales experience had been tailored to the teen-girl's needs and distinctive forms of spending power.

[136] Jackson, "'Coffee Club'."

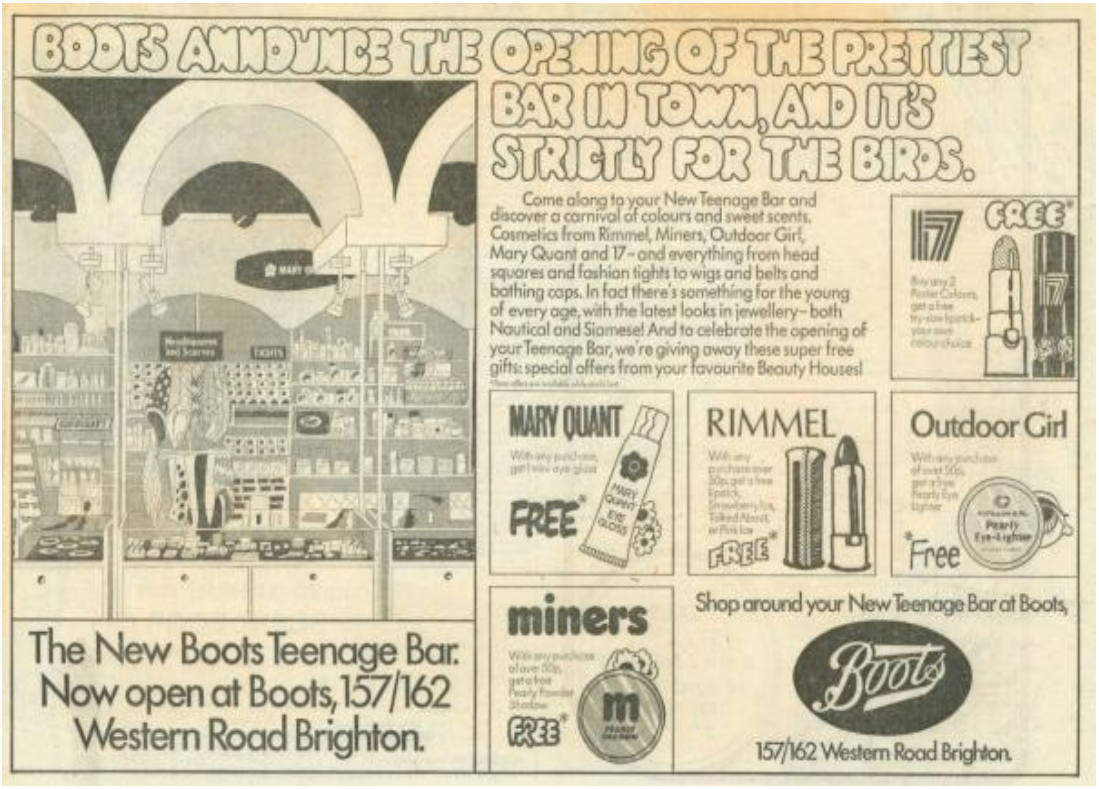


Image 3.6- Advertisement for 'Teenage Bar', Brighton, June 1972 (WBA/BT/11/45/1/40/27)

Nevertheless, despite these nods to contemporary youth culture, the divisional service counter and the use of glass cases signified that the bar had maintained the company's personalised service traditions. By using staff to mediate and oversee how teenagers interacted with their contemporaries as they shopped, the bar epitomised how Boots stores had enveloped Seventeen's customers within a distinctive dynamic of cosmetic consumption. The teen bar experience therefore underlined how executives had selectively adapted modern retail techniques to offer a more structured sales experience, which while encouraging Seventeen customers to develop their identities in close relation with their female friends, also guided their cosmetic experiments in accordance with the company's tastes and values.

Seventeen's cultivation of sociable retail experiences challenges Angela McRobbie's assertion that the lives of post-war teen-girls revolved around a private 'culture of the bedroom' and that *Jackie* magazine readers were socially atomised and incapable of 'real female solidarity'. [137] Even amongst Seventeen's 'nice girl' customers, cosmetic consumption was highly reliant upon the approval and acceptance of an individual's peer group. A 1968 piece of market research recognised that youths began to seriously experiment with cosmetics, 'after mixing with older kids in clubs or school'.[138] Thereafter, girls acquired the social and cultural rules of cosmetic application from observing 'older girls' and friends.[139] It was therefore apparent that Seventeen's social worth dramatically increased after being placed within a girl's wider social network.

Friendly Counsel

This element of conformity, and the teen-girl's need for wider social acceptance, was evidenced most clearly in how Boots employees were tasked with selling Seventeen. As was the case with the configuration of Boots' post-war shops, there was no prescribed way of selling Seventeen products. The store's size and regular customer base dictated whether items would be sold via an advisory counter or 'on a wall run of self-selection'.[140] Either way, employees were informed that Seventeen's sales impetus needed to come from 'the attention and support' it received from staff and the

[137] McRobbie and Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," 181. Angela McRobbie, *Jackie : An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity* (Birmingham: Birmingham : Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies University of Birmingham, 1978), 33.
[138] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Exploratory Research": 4.
[139] Ibid.
[140] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6/- "Colour Me Cash": 8.

discrete 'display space' it was granted within branches.[141] In general, larger city-centre stores sold Seventeen in a more impactful, showpiece style, with cosmetic counters and sales assistants aiming to cultivate Boots shops as a destination for teen cosmetic shopping. The smaller neighbourhood stores that lacked the resources for this style of selling predominately placed Seventeen within a run of self-selection shelving.

In both instances, Seventeen products were sold within a discrete, specially designed 'Test'n Try' sales unit, which distinguished the own-brand material from competing teenage lines (Image 3.6). By encouraging teenagers to 'pick', 'take' and 'try' products, these open-display units replicated the moderated sales experiences available within the company's wider system of self-selection. Senior managers concentrated on nurturing a suitably modern buying atmosphere around these units, with employees strongly discouraged from 'hovering over' customers as they navigated the range.[142] Employees received clear instructions that the 'Test'n Try's' were 'browsing units for browsing over…without hindrance'.[143] Seventeen's 1968 launch advertisement also demonstrated that browsing was an important part of the product's buying experience. It invited customers to, 'browse 'round Boots', to discover the whole 'colour-me-new' Seventeen range.[144] While this approach appeared to ape the unstructured bazaar experience of Woolworth's, employees were always positioned at a slight distance from the sales encounter, rather than being removed from it entirely. Teen-girls were therefore empowered to develop their cosmetic buying skills without the

[141] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- "Seventeen Cosmetics: Summary of Plans and Status": 2.
[142] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- "Seventeen Cosmetics: a run down": 1.
[143] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6/- "Colour Me Cash": 8.
[144] WBA/BT/11/45/2/293- Advertisement for Seventeen Cosmetics.

feeling of harassment or intimidation, whilst also being made aware that assistants were on-hand, if help was required.



Image 3.7- Image of 'Test'n Try' Unit, taken from WBA/BT/11/38/1/1-'January 13th-25th', *Merchandise News*, Supplement to Issue 283, December 31st 1968.

As well as enabling browsing, the unit's various sample products helped to accentuate the sense of self-discovery on offer through the range. The unit fed teenage curiosity and emboldened them to forge deeper connections with Seventeen's range of products by making lipsticks and nail polish colours accessible for trial, alongside small samples of eye shadow products. This inducement towards self-exploration was accentuated within a

redesigned version of the unit introduced from 1972. As it was arranged in a neat, orderly fashion, the unit's taxonomy encouraged teenagers to explore the Seventeen range at their own pace and in accordance to their own tastes, with each section interconnected in logical ways that encouraged bulk buying. [145] Again, as staff were instructed to allow this process of exploration to proceed autonomously, 'without let or hindrance', the units replicated, albeit on a much smaller scale, the structured buying experiences on offer within Brighton's 'Teenage Bar'. [146] They also represented how various aspects of the company's wider self-selection model were being selectively repackaged into a style of cosmetic buying that distinctively targeted the needs and personalities of teenage girls.

During the early 1970s, the principles of the 'Test'n Try' were condensed into a discrete new sales space known as the 'Selfasta' unit (Image 3.8). Rather than containing every Seventeen product, these temporary cardboard units encouraged teens to try the range's recently added seasonal products. Containing around 10 to 15 of the line's leading products, these open-display units extended the fast-paced, autonomous sensations of self-selection to new areas of the Seventeen range. Company literature encouraged staff to place these 'self-merchandising' displays adjacent to their main Seventeen counters, as they contributed to a quicker turnover of stock and allowed employees to 'concentrate on selling' directly to other teenagers via their advisory counters.[147] To channel visiting teenagers towards Seventeen's selling spaces, both the Selfasta and the redesigned merchandise unit

[145] WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, "A Specially Designed Merchandise Unit, May 30th 1972": 3.
[146] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- "Seventeen Cosmetics: a run down": 1.
[147] WBA/BT/11/38/1/12- "Sellfastas Really Do Sell Faster!", *Sales Talk*, No. 27, October 4th 1972: 8.

contained replications of Seventeen magazine advertisements. Staff magazine *Sales Talk,* suggested this approached created a 'direct link' between what teen-girls saw in their weekly magazines and what Boots stores were displaying on their counters.[148] The teen customer's capacity to recall the faces of Seventeen's young models proved decisive in differentiating the brand from its competitors, with sales assistants noting how girls often asked about Seventeen's new line of products 'so soon' after they arrived in store.[149] The targeted nature of the teen-girl advertisements and their effectiveness in facilitating a predetermined level of in-store buying, consequently mirrored the impact of television advertisements discussed in chapter two.

[148] WBA/BT/11/38/1/12-"The 17 Story": 10.
[149] WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, "*Seventeen and Things*, *edition three,* November 1971": 3.



Image 3.8- Image of Selfasta Unit, taken from, WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, 'You Don't Have to be Freaky to be Trendy, August 23rd 1971'

As market research indicated that teenage girls preferred to have young sales assistants 'attend to their wants' and offer them advice, company executives planned to break with tradition and install young sales assistants behind Seventeen oriented units and counters. [150] In May 1968, store managers were encouraged to propose the 'right type of girl' from their existing pool of younger staff to serve as Seventeen ambassadors within their respective branches.[151] These 'young enthusiasts' received training from the company's main beauty advisor trainers and were expected to

[150] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- "Seventeen Cosmetics: a run down": 1.
[151] WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6/- "Colour Me Cash": 7.

promote Seventeen within their individual branches while acting as their store's resident expert on the new range.[152]

From this wider cohort, 50 individuals from Boots' largest toiletry departments were selected for the exalted position of '17 Girl', whose task was to act as a figurehead for the Seventeen range by distributing cosmetic advice and guidance in accordance with the company's personalised counter-service traditions.[153] The '17 Girl' was a radical departure for the company, with the 1960 'you've got to catch them young' article demonstrating how cosmetic expertise was previously understood as the preserve of older, more experienced sales assistants.[154] Executives worked hard to differentiate their new assistants from other advisory counter colleagues, with each '17 Girl' supplied with an 'exclusive Seventeen overall' and branded brooch that offered their position its own sense of prestige and expertise.[155] As bosses recognised that teenage shopping habits primarily occurred within the urban sphere, the '17 Girl' initiative was always confined to the company's larger, city-centre stores, with the scheme proving such a success that it was expanded to 100 branches in 1970.[156]

The installation of '17 Girls' helped to differentiate the Boots retail experience from other teenage cosmetic providers. While large city-centre branches of Woolworth's sold Baby Doll via self-service without the mediation of assistants, other retailers were also of the opinion that the modern teen-girl was so confident and independent that it negated the need for traditional

[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "You've Got to Catch them Young".
[155] WBA/BT/11/22/3/7- "Seventeen Cosmetics: a run down": 3.
[156] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5-"'Seventeen girls' to increase to 100", *Boots News*, May 1970: 9.

cosmetic consultation and guidance. In May 1969, a new cosmetics company named House of Stars announced plans to sell teen cosmetics via self-service concessions within non-traditional spaces such as grocers, newsagents and stationers.[157] The company's Chairman John Stephen Foster claimed the rationale for the company's decision related to the fact, 'most girls are so knowledgeable about make-up now that they don't need—or want—the help of a consultant'. Aiming to have over 12,000 outlets by October 1970, Foster went on to claim that House of Stars were simply giving the 'consumer what she wants, where it is easiest to buy it'.[158]

The '17 Girl' initiative demonstrated that Boots executives held an opposing view, with the shy, inexperienced characterisation of the archetypical Seventeen user helping to justify the company's perpetuation of its counter-service traditions. Interestingly, executives partly drew upon the practices of contemporary boutique culture to lend the '17 Girl' an element of authenticity and coolness. This approach illustrated how Boots executives were adapting aspects of contemporary youth culture and repacking them into a retail experience that was acceptable to the company's traditional service-based cultures. According to Pamela Cox and Annabel Hobley, young female shop assistants took 'centre stage' within London's modern boutiques, with many becoming idolised figures capable of forging a powerful 'emotional bond' with their shoppers.[159] While these girls were often of a similar age and social background to their customers, their inter-customer relationships were often superficial and lacking in any sense of pastoral guidance and care. Boots

[157] WBA/BT/11/22/3/1- Seventeen Advertising, Taken from 'Newsagents Get a Cosmetics Range' *Chemist & Druggist,* October 18th 1969.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Cox and Hobley, *Shopgirls*, 209.

executives resultantly conceptualised the '17 Girl' in much more down-to-earth and relatable terms. Their role was framed as being similar to that which might be occupied by a wise, benevolent, older sister, who was capable of providing 'friendly, light-hearted counsel' and knowledgeable sales advice to Seventeen's inexperienced customers.[160] As a teenager herself, this member of sales staff was assumed to have an intrinsic empathy for the dilemmas of girlhood and was thus presented as a reliable confidante in this vital stage in a young woman's maturity.

Boots executives accentuated the role's pastoral remit by illustrating the sense of indistinguishable triangulation between the Seventeen customer, the '17 Girl' and the brand's advertising models. For example, one staff magazine informed the brand's salesgirls that their typical customer was, 'a bit like you', while another claimed Seventeen advertisements deliberately featured models that customers would recognise as 'their sort of person'.[161] This approach sought to solidify Seventeen's distinctive cohort of like-minded users, with the brand's identity and values immediately affirmed once shoppers visited stores and interacted with the '17 Girl'. 17-year-old Miss Marilyn Purvey, who worked within the company's Edinburgh branch, epitomised the quintessential '17 Girl' persona.[162] Describing her chief interests as 'fashion and cosmetics', Marilyn told staff magazine *Boots News* that she was 'in her element' when selling and advising similarly aged girls

[160] WBA/BT/11/22/3/2- "Boots Seventeen: Advertising Strategy": 2.
[161] WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, "*Seventeen and Things*, *edition one*": 1 and WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, "*Seventeen and Things*, *edition three,* November 1971": 3.
[162] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5-"'Seventeen girls' to increase to 100".

on cosmetic matters.[163] As well as demonstrating that Marilyn participated within the same cultural spheres as her customers, the article also presented her as young, attractive, well presented and friendly. She was thus the epitome of the 'nice girl' figure, and exactly the sort of character Seventeen's teen-girl users would recognise and respond to as a symbol of emulation and respectability.

In a significant break from the company's traditional practices, executives relaxed employee dress codes to allow the '17 Girl' to experiment with, and proudly display, Seventeen's range of cosmetic styles. [164] Reasoning that her cosmetic experimentation motivated customers to do the same, one staff magazine told salesgirls, 'if customers are interested in you and your make-up, they'll be interested in Seventeen too'.[165] The '17 Girl' thus embodied many of Seventeen's stylistic values, with branch managers trusting the employee to promote the range in ways that felt more relatable to the brand's inexperienced and shy cohort of customers. According to her manager, '17 Girl' Delia Gregory offered an 'attractive advertisement for the range' through her 'exciting' use of Seventeen eye-colours.[166] Delia claimed that customers 'more often than not' attempted to copy her look, by purchasing the same line of colours she was wearing.[167] '17 Girl' Nita Hawkins was also described as her own 'sales aid' for 'cleverly' applying four of Seventeen's 'bright, young' eye-colours. In ways that mirrored Delia's experience, Nita recounted how

[163] Ibid.
[164] WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, *"Seventeen and Things, edition two"*: 4.
[165] Ibid.
[166] WBA/BT/11/38/1/12- "The Way With 17"*, Sales Talk*, No. 13, June 28th 1972: 14.
[167] Ibid.

customers often asked what colours she was wearing, with many ultimately being unable to 'resist' buying 'the same shades **and** others'.[168]

Although younger sales assistants avoided the alienating and often condescending instructions offered by older cosmetic assistants, the '17 Girl' was still tasked with the complex job of guiding the cosmetic habits of Seventeen's insecure consumers. The tactics adopted by Boots managers consequently echoed the techniques of popular teen-magazines, which increasingly replaced frameworks of moralism with those of education.[169] While it was important for the '17 Girl' to project aspirational levels of cosmetic expertise, her role always prioritised offering fun, open-ended advice, rather than exacting instructions for how Seventeen had to be used. A humorous staff cartoon entitled 'The Pitfalls of Penelope' outlined how '17 Girls' were expected to help their customers 'make the right choice' by chatting to them 'nicely' and offering advice 'tactfully' (Image 3.9). In this context, the '17 Girl's' role was often reduced to offering reactive forms of advice, with some opting to use their own cosmetic skills as an informal, instructional template for how Seventeen products could be applied. For example, one '17 Girl' suggested she wore a different Seventeen product every day, so that she could 'show customers just how they look when they're on'.[170] The '17 Girl's' advice therefore reflected the product's over-arching invitation to personal exploration, by attempting to foster a certain degree of individual cosmetic agency amongst its users.

[168] WBA/BT/11/38/1/12- "Selling 17 Successfully", *Sales Talk*, No. 27, October 4th 1972: 8. Emphasis in original.
[169] Kenny, ""We Are No Longer Certain"," 90.
[170] WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, "*Seventeen and Things*, *edition three,* November 1971": 1.

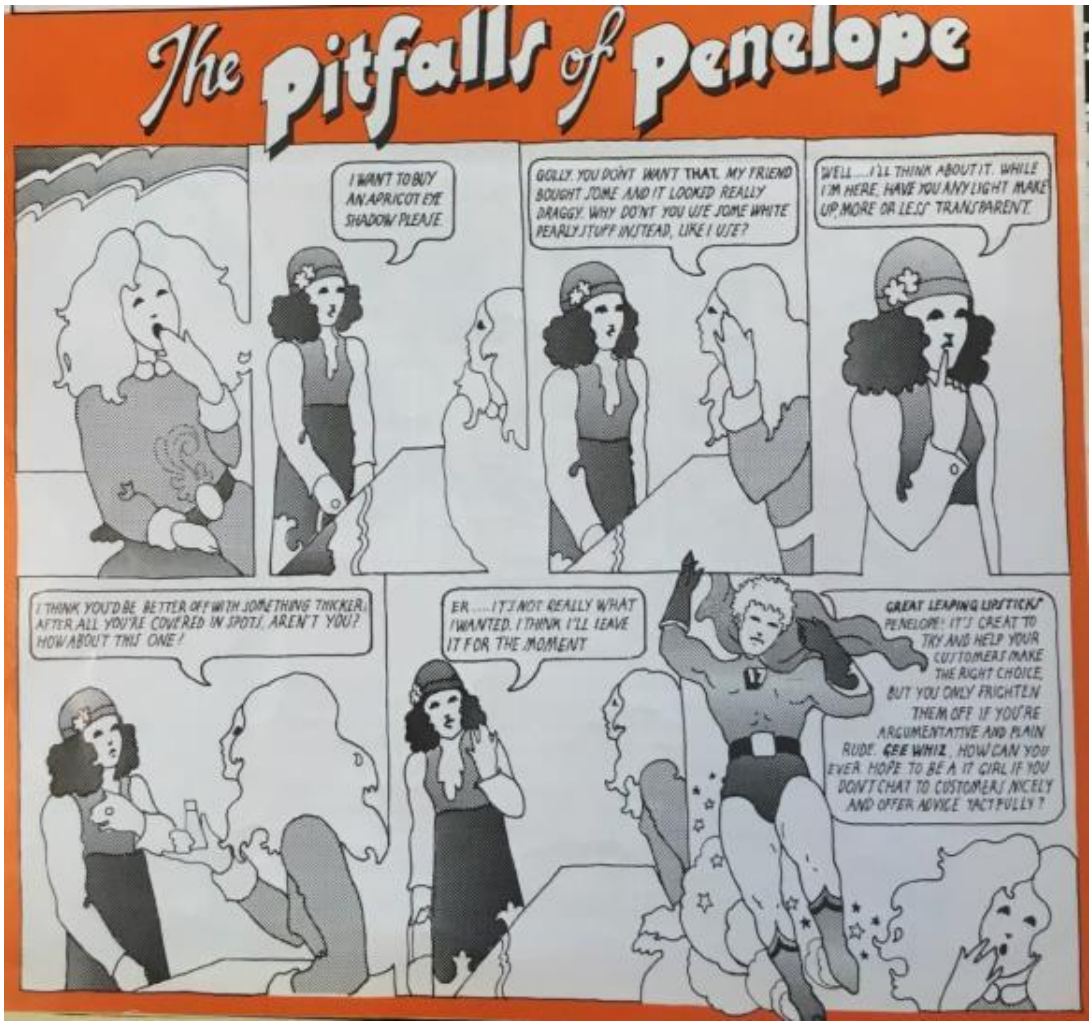


Image 3.9- The Pitfalls of Penelope cartoon, taken from WBA/BT/11/38/1/16- 17 New Product Sheets, '*Seventeen and Things*, *edition three,* November 1971': 6.

The informal advice shared by the '17 Girl' was an important factor in Seventeen's popularity. One staff magazine described how there was always a 'buzz' of activity around Seventeen's counters, as teenage girls began to make Boots shops a regular destination on their shopping expeditions.[171] Nonetheless, despite appearing to offer teenagers a relevant and modernised sales experience, it was clear that installing the '17 Girl' as the figurehead of a counter-based system of guidance and advice, actually rerouted customers back towards the company's traditional methods of

[171] WBA/BT/11/38/1/12-"The 17 Story": 10.

counter selling. Somewhat ironically then, the over-arching sales approach, which teen-girl respondents had claimed was ‘dull’ and ‘old-fashioned’ in 1968, remained largely unchanged in the case of Seventeen cosmetics. The company had merely replaced the figure of the more mature sales lady with a younger, more aspirational, model, but she nevertheless still oversaw the selling process in a way that appeared to contradict the more contemporary aspects of self-selection techniques. Furthermore, while she was a figure of admiration and respect for many of her customers, the exemplary, non-threatening ways in which the '17 Girl' used cosmetics was a significant buttress to Seventeen’s mainstream values and ambitions. As a figure operating diligently within Boots’ rules of employment, any cosmetic aspirations she projected were always moderated, and any experiments she undertook for herself were always contained. The '17 Girl' was thus an important visual embodiment of precisely the type of conforming, attentive ‘nice girl’ the Seventeen brand had always sought to attract.

Conclusion

Seventeen’s launch in July 1968 represented a reactive, rather than a pioneering, business decision. By offering fun, self-expressive and cheap make-up products, brands such as Rimmel, Outdoor Girl and Woolworth’s-own Baby Doll had established the conditions of the emergent teenage cosmetic market and encapsulated much of what it meant to be a contemporary teenaged make-up wearer. Such traits were at odds with how Boots traditionally conceptualised make-up usage, with the company’s reputation as a specialist cosmetic provider largely constructed around the figure of the older, employed woman seeking a more refined and glamorous

look. After the company's own research had demonstrated that teen-girls preferred to shop elsewhere, bosses altered their established approaches by launching a new style of cosmetic product capable of capturing the needs and tastes of this new generation of cosmetic users. While Seventeen's immediate popularity indicated that these changes held significant appeal to post-war Britain's emerging cohort of young, affluent consumers, this chapter has demonstrated that these successes were contingent upon a style of branding, advertising and in-store sale that upheld the moderated tendencies of Boots' wider post-war retail strategy. Seventeen's reactive nature therefore had a significant bearing on its formulation, with the product containing a complex, negotiated characterisation that neither straightforwardly replicated contemporary youth cultures nor attempted to envelop teens within the company's traditionally adult spheres of consumption.

Boots bosses were able to differentiate Seventeen from its nearest rivals by targeting their cosmetic range towards the recognisable social figure of the 'nice-girl', whose polite, mainstream image was understood to be the ideal complement to the company's wider middle-class values of tastefulness and respectability. Associating their product with this well-established form of femininity lent the Seventeen brand an element of authenticity, while at the same time providing teen-girls with an alternative form of make-up application that was deliberately more conventional than the edgier, recalcitrant representations of contemporary youth culture. The use of an own-brand product was of pivotal importance to this process of differentiation, as only own-branded goods afforded Boots managers wholesale controls over how they might appeal to and target the teen-girl

shopper. This element of control was exhibited in different ways. Firstly, the brand's sense of innocence and homeliness was positioned in direct opposition to Woolworth's transatlantic cultures and the working-class ideas of excess and crassness its Baby Doll product was felt to symbolise. Secondly, Seventeen's overarching didactic framework sought to guide a girl's cosmetic consumption in line with the company's personalised service traditions, while also instilling notions of orderly and restrained femininity into their everyday make-up routines. The distinctive framing of Seventeen therefore provides a potent example that can broaden the scholarly literature's focus on resistant forms of youth culture, while also challenging the classless, egalitarian interpretations posited by scholars of post-war youth.[172] It also provides compelling new evidence for the ways in which new post-war teenage brands utilised the concept of the 'nice-girl' to sell and market their products, with pre-existing analysis largely interpreting it as a moral behavioural framework primarily communicated through contemporary teen-girl publications.[173]

Although Boots had been operating its unique version of self-selection for nearly a decade, the introduction of Seventeen in 1968 saw executives further adapt their in-store sales methods to ensure they appeared relevant to contemporary teen-girl tastes. The installation of young sales assistants, the product's emphasis upon fun self-experimentation, the cultivation of collective in-store destinations and the use of modern open-displayed fixtures that facilitated browsing, all demonstrated that Seventeen's cohort of customers were offered retail experiences that were distinct from the

[172] Todd and Young, "Baby-Boomers."
[173] Charnock, "Teenage Girls."; Watkiss Singleton, "The Boy I'm Going to Marry."

company's conventional self-selection model. Nevertheless, as these experiences remained firmly within the structures and regulations of the company's counter-service traditions, they always rejected the independent modes of consumption, and representations of retail modernity, offered within contemporary self-service spaces. Seventeen's 'new' buying experience thus always limited the forms of retail modernity it was willing to offer its adolescent customers, with the process displaying a synergy with the brand's conventional identity and the wider notions of refinement and elegance underwriting Boots' post-war stores. While the scholarly literature has hitherto focused on novel forms of shopping and their role in formulating distinctive youth cultures, the example from Boots demonstrates that the everyday consuming habits of post-war teenage girls were also shaped by hybridised retail experiences that openly modulated aspects of the modern with mainstream conventions.

The mediation of the sales process, by young staff who projected and embodied the retailer's values, was crucial in offering Seventeen the appropriate level of credibility as a new teen specific product. The presence of the '17 Girl' was a decisive factor in the brand's success and can explain how a product that promoted values of moderation and tastefulness could be successful within a wider retailing ecology claiming to offer consumers new forms of personal freedom and choice. The next chapter therefore explores this process in more depth, by analysing how Boots employees were positioned as the lynchpin for upholding and realising the ambitions of this moderated sales system.

Chapter Four- 'Self-Service Shops do not Run Themselves': The Demands and Expectations of Retail Work in the Self-Selection Era c.1960-1975.

On May 17th 1961, the *South Shields Gazette* covered the opening of the town's new Boots store. Detailing the facilities within the new self-selection branch, the article brought attention to the service counters 'looked after by trained assistants' who, in spite of the shop's modernised amenities, continued to 'supply articles which a customer may want to ask questions about'.[1] In 1970, the *Boots News* also reported that the retailer's longstanding 'concern for personal service' featured heavily within the design of its prototype self-service store opened at Wigston Magna, Leicestershire.[2] While the article discussed the modern customer's desire for 'streamlined' retail trading, it also noted how the new store had retained both a dispensary and cosmetics counter that still allowed staff to 'advise and sell'. The article also described how cards were 'displayed prominently' around the store, 'inviting customers to ask for help and advice' whenever it was needed.[3] Although these two examples each represented slightly different models of selling, both demonstrated Boots' commitment to staff expertise and the company's desire to keep employees as a pivotal part of its post-war retail offer. As chapter one argued, the firm's model of self-selection foregrounded the availability of employee skill, with staff continuing to influence both the organisation and the atmosphere of Boots' sales environments. Building

[1] Article contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book. Taken from, "A Space Problem is Solved", *South Shields Gazette,* May 17th 1961.
[2] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Self-Service-but there's still that personal touch" *Boots News*, January 1971: 8.
[3] Ibid.

upon the example of the '17 Girl' discussed in chapter three, the following chapter explores these ideas of employee skill in more depth.

While detailed examinations of self-service era shop work are limited, the majority of academic studies tend to marginalise the histories of retail employees, by focusing upon the efficiencies and the impersonal nature of self-service systems.[4] These tendencies were observable within contemporary sociological studies, such as Olive Robinson and John Wallace's 1974 assessment that 'self-selection…tended to minimize, if not eliminate, the service and specialized knowledge content of the sale assistant's jobs'. According to the authors, such systems ultimately led to the 'de-skilling of the bulk of the retail labour force'.[5] These ideas were sustained within subsequent historical works. For example, by conceptualising modern-day shopping as a 'relationship between the customers and goods', Rachel Bowlby largely dismisses the role employees played in shaping the shop-floor experience.[6] Furthermore, her claim that the shopper was 'on her own' and that the human salesman was 'no longer part of the scene', tended to characterise modern shopping as a phenomenon primarily characterised by the *absence* of those skills and personal interactions previously mandated by the counter-service system.[7] Additional studies into post-war retail labour have emphasised this sense of loss or depreciation. For example, Paul du Gay has highlighted the 'reduction in the number of sales staff' required by

[4] Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened."; Usherwood, "Mrs Housewife ".
[5] Olive Robinson and John Wallace, "Part-Time Employment and Low Pay in Retail Distribution in Britain," *Industrial Relations Journal* 5, no. 1 (1974): 40. For a broader discussion of deskilling see, Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital : The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998).
[6] Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 31.
[7] Ibid., 35, 37.

adoptees of self-service methods.[8] Other scholars have understood this sense of loss in relation to diminishing employee skills and knowledge. Dorothy Davis argued retail selling became 'immensely simpler and less skilled' during the twentieth-century, with many contemporary shopkeepers becoming 'frankly ignorant' of the merchandise they sold to consumers.[9] In addition, Bethan Bide's investigation of early post-war department stores suggested a 'shortage of skilled staff' motivated the emporia's uptake of self-service methodologies.[10] This ensured that in comparison with their inter-war predecessors, buying habits within the self-service department store no longer relied upon 'the personal attention provided by knowledgeable and skilled salespeople'.[11] The social and economic standing of shop work was also conceptualised in negative terms, with Pamela Cox arguing the 'market value' of retail employees 'fell quite dramatically over the course of the twentieth-century'.[12]

An analysis of Boots' model of self-selection challenges the literature's linear interpretations of workforce decline. Yet, while company bosses insisted on sustaining the availability of trained staff, their new sales system was incapable of guaranteeing entirely uniformed levels of employee proficiency. In January 1980, a report compiling the status and current practices of Boots' retail employees claimed school-leavers and careers advisors considered a job in retail distribution a 'last resort' that was traditionally reserved for those individuals with 'limited academic ability'. The report also described a female

[8] du Gay, "Self-Service," 150.
[9] Dorothy Davis, *A History of Shopping* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 277.
[10] Bide, "More Than Window Dressing," 994.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Cox, "Shop Girls," 18.

dominated sector, distinguished by its high levels of turnover, part-time working-hours and 'relatively low' salaries.[13] It therefore raised questions about the extent to which Boots' staff-centred model of self-selection was ever realistically achievable within a wider retailing ecology of efficiency, convenience and customer-controlled choice. The concept of employee skill was thus always highly ambiguous, even within a retail system seeking to uphold and project such values.

By exploring the expectations placed upon Boots' shop-floor workers, the following chapter analyses the intrinsic tensions of the company's self-selection system. It argues that while Boots executives maintained expectations concerning employee skill and expertise, such demands were regularly challenged by the modern sales techniques the company had chosen to deploy. Focused on the years 1960-75, the chapter is divided into three main sections. The first of these examines the product knowledge, customer service and aesthetic presentation skills demanded of Boots employees. In contrast with the literature's focus upon change and the loss of counter-service traditions, the section emphasises the continuation of many of the company's inter-war shop-floor practices. It illustrates Boots' genuine efforts to build retail experiences around the expertise pertaining from the company's role as pharmaceutical specialists. The section also demonstrates that such approaches helped to shape the impressions of skill projected onto Boots customers.

[13] WBA/BT/5/17/5/9- Report to Group Board: "Staffing Policy and Practice in the Eighties", January 1980, 3.

While these demonstrations of skill proved largely successful, section two explores the schism between such projections and the realities of the company's shop-floor. To do so, it uses the 1965 relaunch of the Casual Customer programme— a 'secret-shopper' initiative designed to survey the actions of retail employees. The Casual Customer programme complicates understandings of Boots' workplace expertise, with its reports used to illustrate a more uncertain picture of employee expectation and practice. While the company's presentation of skill was a genuine attempt to differentiate its shops from other high-street rivals, it proved susceptible to wider socio-economic pressures. Section three moves the analysis forward by examining the ways in which the modernised imperatives of self-service techniques undermined the company's deep-rooted expectations for expertise and skill. It explores the growth of part-time work, the associated presence of the Saturday Girl and the heightening levels of suspicion cast over employee actions, to show a more nuanced picture of self-service era employees than has hitherto been presented within the literature. It argues that Boots' corporate vision of skill was compromised by having to respond to the economic realities and operational logics of the self-service system.

Continuity of Skill

During the 1930s, Boots' sales assistants received 12 lessons on how to offer good customer service.[14] Issued as a booklet of written instructions by the company's staff-training department, the lessons promoted exceptional interpersonal skills, sound product knowledge and a positive attitude as the three core attributes of the sales assistant's role. For example, Lesson Two

[14] WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Staff-Training Department papers on Customer Service, c.1930s.

informed employees that the 'real essence' and 'foundation' of good salesmanship related to the 'personal relations' cultivated between 'the buyer and the seller'.[15] Lesson Three listed the necessary character traits of the company's employees, with 'courtesy,' 'alertness,', 'knowledge', 'patience,' 'cheerfulness,' and 'tact' deemed essential for nurturing good sales encounters.[16] Employees were also offered practical tips on improving customer relations, with Lesson Ten asking staff to develop 'the habit of learning the names of customers' as well as memorising the 'things they usually' bought.[17] In Lesson Eight, employees were instructed to learn how to read a shopper's bodily cues, with the document claiming staff needed to be 'constantly on the watch for indications of the customer's ideas and tastes'.[18] The Lessons therefore demanded highly adept and agile forms of retail labour that were capable of guiding sales in response to a customer's specific needs, tastes, class or desires.

Employees had to ensure their friendly demeanour was closely allied with in-depth product knowledge. For example, Lesson Three claimed 'a successful sales-person' did something more than simply exchange 'so much goods for so much money', while Lesson Four declared selling required '*knowledge,* and something more than knowing Somebody's Cream is a 1/- pot, or twice as much for 1/9.'[19] Sales assistants were encouraged to learn more than just an item's price, but also its individual qualities and distinct functions. They were also encouraged to extend their knowledge across the complete range

[15] WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Papers on Customer Service: Lesson Two.
[16] WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Papers on Customer Service: Lesson Three.
[17] WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Papers on Customer Service: Lesson Ten.
[18] WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Papers on Customer Service: Lesson Eight.
[19] WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Papers on Customer Service: Lesson Three; WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Papers on Customer Service: Lesson Four. Emphasis in original.

of merchandise sold in stores. As Lesson Four made clear, 'a very important' part of the sales assistant's job was using this product knowledge to provide customers with the 'reasons…why' they should buy particular lines of merchandise.[20]

While these demands were largely consistent with the person-to-person interactions of a traditional counter-service system, the lessons nonetheless suggested it was the attitude of Boots employees that set them apart from their high-street rivals. Lesson One stated that customers regularly discovered there was 'something different about a Boots shop', through the ways in which 'helpful' and 'cheerful' staff 'evidently enjoyed their work'.[21] Lessons One and Three therefore suggested that if employees resolved to learn their job, whilst also demonstrating to customers that they enjoyed and were 'interested in it', they would go a long way to encapsulating the necessary traits of a Boots retail employee.[22] Lesson Twelve even went as far as suggesting the pride and conscientiousness exhibited by Boots workers was exceptional, with 'few firms' capable of matching the 'long terms of service' carried out by its employees.[23] The Lessons thus depicted Boots employees as highly adept professionals, who were responsible for defining the positive and profitable sales environments of Boots stores. Furthermore, their depiction of attentive, dedicated, adaptable, and knowledgeable sales assistants epitomised the types of skills contemporary scholars have understood as being lost to the advent of self-service methods.

[20] Ibid.
[21] WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Papers on Customer Service: Lesson Three.
[22] WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Papers on Customer Service: Lesson One and Three.
[23] WBA/BT/5/34/1/18- Papers on Customer Service: Lesson Twelve.

While notions of loss and decline pervade descriptions of self-service within the secondary literature, the history shows how some early post-war commentators tended to view its arrival in more nuanced terms. During the early 1950s, research published on both sides of the Atlantic accentuated the continuing necessity of staff within modernised self-service systems. In 1951, the Co-operative movement produced a 'detail assessment' of its earliest experiences with the new format.[24] The report noted that shop managers needed to maintain a degree of shop-floor supervision to ensure complaints and other operational delays were dealt with expediently. Stating 'self-service shops do not run themselves', the report argued shop efficiency and customer satisfaction risked being compromised if too many employees 'withdrew to other tasks' and left the shop floor 'virtually unattended'.[25] A 1956 Harvard Business School report claimed self-service adoptees needed to spend time discussing their plans for conversion with existing employees. Noting the number of full-time employees had 'not generally been reduced' by the format's adoption, the report encouraged managers to tell their staff that 'self-service' did not mean 'no service'.[26] Harry Hedges' 1957 guidebook also argued that a self-service store could be 'equally as 'personal' as any other kind of shop'. Hedges went on to claim that contemporary shopkeepers had a 'greater opportunity' to provide personalised service than the competitor who 'doggedly' remained behind their counter.[27]

[24] J.A. Hough and F. Lambert, "Self-Service Shops: A Joint Report", (Manchester: The Co-Operative, 1951), 1.
[25] Ibid., 13.
[26] Robinson and May, "Self-Service in Variety Stores", 30.
[27] Hedges, *This Way to Self-Service*, 32.

Once the ongoing importance of shop-floor employees had been accepted, self-service retailers needed to decide *how* to most effectively deploy their labour. At Boots, such decisions continued to be guided by the company's role as an employer of professional pharmacists, with the expertise arising from this position heavily influencing all aspects of the retailer's workforce expectations. By placing the provision of pharmaceutical knowledge and advice at the centre of the company's post-war retail experience, executives were able to extend the core elements of the inter-war Lessons and directives. This sense of continuity can be seen within a 1948 employee circular, released in response to the inauguration of the National Health Service (NHS).[28] It claimed that as prescriptions were now dispensed without charge, customers would no longer make their pharmacy choices based upon price, but would instead make decisions subject to the quality of in-store service they received. The circular encouraged staff to view their role as a service, rather than a transaction. Suggesting such good service began with a polite reception at the counter, the circular went on to suggest that repeat business hinged upon the employee's ability to treat the customer in ways they too would wish to be treated. It also went on to claim that Boots stores would now be judged on the way it received its millions of prescription customers, with the capacity to provide good service determining the company's share of this significant new line of pharmacy business.[29]

The introduction of the NHS therefore offered renewed impetus to the company's long-held emphasis upon exceptional customer service and helps to explain Boots' post-war propensity to place the values and ethos of its

[28] Taken from, WBA/BT/11/38/2/8- Display Material from in-store marketing, 1937-1948.
[29] Ibid.

pharmacists above all other aspects of company operations. Throughout the post-war period, the company's internal literature continued to stress, 'We are chemists first', with one staff brochure stating that 'whatever the range of goods on sale', such principles would never be compromised.[30] An additional staff brochure claimed dispensing was the 'hub' for all of the company's 'retail activity'.[31] In many respects, these claims became even louder and more frequent the closer the company came to implementing self-selection mentalities. For example, the 1958 Annual Report claimed that the company's plans for retail modernisation would be undertaken while 'always remembering that we are Chemists first'.[32] The expectations placed upon dispensary staff and the call for improved levels of customer service, consequently infiltrated all aspects of the company's post-war labour force, with sales assistants expected to recognise that 'good service' amounted to 'everything!' within Boots' modernised self-selection stores.[33]

The company's status as professional pharmacists also had a significant influence over how Boots' sales assistants were expected to dress and present themselves. Pamela Cox has used the concept of aesthetic labour to understand how standards of customer service were enacted within twentieth-century retail work. According to Cox, the term related to the 'management of workers' physical looks, style, personal presentation and performance' to ensure they embodied particular institutional 'attitudes and

[30] WBA/BT/28/40/4/5- *Building for the Future; Reviewing the activities of Boots Pure Drug Co. Ltd* (Nottingham: Boots Pure Drug Company Limited, 1960): 10.
[31] WBA/BT/27/39/3/1- "About Boots" Staff booklet, 1970, 7.
[32] WBA/BT/4/15/2/14- Chairman's Statement, Chairman J.P. Savage, 70th Annual General Meeting, 16th July 1958.
[33] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Prescriptions", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 133, September 24th 1965: 1.

capacities'.[34] The aesthetic labour demanded of Boots' post-war sales assistant stemmed directly from the firm's traditions as retail chemists. In 1938, *The Bee* published an article which suggested that in order to inspire confidence in both the customer and the individual worker themselves, the company's pharmacists needed to be 'exceedingly careful' over their personal appearance and bodily presentation.[35] However, the bodily expectations placed upon these largely male pharmacists did have to undergo significant alterations once they were applied to the company's predominately female sales assistant workers.

Boots' post-war executives drew strong associations between a sales assistant's neat and clean appearance and their ability to deliver exceptional forms of customer service. In 1963, industry publication the *Pharmacy News* featured an article about the uniforms of pharmacy assistant staff. The article demonstrated that high-standards of aesthetic labour were common throughout the pharmacy profession, with the appearance of the 'girl behind the counter' understood to be the single most important factor in impressing customers and making them feel that they were shopping within an 'efficiently run' store.[36] As well as claiming those in the profession needed to use 'deodorant', be 'hygiene conscious' and have 'clean finger-nails', the article also suggested that sales girls needed to be 'easy on the eye'.[37] However, while it stressed the importance of assistants adopting a fashionable, 'pretty' look, the article also emphasised that any such attractiveness should not become an 'obtrusive factor' in the 'general

[34] Cox, "Shop Girls," 7-8.
[35] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2-"The Chemist as a Salesman", *The Bee*, Vol. 15, No. 5, December 1938: 281.
[36] Sonia Roberts, "Fashion in the Pharmacy", *Pharmacy News,* October 22nd 1963: 7.
[37] Ibid.

appearance' of the retail space.[38] The article consequently described how pharmacy assistants were expected to use their aesthetic labour in complex, skilful ways that both advertised, but did not overshadow, the pharmacists' wider remit of care and responsibility. It was also clear that the moderated, pleasant appearance expected of pharmacy staff aimed to embolden the wider profession's class-coded projections of respectability and excellence.

These ideas were also evident in Boots' use of uniforms.[39] In 1972, the company's original two-tone grey tunic was replaced with a modernised, 'elegantly styled polyester cotton overall' of orchid pink and blue (Image 4.1).[40] The garment's highly feminised character was demonstrated by its bright pink colour, skirt shape and flat collar, with wearers receiving additional fashion advice on which shades of Seventeen and Number Seven cosmetic worked best with its design.[41] Its stylish, contemporary feel was reinforced by the fact female employees around the country selected the new design via a series of 'informal fashion shows' and in-store 'mannequin parades'.[42] Nevertheless, while the uniform's vibrant colour was described as a 'revolution in sartorial style', its design was actually heavily doctored to conform to the retailer's values of respectability. For example, while it was made available in a shorter, mini-skirt design, bosses emphasised the 'mild' nature of its design, with the hem 'never' positioned 'more than four inches above the knee'.[43]

[38] Ibid.
[39] For a discussion on workplace uniforms see, Victoria Barnes and Lucy Newton, "Women, Uniforms and Brand Identity in Barclays Bank," *Business History* 64, no. 4 (2022).
[40] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "New Retail Uniform- It's Your Choice", *Boots News*, April 12th 1972: 1.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

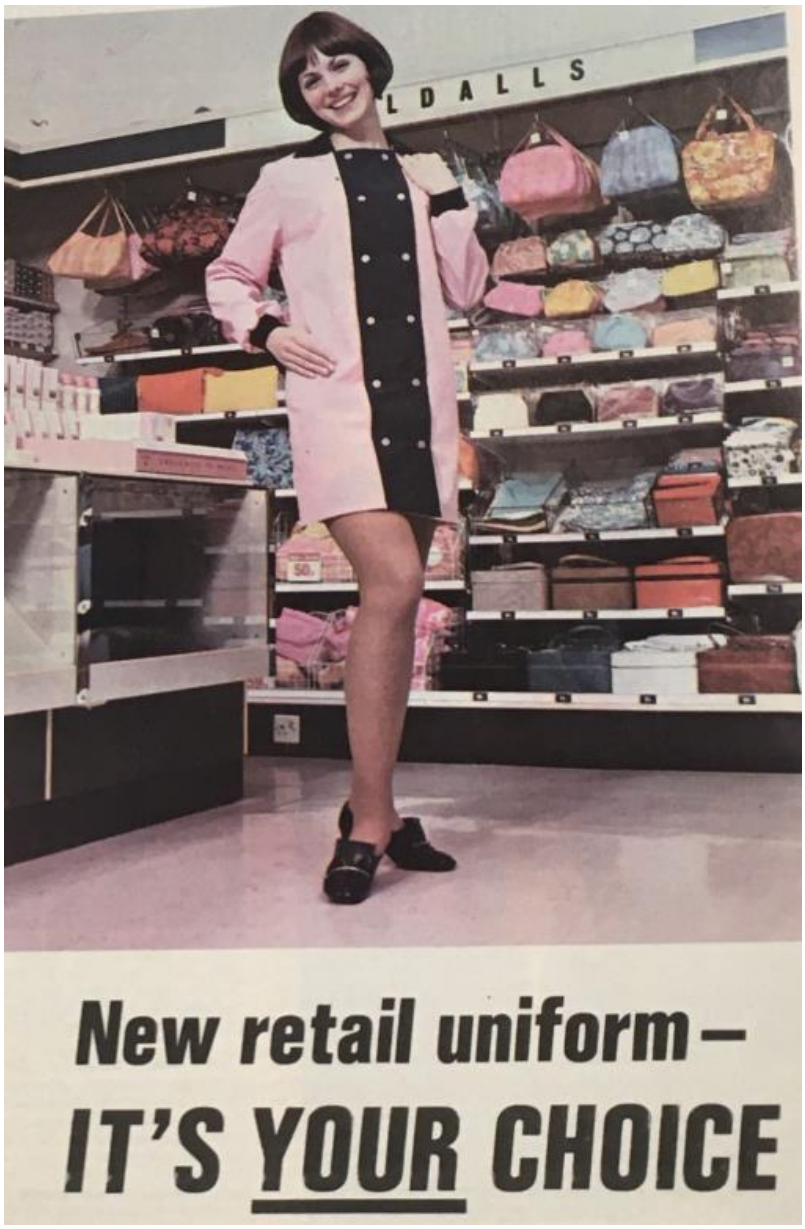


Image 4.1- Image of new Boots overall. (Taken from *Boots News*, April 12th 1972: 1)

The garment also aimed to emphasise the forms of personalised service offered by Boots' sales assistants. According to the *Pharmacy News* article, retailers could choose to adopt a 'completely different shade' of overall as a mark of distinction, and as a means of suggesting to customers that their staff offered an 'even better service' than their competitors did.[44] While the stark orchard pink overall helped employees to standout within the open

[44] Roberts, "Fashion in the Pharmacy", 7.

sales-floor environment of modern Boots stores, its silhouette's close mirroring of a contemporary nurse's uniform also sought to extol the notions of service and skill inherent within the company's model of self-selection. The new uniform therefore underlined the sales assistant's status as an attentive, available worker, whose continued presence on the shop floor accentuated Boots' ambition to help and serve its customers with their health, hygiene and beauty needs.

A 1974 leaflet entitled, 'The Personal Touch', outlined the strict corporeal codes issued to employees.[45] The leaflet made it clear that almost every aspect of the sales assistant's appearance fell under the control of the company's managers. It asked staff to regulate eight separate areas of their body, with employees told that managerial scrutiny applied to 'Your Hair', 'Your Hands', 'Your Nails' and 'Your Teeth'. Employees were also asked to be mindful of their 'Feet', 'Legs', 'Dress' and 'Overall' and personal hygiene. Categorising work as a 'special occasion', the leaflet demanded employees take as much pride in their work based appearance as they would during important social events. 'Every minute' that employees were facing customers was therefore regarded as being worthy of close personal attention, with the leaflet clarifying that in both 'manner and appearance', workers were expected to always be the 'perfect hostess'.[46] The leaflet included instructions on how to achieve these objectives. For example, employees were asked not to wear roll-neck jumpers or blouses underneath their overall because they looked 'awful'. They were also ordered to wash and treat hands with lotion to ensure they were 'smooth and soft' and to keep

[45] WBA/BT/5/39/3/33- "The Personal Touch" leaflet, c.1975.
[46] Ibid.

nails ‘well manicured’ and at a ‘reasonable length’. After reminding readers, ‘you are a working girl, and proud of it’, the leaflet went on to encourage the women to wear their hair in a ‘practical, business-like style’, because, they were in a ‘shop, not a disco’.[47]

While, on one level, the leaflet can be judged as subjugating Boots’ sales assistants, on another level it can be read as an illustration of the scope employees had for expressing high-levels of individual skill. The leaflet’s long and exacting list of orders underscored how the daily performance of orderly, controlled forms of aesthetic labour was challenging for Boots employees. The skills required of the company’s assistants thus embodied the wider levels of quality and excellence strived for by Boots executives, with bosses drawing parallels between the aesthetic labour of their staff and the orderly nature of their modernised self-selection stores. For example, the leaflet claimed that as Boots stores were ‘bright, clean, attractive places’ and the merchandise sold therein was of a ‘good quality…and always nicely presented’, it followed that the company’s employees also needed to be ‘presentable’ and ‘efficient’.[48] By drawing these connections, bosses were making it clear that the company’s sales assistants were a fundamental element of their modernised retail experience, who skilfully upheld its wider values and objectives.

The synergy between the staff and the store was exemplified in May 1972, when Boots opened its largest ever branch within Nottingham’s Victoria Shopping Centre. According to the *Boots News*, the branch’s senior

[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

managers were 'spending a lot of time' on the question of staff appearance, with many customers taking a renewed interest in the issue due to the modernity of the new shopping precinct.[49] Boots' local TGM, Derek Happs, claimed that the attractiveness of the Victoria Centre should encourage the company's employees to seek equivalent levels of beauty and individual presentation. This process was even facilitated by an in-store staff competition, to discover which of the female assistants maintained the 'highest standard of personal appearance'.[50] By making beauty and regulated forms of attractiveness a pivotal strand of the sales assistant's skillset, company bosses were continuing to justify their worker's place within their newly modernised stores. This approach helped to distinguish Boots from its high-street competitors, as even in the age of self-service and increased customer agency, bosses were demonstrating that the quality and appearance of their staff had received equal weighting with the provision of modern retail facilities.

Throughout the post-war period, Boots executives continued to underline the importance of an employee's product knowledge. In 1953, the staff-training department hosted an exhibition above London's Edgware Road branch. *The Bee* explained how the exhibition wanted to 'emphasise the importance of 'service to the customer'', whilst also enhancing the product knowledge of retail employees.[51] The exhibition consequently presented own-branded products such as toothbrushes, electric shavers and elastic hosiery in 'various phases of manufacture', to ensure staff were 'fully conversant' with

[49] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Victoria Centre: a new concept in shopping, our biggest and best", *Boots News*, June 21st 1972: 8.
[50] Ibid.
[51] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Staff-Training Exhibition", *The Bee*, Vol. 24, No. 1, March 1953: 9.

the qualities and functionality of the products they sold.[52] The 'salient points' of cosmetic brands Coty and Innoxia were also 'brought under review' by the exhibition's displays. As all female assistants were expected to be comfortable describing the features of men's toiletry requirements, the exhibition also included 'useful information' regarding Gillette razor blades.[53]

Despite occurring in parallel with the company's Burnt Oak self-service experiment, the exhibition conveyed little sense of the system's most modern merchandising techniques. According to Barbara Usherwood, the bright, appealing and more detailed product labels used within a self-service system resulted from the fact assistants were 'no longer the end-point of the selling process'.[54] However, Boots' decision to continue investing in the product knowledge of its assistants demonstrated that the retailer's stores were purposely resistant to such trends. Executives were making it clear that despite the shift towards customer agency and selection, important sales information and product knowledge could primarily reside with staff and not just a product's label.

The 1961 staff-training film, 'Point of Sale', also stressed that employees needed to learn their 'goods and prices' (Image 4.2).[55] In ways that mirrored the 1930s Lessons, the film positioned product knowledge as one of the core aspects of a sales assistant's role, alongside a well-kept appearance and a versatile sales approach. In order to accumulate the requisite forms of knowledge, the film encouraged employees to handle merchandise and examine product labels, while they dusted and price-marked stock.

[52] Ibid., 10.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Usherwood, "Mrs Housewife " 124.
[55] WBA/BT/5/34/60/1- 'Point of Sale' film, 1961.

Employees were also encouraged to ask questions of their superiors and to read the various product bulletins, broadsheets and magazines regularly distributed from company headquarters. The film made clear that company bosses did not publish these materials 'for fun', but as a means of helping staff acquire the levels of skill necessary to positively affect a sale.[56]



Image 4.2: Still images from WBA/BT/5/34/60/1 'Point of Sale' Staff-training Film (1961).

The instructions of the 'Point of Sale' film were reinforced within a 1960s training leaflet entitled 'Helping People to Buy'. Issued to all new starters by the company's staff-training department, the leaflet advised employees to use 'every spare minute' to 'learn more' about the purpose and function of the individual items they sold. [57] The patient and highly detailed forms of study recommended in the leaflet illustrated the company's continued

[56] Ibid.
[57] WBA/BT/5/34/1/28/21- Network Training Leaflet, NET 4, "Helping People to Buy", c.1960s.

ambition to position its staff as specialists in their field, with bosses acutely aware that their push for product knowledge was made more eminent by the fact such skills were increasingly rare within the wider ecology of self-service techniques. This was made clear in Chairman W.R. Norman's 1962 address to shareholders, which claimed that the 'movement towards self-selection' demanded more, rather than 'less experience and knowledge'.[58] He consequently reiterated the company's policy of ensuring members of staff were 'available and well able to give advice and help where needed'.[59]

In 1965, the *Merchandise News* included a front-page feature that supported Norman's claims. Written by Retail Sales Manager, H.J. Fraser, the piece responded to the wider insinuation that self-service techniques had produced passive, unthinking sales assistants, whose job was merely to distribute goods to awaiting shoppers.[60] Claiming the company's sales assistant role was different, Fraser stated the job was 'not for handers outers' and instead required active, engaged individuals with extensive forms of 'product knowledge'.[61] Executives were eager for this knowledge to be channelled directly into the promotion and sale of their own-branded goods, with bosses conceptualising that the product's high standards of quality required sales assistants of equal character and distinction (see also chapter two). An additional 1960s training leaflet entitled 'The Seven Stages of Selling', encouraged staff to use own-branded products within the course of their everyday lives to ensure they could easily vouch for their quality and act as

[58] WBA/BT/28/41/2/8- Trading Results and Chairman Statement press-cuttings, 1961-63.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Towsey, *Self-Service Retailing*, 24.
[61] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Not for handers outers", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 109, April 2nd 1965: 1.

knowledgeable own-brand ambassadors.[62] Bosses were therefore using the knowledge and receptiveness of their staff in concert with the projections of quality and taste assigned to their own-branded merchandise, with these synergies helping to uphold the notions of employee skill and availability that were integral to Boots' tempered model of self-selection.

This exhibition of employee skill continued to contradict wider impressions of modernised retailing techniques. A 1965 *Financial Times* article reflected the common belief that self-service methods had both diminished and replaced the capabilities of retail grocery employees. It alleged traditional shopkeeper crafts such as tea blending, as well as the 'specialised knowledge' of local meats and seasonal fruits were being wilfully lost to the mechanised efficiencies and impersonalised imperatives of supermarket operations. It also claimed that self-service supermarkets utilised 'unskilled labour on specialised routine jobs' rather than employing 'skilled men who once needed a 'lifetime in the business''.[63] During the 1960s, Boots' regional newspaper advertisements sought to counteract these popular beliefs, by promoting the opening of new self-selection branches with full-page profiles of individual members of store staff (Image 4.3). Containing the headline 'Courtesy and Smiles', the advertisement was a standardised, company-directed template utilised for store openings in locations including Glasgow, Bolton, Kettering and Bradford.[64] While the advertisements focused upon the hobbies and social lives of the branch's senior managers and departmental heads, they nonetheless aimed to counteract the prevailing narratives of

[62] WBA/BT/5/34/1/28/17- Network Training Leaflet, NET 5, "The Seven Stages of Selling", c.1960s.
[63] Patrick Coldstream, "Supermarkets: Symbols of the Affluent Society", Financial Times, May 25th 1965, 19.
[64] See articles contained within WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book c.1960s.

retail deskilling through their presentation of a new type of retail expert who appeared both normal and relatable, while also emotionally invested to their career as a Boots employee.

The profiles accompanying the October 1961 opening of the new Bolton store portrayed employees as friendly, approachable individuals deeply embedded within the civic life of their local community. Branch manager Mr Harold Thomasson, was portrayed as 'Bolton-born and educated' and a member of the town's 'Pharmaceutical Committee', while Head of Stationery and Art, Miss Cunliffe, was depicted as an 'ardent' supporter of both Bolton Wanderers Football Club and Lancashire County Cricket Club.[65] In an attempt to make staff seem more relatable, the profiles regularly divulged intimate details including the employee's marital status and living conditions. For example, customers were informed that newlywed Book department head, Mrs Delia Rawlison had just returned from her honeymoon in Devon. Readers were also told that dispenser Miss Elizabeth Bretherton, was a swimming and dressmaking enthusiast, who lived at home with her parents in nearby Chorley.[66]

[65] See, WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book. Taken from, "Courtesy and Smiles at the Big New Boots", *Bolton Evening News,* Wednesday October 4th 1961: 4.
[66] Ibid.



Big new Glasgow store opens

Largest 'Boots' in Britain

Courtesy and smiles at the Big New Boots!

SCOTS HOLD TOP POSTS

BOOTS SUCCESS STORY IN SCOTLAND

Image 4.3: Example of staff profiles used within local press to promote new store openings- Glasgow 1962. (Taken from WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book)

As well as challenging the impersonal perceptions of modernised, self-service shopping, the profiles presented Boots employees as an accessible feature of the company's new stores, who were always on hand to answer queries in a personable, humane manner. While the *Financial Times'* depiction of the supplanted grocer was tinged with an element of nostalgia, it was nonetheless the case that the more self-service was understood to erode traditional forms of retailing, the more powerful and convincing Boots' professed ability to uphold such values consequently became. The advertisements emphasised the longevity of Boots employees, with four of the female workers shown to have devoted 10 or more years to the business.

Alongside the 27 years of service from 'veteran' Miss Cunliffe, Librarian Mrs Ann Blatchford had 'been with Boots for 17 years'. Readers were also told Head of Surgery and Dietetics, Ms Eva Roberts had spent 20 years with the company, while Ms Ida Knipe had 14 years of experience, seven of which had come within Bolton's toilet and cosmetics team.[67] Emphasising these lengths of service not only helped to validate the staff member's levels of expertise, but also served Boots' wider purposes, by casting them as a favourable employer who nurtured and appreciated the skills of its workforce.

This level of dedication and experience was seen as crucial in enabling Boots staff to offer a superior level of personalised customer service. In his profile, manager Harold Thomasson claimed the store's 'happy staff' helped facilitate enjoyable shopping experiences for customers, while Eva Roberts' profile discussed how she enjoyed meeting people, particularly those who were 'new customers'.[68] As well as promising to put the customer first, the profile advertisement for Bradford's new self-selection store also guaranteed to provide the 'smiles and helpfulness' necessary for pleasant retail experiences.[69] The advertisements thus drew explicit connections between an established and contented workforce and the ability to provide the forms of modernised, pleasurable retail experiences outlined in chapter two. Furthermore, the presentation of Boots employees as satisfied, friendly people cultivated the impression that retail work was their vocation, and that they were all suitably positioned to provide exceptional customer service skills.

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] See, WBA/BT/11/45/1/20- Advertising Guard Book. Taken from, "Courtesy and Smiles at the Big New Boots", *Telegraph and Argus*, May 10th 1961: 4.

These exalted customer service skills were seen as essential for the optimal functioning of Boots distinctive version of self-selection. According to one staff brochure, the 'own-brand' model of self-selection helped the company to maintain the 'highest possible standard' of personal service because it had released shop assistants from their 'less important duties' and diverted their 'full attention' onto customers requiring additional advice and support.[70] The system was therefore conceptualised as being ideally suited to the skilful, customer-focused employees promoted in the profiles, as it had largely removed the superfluous elements of counter-service activity, whilst maintaining the core function of interpersonal customer service. This idea was underlined in a separate training document, which claimed the retailer had achieved 'better service', by making the 'simple part of shopping easier for all concerned' and thus releasing 'more' time for 'real selling and real help' whenever and wherever it was required.[71]

The company's employees were consequently encouraged to develop service skills that adapted to this dynamic sales environment. Both the 'Point of Sale' training film and the associated 1960s training leaflets called for versatile sales approaches that were capable of meeting the different needs of Boots' diverse clientele. The film asked employees to offer 'warm-hearted help' and 'kind attention' to those shoppers who looked perplexed by the company's new sales system, while the 'Helping People to Buy' training leaflet expected assistants to cultivate techniques for Boots' different types of shopper, including the 'Decisive', 'Indecisive' and 'Looking around

[70] WBA/BT/28/40/4/5- *Building for the Future,* 8.
[71] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", September 1960, 19.

customer'.[72] They also asked assistants to act as a confidante to regular customers by remembering their names and domestic affairs, as well as their regular purchases and preferred times of shopping. However, employees were also instructed to know the limits of these cordial discussions, with the film telling assistants to be prepared to cut away from longer-form customer interactions to provide fast, polite service to those shoppers utilising self-selection methods. [73] The company therefore presented good salesmanship as a deft craft that required employees to adopt a near constant state of readiness for adaptive forms of individual service skill, while also providing customers with endless quantities of courteous, friendly smiles. While this task appeared very challenging, the leaflet reassured employees that their abilities, and the company's exceptional provision of training, would ensure they soon learned how best to serve each type of customer.[74]

The key measure of service skills therefore rested on each sales employee's ability to recognise a customer's shopping preferences and decipher, in an instant, whether they wished to shop via self-selection or personalised service methods. An additional 1960s training leaflet entitled 'Selling by Design', instructed employees to learn how to 'judge' the 'often unspoken desires' of the retailer's customers.[75] It went on to state that assistants had to 'appreciate the need for versatility of behaviour', whilst also being 'prepared at all times' to deploy their 'common sense' in the pursuit of the 'best possible service to all customers'. This flexible, intuitive approach to service encapsulated what Norman meant in 1962, by self-selection requiring

[72] WBA/BT/5/34/60/1- 'Point of Sale'; WBA/BT/5/34/1/28/21- "Helping People to Buy".
[73] WBA/BT/5/34/60/1- 'Point of Sale'.
[74] WBA/BT/5/34/1/28/21- "Helping People to Buy".
[75] WBA/BT/5/34/1/28/14- Network Training Leaflet, NET 11, "Selling by Design", c.1960s.

increased forms of knowledge and experience. In many ways, the expectations placed upon the company's post-war assistants extended the demands of the inter-war era, because they asked employees to attend simultaneously to both the modern and traditional type of Boots customer. As far as the company's executive was concerned, the capacity to navigate this new sales terrain in friendly and knowledgeable ways was ultimately what distinguished Boots employees from those employed within rival high-street retailers.

Although high-quality customer service had been the cornerstone of Boots' retail offer since the inter-war period, the company's moderated version of self-selection gave new impetus to these long-held practices. In 1966, Acton's branch manager, Mr R.L. Trehorne, had a letter published in the *Merchandise News,* which demonstrated how the successful negotiation of the modern and the traditional had allowed the company to uphold its longstanding reputation for exceptional customer service.[76] Trehorne claimed:

> It is refreshing and satisfying to know that Boots' reputation for courtesy and service is still highly regarded and must appear like an oasis in the desert of impersonal automation. Retention of these qualities whilst outstripping others in modern business methods is a very laudable achievement.[77]

[76] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Appreciations:…a customer for 56 years", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 174, August 12th 1966: 8.
[77] Ibid.

As well as highlighting the element of tradition that ran through the company's post-war operations, Trehorne's letter underlined how the moderated qualities of Boots' self-selection system had bestowed a distinct competitive advantage onto its post-war stores. Furthermore, the letter made it clear that the continued presence and availability of assistants was highly valued by employees, who considered it to have given them and their labour cause for pride and merit.

Such views were echoed by some of Boots' customers. In 1965, a Mrs E.L. Hill wrote a letter of appreciation to staff at the Bow Branch in East London. After complimenting a sales assistant named Miss Bainbridge for her 'fine example of salesmanship', Mrs Hill claimed the 'pleasantness and great helpfulness' she received amounted to 'rare qualities…in this day of indifference' within other shops and stores.[78] The company's distinguished levels of service were also raised within a 1968 letter of thanks from a Miss Elizabeth Pearce. It claimed that in spite of the 'non-caring and non-appreciative attitude of many concerned with 'National Health'', employees from the company's Southampton branch had always provided her with a 'helpful' and consistent level of service.[79] Despite being picked because they provided positive messaging for *Merchandise News* readers, both examples demonstrate that the company's projections of superiority and quality had proved largely successful and that members of the wider public associated Boots' self-selection stores with the exalted, unique forms of customer service skill that the company had become known for since the 1920s and 1930s.

[78] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Salesmanship", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 136, October 15th 1965: 8.
[79] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Appreciations", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 259, June 7th 1968: 8.

The Casual Customer

In July 1965, the *Merchandise News* announced the revival of the company's inter-war 'Casual Customer' scheme, an initiative that saw an unidentified shopper visit Boots stores to judge the quality of service they had received.[80] Published monthly within the *Merchandise News,* the Casual Customer's reports helped managers construct a detailed picture of the quality of service being performed within the company's stores. Tasked with uncovering examples of 'good service', the Casual Customer's evaluation criteria mirrored the expectations of the company's early 1960s training documents. Therefore, as well as needing to offer 'a welcoming smile' and courteous 'whole-hearted attention', employees were instructed to be mindful of their appearance (Image 4.4).[81] Employees were also warned that the Casual Customer was looking for a sound 'knowledge of the merchandise' and expected to receive recommendations of companion lines, economy sized savings and the suitable own-branded alternatives to popular proprietary goods.

[80] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "The Casual Customer Shops Again at Boots", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 125, July 30th 1965: 1.
[81] Ibid.



Image 4.4: Cartoon used to promote the relaunch of the Casual Customer initiative (Taken from *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 125, July 30th 1965:1)

The scheme's revival after nearly a quarter of century was fraught with complexity. On the one hand, its reintroduction was a proactive measure that appeared to sustain the company's commitment to inter-war retailing practices. Yet, on the other hand, its resumption was reactive and can be read as serving as an admission that the service within Boots stores was failing to meet the standards projected within the company literature. Due to a widening disparity between the organisation's vision of employee skill and its actual everyday existence amongst shop-floor personnel, executives sought to use the Casual Customer scheme to impose discipline and create a consistent, replicable template for employee behaviour and performance. While executives rewarded compliance with a one-guinea prize for every instance of 'good service', the scheme nevertheless illustrated that heightened levels of surveillance were being cast upon employee actions.[82]

[82] Ibid.

Claims the Casual Customer was ready to purchase 'anything' from 'anywhere' at 'any time' reinforced the idea, that in an effort to drive up service standards, executives were prepared to extend the threat of scrutiny and observation to all of their retail employees.[83] The Casual Customer's presence within Boots' post-war stores consequently raises questions on whether the high-standards of customer service expected by the organisation were only ever achievable through coercion and the strict observations of employee action, rather than stemming from the innately humane characteristics presented in the 1960s profile advertisements.

The Casual Customer's first report, listing six separate encounters, was published in the *Merchandise News* on August 20th 1965. In a demonstration of both the Casual Customer's candid nature and the varying quality of service they received, the report contained an equal number of both positive and negative interactions. Presented under the heading, 'A Glum Transaction', one account described an interaction almost entirely bereft of the skills demanded by the business. As well as explaining how the worker had missed opportunities to greet the customer, offer product information or propose suitable companion lines, it also noted how the assistant had produced a pot of Number Seven Moisturising Cream with a 'thunderous bang', while offering 'no smile, no 'thank you' and no bill'. [84] A positive encounter was presented under the heading, 'Really Interested' and involved the purchase of suntan lotion. The report described how the toilet assistant, Miss Stafford, took an interest in 'the products she was selling', by enquiring

[83] Ibid.
[84] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Shopping at Boots. Casual Customer Reports", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 128, August 20th 1965: 1.

into the customer's needs, making brand recommendations and demonstrating the product's qualities. Noting that nothing appeared 'too much trouble for her', the Casual Customer claimed the smiling, attentive service was the type of in-store attention they liked to receive.[85]

This first collection of reports ended with a summary of the Casual Customer's initial thoughts and reactions to Boots' stores. Noting the high standards of aesthetic labour performed by the company's sales assistants, they claimed 'Les Boots Girls' were 'extremely well groomed' with 'very smart' overalls and 'beautifully cared for hands'.[86] They stated that all were therefore 'excellent adverts' for the health and beauty products sold within the stores. They were more critical of the attitudes they encountered, claiming that while some assistants were personable and smiley, most were in fact, 'gloomy Jills', who appeared as though they had recently had a 'tiff with the boy friend [sic]'.[87] The report also hinted at the ways in which self-selection methods were nullifying the standards of service desired by company officials. Noting that they had made 'many purchases' during their first round of visits, the Casual Customer commented that many of these were 'ordinary sales' where they had asked for what they wanted and then it was 'wrapped, passed over and that's that'.[88] Despite looking for that 'little extra interest', they were often left disappointed by the assistant's actions. Furthermore, while assistants were generally aware of Boots' own-branded goods, many lacked the enthusiasm or ability to 'comment upon,

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

recommend, show knowledge of, or demonstrate, in fact, to SELL', any of these products.[89]

The second Casual Customer report of September 17th 1965 further revealed some of the dilemmas of working within Boots' self-selection system. The report's opening section discussed an anonymous letter received by the Casual Customer, which questioned the preferred shop-floor greeting of 'May I help you?'.[90] According to the unidentified worker, employees needed to leave customers 'free to browse around the shop', rather than intruding upon them with the Casual Customer's suggested welcome. While the Casual Customer claimed this approach was 'all right' to a 'certain degree', they continued to insist on being approached by the assistant, as it was 'terribly annoying' to have to ask for help.[91] The Casual Customer also claimed that failing to engage customers left assistants having to retain an 'ever watchful eye' on the shop-floor in anticipation of the moment when such shoppers eventually needed their help. The tone of the Casual Customer's reply implied that such methods were not only impractical, but also incompatible with the precepts of high-quality customer service.

The interaction thus illustrated the tensions and contradictions that ran through Boots' hybrid system of self-selection. These tensions centred on the compatibility of the attentive, traditional modes of service advocated by the Casual Customer and the facilitation of fast, convenient and autonomous modes of shopping encapsulated within the offer to browse. As well as creating questions about when employees should seek to initiate the process

[89] Ibid.
[90] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Shopping at Boots. Casual Customer Reports, No.2", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 132, September 17th 1965: 8.
[91] Ibid.

of selling, the Casual Customer's comments also raised fundamental questions about the level of service and attention the modern, self-selection customer was entitled to claim. Crucially, Boots executives offered no exacting template on how to conclusively resolve these dilemmas, with employees only ever gaining rather nebulous instructions on 'judging' the retail environment and prioritising their service skills towards the most appropriate people and places. This accentuated the pedagogical value of the Casual Customer reports, with the encounters published within a deliberately open forum in an attempt to offer employees different examples of how these adaptive skills were expected to function on a day-to-day basis. Yet, conversely, the publication of negative encounters had the undesirable effect of demonstrating that many workers were operating unsatisfactorily and failing to meet the company's desired standards of service.

The retailer's unique model of self-selection had therefore unwittingly created an ambivalent space within the sales encounter, where for a fleeting moment, service skills were almost entirely absent and workers were liable to appear passive or unforthcoming while they deciphered how certain customers wished to shop. This moment of hesitancy stemmed from the vague and open-ended ways in which executives conceptualised the needs of their post-war customers. For example, the 1962 American research report claimed Boots customers would increasingly look for 'optional methods of shopping within the same premises' by desiring the convenient, efficient forms of self-service shopping alongside their wish for 'first-class',

personalised service provided by 'well-trained' members of staff.[92] A consequence of this characterisation was that it created no clear demarcations in customer action, with every Boots customer assumed to want both forms of service style each time they shopped. While this was an advertised benefit of Boots' modernised sales system, it nevertheless created tensions in how employees were being asked to serve and conceptualise customer need. The directives offered to the newly appointed '17 Girl' (see chapter three) encapsulated the contradictory nature of the company's sales-floor approach. After all, while this member of staff was instructed to allow teenage girls to browse 'without hindrance', they were also directed towards offering customers friendly, light-hearted advice.[93] This demonstrated that bosses were stuck between the opposing ideals of the modern and the traditional, with the company's service culture struggling to articulate an acceptable middle ground for how self-selection operated in practical terms.

The third Casual Customer report of October 29th 1965 contained some stark evaluations about the quality of service delivered during the scheme's first four months of operation. It claimed that after visiting 80 Boots stores and making over 200 separate purchases, only 12 interactions had been worthy of the guinea award, while 9 exchanges had been so bad as to warrant their own damning reports.[94] According to the Casual Customer, this left over 180

[92] WBA/BT/12/17/1/13- "Visit to United States of America: 8th April- 8th May 1962": Report on a visit to America by R.M. Dickson and Party, 36.
[93] For example, see, WBA/BT/11/38/4/14/6- "Colour Me Cash; Colour me Seventeen" launch information booklet, June 1968: 2.
[94] WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Shopping at Boots. Casual Customer Reports, No.3", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 138, October 29th 1965: 8.

'nondescript' transactions that were 'neither one thing nor the other'.[95] Claiming to 'hate' these 'disappointing' sales encounters, the Casual Customer described a typical shop floor interaction in the following way:

> No greeting. No smile. Asked for 'what have you'. Its wrapped (occasionally not)—passed over with change and quite frequently without a bill. There's no 'thank you' or parting greeting.

They went on to claim that these nondescript transactions were the 'dull side' of shopping, offering 'nothing' and leaving 'no impression whatsoever' on the visiting customer.[96]

Despite efforts to maintain continuity with inter-war practices, the impression of Boots workers as highly trained and deftly skilled sales people was ultimately fallible and failed to survive contact with the everyday realities of the shop-floor. However, Boots employees were not entirely at fault for this situation. For example, a training booklet distributed during self-selection's 1960 launch, claimed the new system made work 'easier', by allowing assistants to 'sell more in less time and with less effort'.[97] The company's post-war shop-floor workers were therefore placed in the awkward situation of navigating a space that both accepted that the mechanics of many of their customer interactions had been reformulated by self-service, while also needing to prioritise and pay heed to traditional service methods. In such a paradoxical situation, it was perhaps unsurprising that service standards regularly failed to accord with managerial expectations.

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 2.

The company's model of self-selection was consequently extremely difficult for staff to navigate effectively. It also fostered a reactive, perfunctory approach to service, where although employees were theoretically always readily available to help, the majority of interactions proceeded under the assumption that most customers preferred quick, convenient shopping experiences. While the company's model of self-selection was unique in preserving the opportunity for 'good' service, the Casual Customer made it clear that such moments were becoming increasingly rare and were only occurring when shoppers approached employees with a problem or when those workers with superior service skills recognised a customer's subtle calls for assistance. Rather than uncovering a rude, inept or disinterested workforce, the Casual Customer's reports conveyed a more subtle criticism of the emergence of an entirely new style of customer service that was increasingly dominated by a presumption towards the efficiencies and logics of self-service techniques. This new service style imitated an employee's momentary uncertainty for how exactly each Boots customer wished to shop, and ultimately yielded the functional, yet characterless transactions reviled by the Casual Customer.

Challenging the Notion of Skill

Although the presentation of employee expertise was a genuine attempt to distinguish Boots stores from other high-street competitors, the Casual Customer reports illustrated that such ambitions always remained vulnerable to wider financial imperatives aimed at improving operational efficiency and reducing business costs. For example, in 1959 General Sales Manager Mr W.K. Oliver claimed the company were undertaking 'productivity studies' to

understand how its stores could be run 'more efficiently and economically'.[98] Furthermore, a 1960 staff booklet claimed that in an era when high-street rents were 'going up' and shopkeeping costs were 'constantly increasing', self-selection was the necessary antidote for helping to 'keep running costs down'.[99] Company executives were therefore incapable of detaching their business venture from the economic logics and procedures that authors like Bowlby claimed had eroded traditional service skills.

Being efficient and economical meant having a workforce capable of meeting the demands of contemporary British life. The company's traditional trading hours of 9am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, with a half-day closure on Wednesday, concentrated staff into an increasingly inconvenient and rigid shift pattern that failed to properly reflect the shopping needs of the era's greater number of employed married women.[100] During Boots' American research trips, delegates outlined the concentrations in weekend and evening trade that most likely awaited British retailers in the second half of the post-war period. A 1959 report claimed the 'universally long' trading hours adopted by American retailers made 'part-timers and shift workers' essential.[101] The 1962 report stated that many stores had adjusted their opening hours to reflect the increased popularity of 'family shopping by motor car outside working hours'.[102] The report cited a Walgreen Drug Executive, who claimed that over 50% of his company's trade was now done after 5

[98] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Retail Pricing: With particular reference to sales volume", *Sales & Selling,* No. 29, September 1959: 7.
[99] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 2.
[100] WBA/BT/5/34/1/10- Staff Guide for Eastgate Street branch, Chester, February 1966, 3.
[101] WBA/BT/12/17/1/11- "Report on a visit to the United States of America and Canada: 10th September- 27th October 1959": Report on a visit to America and Canada by Mr. F.A. Cockfield and Party, 12.
[102] WBA/BT/12/17/1/13- "Visit to United States of America", 15.

p.m., while it also claimed stores not open on Sundays did 80% of their trade 'after 6 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, plus all day Saturday'.[103] These figures were corroborated by the delegate's own observation, which stated it was 'rare to see stores busy during the daytime' with many only having a 'handful of customers'.[104]

Although Boots bosses had originally denied that their pursuit of self-service methods was connected to saving on staff costs (see chapter one), the shifting patterns of trade observed within America presented the company with an opportunity to reduce its staffing costs. During his 1959 research visit, future chairman W.R. Norman, suggested Boots could benefit from replicating the ways in which American businesses utilised 'the mechanics of shop operation to achieve staff economy'.[105] One such example came from the large Woolworth's store in central Manhattan, New York City. According to Norman, only six employees manned the store's first floor, except for 'peak periods' when additional part-time staff were used.[106] When utilised in conjunction with self-service techniques, employees could be deployed in flexible and responsive ways that targeted the store's increasingly fluctuating periods of trade. This led Norman's report to suggest:

> Every effort should be concentrated on increasing staff productivity by reduction of regular staff to a minimum and

[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] WBA/BT/12/17/1/12- "Visit to United States of America and Canada: 21st May- 8th July 1959": Report on a visit to America by Mr. W.R. Norman and Party, *preface*.
[106] Ibid., 3.

supplementing where necessary with the use of part-time assistants during peak periods.[107]

During the 1962 American research visit, delegates noted that while they did discover 'good-class shops' with 'excellent service', the 'great majority' of examples were 'very thinly staffed…often with poor personnel including many part-timers'.[108] Despite drawing a connection between poor service standards and part-time working, Boots executives nonetheless sought to increase their reliance on part-time contracts during the 1960s and 70s. A number of factors combined during the post-war era to drive changes in the structure of retail employment. While one of these was the widespread implementation of self-service techniques, the development of the five-day working week for full-time staff, the growth of married women seeking employment and the passing of legislation like the Shop Acts of 1950-1962—which constrained opening hours and mandated welfare provisions for employees—also drove the sector's increased reliance on part-time hours.[109] In 1957, 2593 male and female retail workers, or 10.5% of Boots' entire retail workforce were employed on a part-time basis.[110] By 1962, this figure had almost doubled to 4774, which was representative of 17.3% of retail employees.[111] By 1979, Boots shops were employing 27,107 part-time workers, a figure that represented over 53% of the company's entire retail labour force.[112]

[107] Ibid., 10.
[108] WBA/BT/12/17/1/13- "Visit to United States of America", 14.
[109] WBA/BT/34/30/34- Shop Acts. See also, Cox and Hobley, *Shopgirls*, 216.
[110] WBA/BT/3/8/7/33- Statistical Record 1958.
[111] WBA/BT/3/8/7/37- Statistical Record 1962.
[112] WBA/BT/5/30/86- Alan Hawksworth Statistical notebook, 1974-1982.

New branch openings, store enlargements and the extension of more convenient opening hours were consequently accompanied by a greater dependence upon part-time workers. For example, when it opened in 1970, the experimental store at Wigston Magna relied upon the efficiencies of self-service to operate with a significantly reduced workforce of only five full-time staff, 'three part-time assistants…and four Saturday Girls'.[113] Opened in the same year with 24,000 square feet of sales space, the brand new store in central Leicester had 140 staff on its payroll, of which 60 were employed in a part-time capacity.[114] Such trends were also observable within the out-of-town shopping centre at Bretton, Cambridgeshire, which had a 'massive' 700-space car park that encouraged customers to travel to the shops in their own vehicle. This close replication of American retailing methods saw Boots' new store duplicate many transatlantic patterns of consumption, with 'Thursday to Saturday' quickly acknowledged as the store's 'busiest time'.[115] To meet these peaks in trade, the new shop remained open until 7 p.m. on Thursdays and 8 p.m. on Fridays, with seven of the store's twenty workers hired on a part-time basis as a result.

Contrary to the dominant scholarly narrative that self-service brought loss and diminishment to staff, Boots' post-war stores actually saw an increase in their retail workforce numbers. In 1957, the total number of retail employees was 24,611.[116] While this had increased slightly to 27,467 in 1962, by 1979

[113] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Self-Service-but there's still that personal touch".
[114] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Spotlight on 191: Leicester Ready to Go After £620,000 extensions", *Boots News,* September 1970: 8.
[115] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Excitement Development at Bretton", *Boots News,* July 26th 1972: 3.
[116] WBA/BT/3/8/7/33- Statistical Record 1958.

the total number had grown substantially to 50,574.[117] Part of this rise was attributed to Boots' newly constructed post-war stores, which were generally much larger than their inter-war predecessors. For example, when it opened in June 1970, the sales area of the Wood Green branch in North London was twenty times bigger than the traditional chemists' shop it replaced.[118] This necessitated a significant increase in workforce numbers from 20 to over 120. The newly enlarged store in central Leicester also saw its staffing numbers increase by 55% compared with the original 1930s store.[119]

Despite these increases, costs were kept down by efficiently managing labour and concentrating it onto the store's busiest periods of trade. By conceptualising part-time workers as a supplementary element of their sales spaces, branch managers cast such employees as moveable puzzle pieces, who could be deployed wherever and whenever was deemed operationally necessary. The efficient, targeted deployment of staff was also aided by the design of Boots' modernised self-selection stores. For example, the new central Leicester store installed 191 'cash and wrap' stations to maximise efficiency and ensure workers could access registers and serve customers at practically any point on the shop floor.[120] While this facility boosted potential sales during busy periods, employees were never perpetually tied to such pay points, ensuring it was unproblematic for many registers to go unused during quieter trading times.

[117] WBA/BT/3/8/7/37- Statistical Record 1962 and WBA/BT/5/30/86- Alan Hawksworth Statistical notebook.
[118] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Wood Green All Set for Opening", *Boots News,* June 1971: 8.
[119] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Spotlight on 191".
[120] Ibid.

Using the workforce in such fragmentary ways posed challenges for a company purporting to uphold employee skill and expertise. The idea that employee expertise was tied to, and drew from, Boots' role as professional pharmacists became severely diluted after workers were pulled across a wider sales area, increasingly employed on fractional contracts, and stretched to occupy longer opening hours. Although they were a fundamental component of the 1930s lessons and 1960s training leaflets, an employee's ability to learn on the job and gain knowledge through their daily responsibilities was also significantly hindered by part-time working. In practical terms, the company's significant influx of post-war employees made training individuals to the desired high standard a much more complex task. Furthermore, while retail work was a traditionally low paid industry, part-time employees were always understood as a cost-saving alternative, with Boots only paying its part-time staff the same hourly rate as their full-time equivalents after April 1980.[121] A 1980 internal report claimed the company was increasingly dissatisfied with its reputation for not being a 'good payer'.[122] It claimed its policy of paying slightly below the market rate had caused difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, with many executives becoming 'increasingly embarrassed' by the national agreements to which they were linked.[123] Despite attempting to promote the skill of its employees, the organisation therefore lacked the necessary salary structure to properly acknowledge and reward this desired level of expertise.

[121] WBA/BT/5/17/5/9- Report to Group Board, 5.
[122] WBA/BT/5/7/17/5/10- Report on Staff and the Company in the 1980s, February 1980, 10.
[123] Ibid.

Many of these tensions and contradictions were visible in the part-time role of the Saturday Girl—a form of supplementary employment that Boots executives came to rely on heavily during the post-war era. During a 1958 American research visit, Boots delegates commented that while American stores made 'considerable' use of part-time hours, the country differed from British retailers by largely avoiding the wide scale use of 'Saturday only school-girls'.[124] Normally of school or university age, the Saturday Girl commanded significantly lower rates of pay than the already low figure offered by Boots, ensuring they aligned perfectly with the company's model of self-selection and its push for greater productivity and savings. [125] The implementation of the five-day working week meant the Saturday Girl's labour was often a direct replacement for the substantive activities undertaken by Boots' full-time staff. This was demonstrated at a small branch opened at Greenock, Scotland in 1973, whose workforce of four Saturday Girls was broadly comparably to its roster of six full-time employees.[126] The role was never limited to a single task or shop floor position; instead, individual branch managers adapted it to suit their store's specific needs and trading patterns. It was, however, always restricted to Saturdays, the day of the week widely acknowledged as the busiest and most financially important for retailers. While this situation appeared to demand the highest and broadest level of customer service and product knowledge skills, Boots' Saturday Girls were never conceptualised as elite level employees. On the contrary, the infantilising title given to the role reflected its fledgling, entry-

[124] WBA/BT/12/17/1/8- "Visit to United States of America: 16th September- 22nd October 1958": Report on a visit to America by Mr. S Harker- Smith and Party, 15.
[125] Cox and Hobley, *Shopgirls*, 216.
[126] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Flabbergasted…", *Boots News,* June 27th 1973: 13.

level nature, with the job widely understood to offer young women a taste of formalised employment, before they went on to pursue jobs and careers within other professions. Pamela Cox and Annabel Hobley affirmed this in their description of the role as 'an exciting rite of passage', which largely furnished young women with the financial independence to enjoy the benefits of the post-war affluent economy.[127] There was, perhaps, always something illogical and paradoxical about positioning young, cheap, inexperienced auxiliary employees as the face of an organisation during its most impactful and economically consequential day of the week.

Furthermore, any sense of autonomy granted to the Saturday Girl position was consistently undermined by the ways in which Boots' internal literature focused on her individual beauty ahead of any form of traditional service capability. In 1969, *The Bee* featured 19 year-old Jenny Guildford, who worked as a Saturday Girl toilet department assistant with the company's Kettering branch. Claiming Jenny was 'pretty' and capable of catching a 'photographer's eye', the article suggested that 'on Saturday', Boots girls were 'the tops in both attraction and charm'.[128] The Saturday Girl's skill was largely understood through the rubric of aesthetic labour, with virtually no consideration given to her product knowledge or customer service skills. This was underlined in a 1971 *Boots News* article, which focused upon 17 year-old Saturday Girl, Jenny Jago, of the company's branch in Cheam, Surrey.[129] Jenny's story was of interest because she had recently modelled in a Seventeen cosmetic advertisement (see chapter three). However, rather than

[127] Cox and Hobley, *Shopgirls*, 216.
[128] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "Round the Territories", *The Bee*, September/ October 1969: 8.
[129] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Model Jenny is Saturday Girl", *Boots News,* July 1971: 1.

discussing how this situation aided sales or supported Seventeen's younger customers, the article focused solely on Jago's appearance. As well as claiming she was 'building a promising modelling career', the article noted that she continued to work at Boots 'simply because' she enjoyed it.[130] While enjoyment had always been an important consideration of a Boots retail position, it was traditionally understood to have occurred as a consequence of one's proficiency in their job. However, by overlooking any suggestion that Jenny was accomplished in either product knowledge or customer-service skills, the article implied there was always something rather frivolous about the Saturday Girl position. It also suggested that beyond the display of aesthetic labour, and the ability to earn a little extra pocket money, shop work was not necessarily the preferred vocation for most Saturday Girls.

Rather than bemoaning this situation, Boots' executives largely embraced the Saturday Girl's lack of career focus and her status as a 'stop-gap' form of employment. This ensured that alongside discussions of her appearance, the Saturday Girl drew attention for her capabilities beyond her position as a Boots employee. For example, although she had been employed for over a year within the company's St. Helen's branch, the *Boots News* emphasised how the hopes of sixteen-year old Saturday Girl Ann Knox lay beyond both the organisation and the retail profession. [131] By claiming it was Ann's ambition to study dietetics at university, the article clarified that Boots stores were not intended as the main beneficiaries of the Saturday Girl's journey of maturity and personal development. Instead, the company's pursuit of subsidiary part-time work had created a mutually beneficial situation,

[130] Ibid.
[131] "Our Saturday Girl is Billinge Beauty Queen", *Boots News,* November 17th, 1971: 5.

whereby Saturday-only employment was deemed both acceptable and temporarily convenient for both the employer and the employee.

Even if the individual was committed to her role, the underlying structure of the Saturday Girl position made it difficult for her to accrue significant levels of experience and expertise. Firstly, the job's supplementary nature ensured its incumbents were always distanced from the institutional skill, knowledge and expertise residing in its full-time employees, with the majority rarely enfolded into corporate training programs and detached from wider schemes of reward and promotion. Secondly, the fact their labour was restricted to one day a week meant individuals lacked exposure to the differing types of shop-floor experiences that executives claimed were vital to the development of their sales assistants. The executive's determination to cultivate these efficient, cost-cutting forms of employment therefore always sat awkwardly within a sales system reporting to promote exceptional levels of employee expertise.

In June 1974, the *Boots News* launched a fictional cartoon series that sought to inform and update the company's sales assistants. Focused upon the career and social life of a young Boots Toilet Assistant named Sue Talbot, 'The Adventures of Sue' series ran for sixteen episodes until December 1975. The series built upon the company's practice of using workplace cartoons as an educative tool, with examples including 'The Pitfalls of Penelope' cartoon evidenced in chapter three and the 'Vicki' comic strip featured within the early 1960s *Merchandise News* (Image 4.5).[132] Whereas these examples concentrated on the individual's role within Boots stores, the

[132] For example, WBA/BT/11/38/1/1- "Vicki", *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 20, May 24th 1963: 8.

Sue cartoons encompassed everyday examples from the protagonist's leisured, consumerist lifestyle. It consequently offers insight into the shifting expectations of Boots' retail workers and the ways in which the changing social conditions of post-war Britain altered the priorities of young sales assistants.



Image 4.5: Example of Vicki cartoon featured within Merchandise News (Taken from *Merchandise News* (no.1), Issue 45, November 15th 1963:8)

While her exact employment conditions and social status were unspecified, Sue was certainly a young, attractive, unmarried worker who used the disposable income from her new Boots job on a variety of social activities and events. In episode one, she was described as a 'nujoin' employee, while in episode seven she was shown to be still living at home with her parents and younger brother.[133] Sue's regular depiction behind a cosmetics counter confirmed her status as a Toilet Assistant. For example, in episode three, she was shown recalling her 'sales work training' while selling a bottle of the company's new own-brand 'Love' perfume to an attractive young man

[133] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Sue: Episode 1", *Boots News,* June 26th 1974: 12.

looking for a gift for his mother.[134] Furthermore, in episode fourteen, a dashing, sports-car-driving male friend asked her to lend her make-up and cosmetic skills to the local amateur dramatics society's production.[135] While Sue appeared to embody many aspects of Boots' highly skilled, attentive sales assistant, her abilities were often depicted in complex, contradictory ways. The cartoons consequently portrayed Sue as somewhere between the hyper-skilled, model employee represented by 'Vicki' and the rude, inattentive sales assistant seen in the 'Penelope' comic strip.

In much the same way as the Saturday Girl, Sue was shown to have exceptional aesthetic labour skills, with her blonde hair always neatly groomed and her new Boots overall always immaculately clean. To demonstrate she followed a regimen of personal hygiene, episodes seven and fifteen even went as far as showing Sue bathing at home, while later on in episode three, the man from the store approached Sue at a disco, after recognising the scent of her Love perfume.[136] The importance the company placed on aesthetic labour also received emphasis from the fact Sue's colleagues were similarly doe-eyed, attractive young women. Nonetheless, Sue's interpersonal and procedural knowledge skills were always much less assured. No doubt partially conforming to sexist stereotypes about the behaviours of beautiful young women within a professional realm, Sue was regularly characterised as possessing slightly hapless behaviour, a character trait which added an element of trepidation to her interactions with customers and managers. Sometimes Sue was quick thinking, for example in episode

[134] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 3", *Boots News,* September 4th 1974: 15.
[135] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 14", *Boots News,* October 1st 1975: 15.
[136] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 7", *Boots News,* January 22nd 1975: 14; "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 15", *Boots News,* November 17th 1975: 19.

four, she was portrayed as displaying good interpersonal skills by asking a customer to extinguish his cigarette in store and thus avert a potential fire.[137] Similarly, in episode five, she recommended that a boy scout and his mother purchase a first-aid kit, in preparation for their troop firework display; actions her colleague described as 'clever stuff'.[138] By contrast, in episode two Sue's supervisor admonished her after keeping an elderly customer waiting at the counter for five minutes while she chatted to colleagues about her boyfriend (Image 4.6). Her supervisor cautioned her again in episode fifteen, this time for not knowing the company's appropriate telephone procedure and for suggesting to make a long-distance call in the morning. Furthermore, in episode seven Sue's colleagues criticised her for leaving a stockroom door open, at the very same moment she was lauding her own energy-conscious actions.[139] Episodes six, twelve and fifteen also characterised Sue as a prolific talker, in ways which left interpretation uncertain as to whether colleagues found this trait endearing or irritating.[140]

[137] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 4", *Boots News,* October 10th 1974: 15.
[138] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 5", *Boots News,* November 13th 1974: 14.
[139] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 7".
[140] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 6", *Boots News,* December 11th 1974: 15; "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 12", *Boots News,* July 30th 1975: 15; "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 15".



Image 4.6: Example of 'Adventures of Sue' cartoon, Episode 2 of 16 (Taken from *Boots News*, July 31st 1974:15)

The cartoon series suggested that one of the major attractions to being a Boots sales assistant was that it offered young women access to a community of likeminded friends and the necessary financial support to sustain a leisured, consumerist lifestyle. The cartoons contained very little suggestion that Sue was on a pathway towards a long-term and highly skilled career in retail. The entire series lacked any narrative arc of skill accrual, with Sue not shown to be any better an employee by the end of episode sixteen than she was in episode one. Her career was also understood to be largely stagnant, with no discussion of promotions or new training opportunities. Instead, each episode depicted Sue's job as initiating either an exciting new leisure activity or a chance encounter with a potential new love interest. By deliberately replicating the appearance and tone of the love story comics contained within teen-girl magazines like *Jackie,* the cartoons were able to play upon their fun, dynamic, 'get ahead' portrayals of contemporary

womanhood.[141] They consequently portrayed Sue as someone with an active social life, who enjoyed foreign holidays, attending discos, watching plays, playing tennis and learning Judo.[142]

While it appeared strange that executives had selected a somewhat flawed and comedic employee such as Sue as their figure of education, she was nonetheless a valid reflection of the realities of 1970s retail employment. Unlike the profiles that had accompanied 1960s store openings, the Sue cartoons suggested that retail work was less critical to a young person's identity and that pursuing a high-skilled career at Boots was not the priority of girls like Sue. The series also highlighted that the accumulation of product knowledge and customer service skills had become largely subordinate to the understanding of retail work as a fun, yet practical, means of earning money. The cartoon series therefore illustrated how Boots' push for productivity and savings had fractured the post-war workforce and encouraged a new type of employee to emerge, one who was understood to be less skilled and less committed to a career in retail than their earlier post-war predecessors.

Questions of employee commitment and quality came to the fore at the beginning of the 1970s, as reports and accusations of staff dishonesty became more prominent within the mainstream media. In 1969, *The Sunday Telegraph* reported that 'more than' 50% of retail losses occurred through 'staff dishonesty'. It claimed retail grocery chain Pricerite found 'at least one

[141] Carter, "A Taste of *Honey*."; McRobbie, *Jackie*.
[142] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 8", *Boots News,* February 26th 1975: 15; "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 3"; "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 14"; "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 10", *Boots News,* May 28th 1974: 15; "The Adventures of Sue: Episode 9", *Boots News,* April 9th 1975: 15.

check-out girl a week' with their 'hand in the till'. [143] The following year, *The Times* reported on the research of Professor Michael Banton, an eminent sociological scholar at the University of Bristol. According to Banton's research, retail store managers were 'turning a blind eye' to the issue of staff theft as they feared 'possible labour troubles' if they reprimanded employees.[144] It was also found that when the issue was confronted, managers commonly chose to dismiss staff quickly without reporting the issue to the police. Baton found that this tendency to circumvent formal processes, in turn, worsened the issue, as reprimanded individuals could swiftly move on to their next retail position, knowing that the profession generally failed to follow up on references.

Although many large retailers had deliberately engineered the use of part-time adolescent workers, a number of businesses started to draw connections between these cheaper forms of labour and the wider rises in retail dishonesty. In 1972, Tesco's Chief Security Officer, Mr E.W. Weaver gave evidence to a Home Office Working Party investigating the rise in staff thefts. Weaver claimed that due to Britain's widespread difficulties in recruiting for retail positions, the company had been forced to hire 'school children' on part-time contracts. Weaver lamented the problems this policy had caused, claiming that as well as cultivating a high level of staff turnover, the use of adolescents had ensured the standard of recruitment was no longer 'as high as could be wished'.[145] Weaver later argued that it was 'difficult to enlist the loyalty of young staff' because many regarded the job as

[143] Ivan Fallon, "The £.S.D. Of Shoplifting: The Sick, Needy and the Greedy," *Sunday Telegraph*, November 23rd 1969, 27.
[144] Norman Fowler, "Staff Pilfering is Ignored by Shops", The Times, February 19th 1970, 5.
[145] HO 287/1893- Working Party on Internal Shop Security: Sixth Meeting, 7th March 1972.

a form of ‘casual employment’.[146] In comparison with the company’s older, more ‘responsible’ employees, these part-time minors were ‘more difficult to train’ and ‘more prone to carelessness’.[147]

Weaver also noted how the introduction of part-time contracts made it difficult for managers to enforce discipline on the shop-floor. He said that the policy of restricting staff purchases to the end of the working day had become difficult to enforce now that many part-time employees started and finished their shifts at different times.[148] Sainsbury’s manager of Branch Operations, Mr D.J.B. Salisbury, similarly noted the operational impacts of part-time working. In his evidence to the same committee, Salisbury suggested that although employees were forbidden from serving friends, such procedures had become ‘more difficult to manage as branches became larger, with more staff and, in particular, a high[er] proportion of part-time staff’.[149] A number of Britain’s post-war self-service retailers had consequently adopted the rather perverse position of blaming the rises in staff dishonesty on the very same employment conditions they had been instrumental in initiating.

Boots executives were as equally as involved in this process of blame. The company’s head of security, Mr Wilson, also gave evidence to the Home Office Committee and largely substantiated the patterns of dishonesty discovered at Tesco and Sainsbury’s. Evidence suggested that Boots employees under the age of eighteen committed ‘55-60%’ of all thefts and

[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

breaches of security rules.[150] The company also found that in 1969, there were fourteen incidents of rule breaking for every 1,000 employees. When broken down in age, the findings offered clear indications that the younger a member of staff was, the more likely they were of being found guilty of committing an offence. Figures suggested that 74 out of every 1,000 employees aged 15 breached the rules, while it was 38 out of every 1,000 for 16 year olds and 22 per 1,000 for 17 year olds.[151] In other age ranges, the number per thousand never rose above 11. According to Wilson, such figures merely 'confirmed the impression gained from direct observation'.[152]

Moreover, Wilson claimed the very systems put in place by the company to combat staff theft were being compromised by the propensity to employ large numbers of part-time workers. For example, he noted that while full-time employees were provided with lockers to store their personal belongings and any items purchased while on shift, many of the company's stores simply did not have the space to extend this provision to every part-time worker.[153] Furthermore, while he claimed the 'ideal' method for checking staff pilferage was to assign each worker with their own cash register, such ambitions became impractical and unenforceable during Saturday's and holiday periods when more part-time workers were required.[154]

[150] HO 287/1889- Working Party on Internal Shop Security: Evidence from Retail Organisations, c.1971-1973.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.

Conclusion

The role of the sales-floor employee within Boots' modernised system of self-selection was highly complex. The continued emphasis upon product knowledge, aesthetic labour and personal service skills was a genuine attempt to generate a sense of continuity with the company's inter-war practices. The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that executives believed the company's heritage as professional pharmacists offered it a distinct skills and prestige advantage over its high-street competitors. The availability and continued shop-floor presence of Boots employees formed a crucial component of the company's conceptualisations for self-selection. These ambitions remained largely unchanged into the 1970s, even as the company evolved its model to encompass more self-service ideologies.

However, the existence of continuity did not mean that Boots employees always projected a cohesive, unproblematic impression of skill preservation. The reintroduction of the Casual Customer initiative highlighted the significant gaps between the company's vision of excellence and the everyday realities of Boots' shop-floor experience. The reports revealed that many of these fissures stemmed from the introduction of modernised self-selection systems, which aside from unsettling previous service orthodoxies had also created an unwanted element of doubt in workers minds as to how customers actually wished to shop. Boots' ability to uphold notions of employee skill were also confronted by the introduction of part-time working conditions. Although these techniques were not unique to Boots and largely reflected the sector's efforts at capturing the changing nature of post-war

retail consumption, they were nonetheless fraught with tension and complexity. The newly created Saturday Girl position was a prominent example of these tensions, for while the job enabled Boots to attain greater operational efficiencies and cost-saving measures, the influx of young, supplementary workers also carried the potent menace of dishonesty, which unsettled the very values of employee expertise and trust the company were seeking to promote.

The workforce fragmentation that resulted from the company's push for efficiency had direct implications for its claims of cultivating a highly knowledgeable and skilled workforce who were invested in the company's mission and values. Although Boots executives had maintained their demands for skilful sales assistants, it was clear that the self-service era had created conditions where the status and quality of retail employees could be openly questioned, with the notion of employee expertise most severely undermined by the growing issue of staff dishonesty. While Boots were not entirely at fault for the noted rises in crime, the typical felon's characteristics strongly overlapped with the requirements of these newly created part-time positions. Most were found to be young, poorly trained and lacking the necessary commitment to uphold the retailer's core values and traditions. Therefore, despite working hard to uphold the inter-war notion of employee skill, the relationship between employee and employer had been fundamentally altered, with segments of Boots' post-war workforce now governed by entirely new workplace logics and ideologies.

Staffing was consequently one area where the tradition-facing ambitions of Boots' self-selection system sharply abutted the realities of post-war

efficiency and modernity. While other areas of company operations had successfully blended tradition and modernity to uphold Boots' refined retail experience, the socio-economic realities of post-war Britain challenged and fundamentally reshaped the idealised workforce contained within its new sales model. Although the system had been designed to uphold and promote employee skill, much of this process was undercut by a simultaneous adherence to practices of low-paid and supplementary youth labour. Despite the difficulties Boots executives faced in untangling themselves from these broader socio-economic trends, the company's close interrelationship with such forces unquestionably created tensions that were never easily resolved.

The relationship between Boots' model of self-selection and the wider realities of post-war Britain forms the basis for the next and final chapter. Exploring the dramatic rise in rates of shoplifting experienced from the beginning of the 1970s, the chapter examines how company bosses confronted the issues of retail crime, while attempting to remain faithful to their offer of pleasurable, sophisticated and high-quality shopping experiences.

Chapter Five- 'Look Out!': Confronting Shoplifting in the Self-Selection Era c.1970-79.

On 26th July 1972, over 400 guests gathered for a movie premiere in the Mayfair Suite of the Bristol Entertainment Centre.[1] Rather than watching the latest Hollywood blockbuster, the invitees were about to view a film focused more on education than entertainment. The film was produced by the government's Distributive Industry Training Board and was narrated by Stratford Johns, an individual more popularly known to audiences as Detective Chief Inspector Charles Barlow of the BBC police dramas *Z-Cars* and *Softly, Softly*. Recorded in collaboration with the Bristol Constabulary, it featured locations from across the city's Broadmead shopping district. Seeking to address an area of growing social concern, the film responded to Britain's escalating rates of shoplifting, which English and Welsh police forces had documented as soaring from 68,288 cases in 1968 to 119,281 in 1971.[2] While shoplifting accounted for around 6% of all nationally recorded crime, the Bristol Constabulary reported rates of 18% within the Broadmead area.[3] Entitled *Help Yourself*, the film sought to examine the fraught interrelationship between the modern self-service age and its escalating rates of retail crime.[4]

In 1969, the *Sunday Telegraph* captured the widespread sense of moral panic by claiming the 'shoplifting disease' was more serious in Britain than

[1] POL/R/3/38- Records of Bristol Constabulary (1836- 1974), Bristol Constabulary Annual Report on Establishment and Crime, 1971, Bristol Archives.
[2] Home Office, *Shoplifting and Thefts by Shop Staff: Report of a Working Party on Internal Shop Security,* ed. The Home Office (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973), 2.
[3] HO 287/1901- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Twelfth Meeting, 17th January 1973, National Archives.
[4] NWFA 4555- "Help Yourself", Distributive Industry Training Board Film, 1972, North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University.

almost ‘any other country in the world’, with thefts from all stores and supermarkets totalling up to a ‘massive’ £100 million per year.[5] Drawing connections with modernised self-service techniques, the article argued that increased permission to handle goods had seen the customer’s ‘temptation to steal’ multiplied ‘several times over’.[6] The criminal consequences of self-service techniques were central to the *Help Yourself* film. During its opening sequence, it tracked a young mother and her child as they walked across a non-descript British high street into a large department store. The next scene, depicting prams and baby merchandise neatly arranged within easy reach of the customer, clarified to the audience that the mother had entered a self-service shop. As a sales assistant worked away obliviously in the background, the mother was then shown casually placing her child into the nearest available stroller. As she began pushing the pram, the mother also gathered two teddy bears, handing them down to her seated child as she casually exited the shop without paying.[7] The scene illustrated the difficulties in reading a shopper’s behaviour and discerning, in an instant, whether their engagements with self-service merchandise were legitimate or not. After all, while the mother was shown to be ‘helping herself’ in a criminal sense, she was equally performing actions that were logical to contemporary shopping. Save for the concluding element of actually paying for the goods, the mother was perfectly executing the sense of freedom afforded and encouraged by self-service. The film therefore showed how the post-war endorsement of

[5] Ivan Fallon, "The £.S.D. Of Shoplifting: The Sick, Needy and the Greedy," *Sunday Telegraph*, November 23rd 1969, 27.
[6] Ibid.
[7] NWFA 4555- “Help Yourself”.

self-service ideologies had created an increasingly indecipherable point of differentiation between criminal behaviour and regular shopping activity.

While scholars including Elaine Abelson and Charlotte Wildman have explored how emergent mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth century retail spaces like the department store created novel opportunities for theft, there have been limited comparable studies for the self-service context.[8] Despite the scholarly literature's focus on the 1970s as a touchstone for decline, only Dawn Nell et al. have explored the relationship between shoplifting and the new retail landscape of self-service.[9] While Nell's study looked at the fractured public discourse and sense of blame surrounding the era's rises in retail crime, this chapter focuses more closely on the new methods of crime prevention introduced by Boots executives from the late 1960s. Highlighting Boots' efforts at controlling retail crime during the 1970s, it explores the company's precarious negotiation between preserving the values and economic imperatives of its newly installed system of self-selection and the containment of shoplifting. It argues that although executives were acutely aware of and susceptible to the national rises in shoplifting, efforts at limiting criminal activity always sat awkwardly with the version of self-selection adopted by the company. It also argues that the new anti-shoplifting technologies and techniques adopted by retailers were adaptive and self-

[8] Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go a-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Charlotte Wildman, "An 'Epidemic of Shoplifting'? Working-Class Women, Shop Theft and Manchester's New Retail Culture, 1918–1939," *Social History* 46, no. 3 (2021). See also, William M. Meier, "Going on the Hoist: Women, Work, and Shoplifting in London, Ca. 1890–1940," *Journal of British Studies* 50, no. 2 (2011); Peter M. Scott, "The Booster, the Snitch, and the Bogus False Arrest Victim: Retailers and Shoplifters in Interwar America and Britain," *Enterprise & Society* 24, no. 1 (2023).

[9] For discussions of decline see, Hugh Pemberton and Lawrence Black, eds., *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Alan Sked, *Britain's Decline: Problems and Perspectives*, ed. Roger Mettam and James Shields, Historical Association Studies (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). Nell et al., "Helping Yourself."

governing, which ultimately created methods of crime-control that were as modified and personalised as the surrounding systems of self-service adopted by the retailer.

The chapter is structured chronologically and is divided into four sections. Section one focuses on the period before 1970 and explores the questions facing Boots executives prior to their implementation of self-selection techniques. It demonstrates that while there was an acknowledged link between modern retailing methods and increased rates of shoplifting, company bosses ultimately believed the crime could be contained via orthodox methods of criminal abatement. Section two then examines the new approaches adopted by Boots executives in the wake of the early 1970's rapid rises in shoplifting. It focuses on the 1971 Bristol Experiment, a pioneering trial involving Boots, which tested the impact of novel deterrence technologies like CCTV and convex mirrors on rates of shoplifting. It argues that the Experiment yielded ambiguous results, both in terms of its impact upon rates of shoplifting, but also in terms of how shoppers responded to its encroaching tide of surveillance. Section three studies the ways in which the convex mirrors, anti-shoplifting cables, warning signage and CCTV equipment introduced to Boots stores after 1971 sought to balance overt criminal deterrence with the preservation of personal freedoms. It demonstrates that while Boots' branch managers had difficulty balancing this new surveillance ecology with such freedoms, they nonetheless always aimed to protect the actions of their honest, law-abiding shoppers. Finally, section four shows how these anti-shoplifting technologies received support from the company's newly installed procedures of in-store criminal

management. It argues that while these systems introduced methodical practices of criminal management, they were largely internalised and self-governing, leading to significant divergences across Britain's high street for the ways in which shoplifting was conceptualised and confronted.

The Impact of Self-Service

The introduction of self-service methodologies during the first decades of the post-war era brought questions about whether the system's novel sense of freedom and customer-oriented choice created a rise in shoplifting. Understanding the relationship between self-service and retail crime brought significant differences of opinion amongst British retailers, with some groups fearing the worst from its implementation and others downplaying and largely dismissing its impact. In 1950, President of the National Union of Small Shopkeepers, Mr. T. Lynch, sought to repel self-service's wholesale introduction by proposing legislation that banned customers from handling goods.[10] Lynch argued that by removing the methods of employee oversight inherent within a traditional counter-service sale, the 'high-powered American methods' of self-service were practically placing goods into 'the customers' pocket' and making it easier for a 'crime-minded section of the shopping public' to exploit the system and steal.[11] Furthermore, a *Times* article of 1962 claimed the public only needed to look to the 'proliferation of self-service stores, especially in the suburbs…to account for the post-war increase in

[10] Unknown, "Make This 'Temptation' Illegal, Shops Urge," *The Daily Mirror*, January 23rd 1950, 6.
[11] Ibid.

convictions', while the *Financial Times* stated simply, 'supermarkets and self-service stores encourage theft'.[12]

Advocates of self-service unsurprisingly held a different view, with the majority seeking to play down any correlation between the format and rises in retail theft. For example, Patrick Galvani & Arthur Arnell's 1952 guidebook reassured readers that rates of theft within a self-service shop were often no 'greater than that of service stores, usually less'.[13] In 1956, retail designers Ellis Somake and Rolf Hellberg claimed pilferage rates within self-service shops had 'not increased appreciably' when compared with counter-service traditions.[14] Furthermore, Harry Hedge's 1957 manual was able to 'unhesitatingly say' that the average self-service shop suffered less pilferage 'than many counter-service stores'.[15] The fact these guidebooks all took the time to address the question of shoplifting demonstrated, however slightly, that their authors were conscious of the debates surrounding self-service's connection to rising retail crime. However, by also illustrating the system's potential for increased efficiencies and profits, they largely presented the system as one that could contain shoplifting and as such was a calculated risk that retailers could afford to take.

While this sense of disagreement and blame is visible in Nell et al.'s research, the American research trips demonstrated that Boots executives viewed the relationship between self-service and retail theft in more balanced

[12] Unknown, "The Shoplifters," *The Times*, Monday June 25th 1962, 11; Our Women's Editor, "How Much Protection against Pilferage?," *The Financial Times*, April 24th 1962, 17.
[13] Galvani & Arnell, *Going Self-Service?* , 133.
[14] Somake and Hellbery, *Shops and Stores Today*, 111.
[15] Hedges, *This Way to Self-Service*, 44.

terms.[16] The late-1950s and early-1960s reports illustrate that while bosses were conscious of the system's impact on rates of shoplifting, the issue ultimately had limited bearing on their wider deliberations with the format. Discussions of shoplifting featured sporadically within the reports, with bosses devoting more of their research attention to self-service's operational procedures, rather than its criminal consequences. The 1959 visit observed a Katz Drug store in Kansas City, with delegates noting how the shop's deployment of self-service techniques had made pilferage a 'normal trading risk' of everyday operations.[17] On the same trip, staff visited the large Woolworth's store on 34th Street in downtown New York. They commented that due to staff reductions induced by self-service techniques, the store's pilferage rates were 'higher than usual' at 1.7% of turnover, with Woolworth's management considering the greater losses to be cheaper than the overall cost of 'additional sales or security staff'.[18] The 1962 report also described how America's retail managers remained 'conscious' of the nebulous balance point between shoplifting losses and the financial outlay of security procedures, with many choosing to adopt 'psychological' safeguards like 'one-way-entry turnstiles' and 'convex mirrors' rather than the physical presence of security personnel intent upon detection. [19]

Crucially, the reports carried the suggestion there was something remote about America's experience of shoplifting, with bosses reasoning that the nation's brasher and more commercially orientated forms of merchandising

[16] Nell et al., "Helping Yourself," 372.
[17] WBA/BT/12/17/1/12/- "Visit to United States of America and Canada: 21st May- 8th July 1959": Report on a visit to America by Mr. W.R. Norman and Party, 4.
[18] Ibid, 3.
[19] WBA/BT/12/17/1/13/- "Visit to United States of America: 8th April- 8th May 1962": Report on a visit to America by R.M. Dickson and Party, 15.

made it improbable that Britain would ever experience similar levels of retail crime. This level of contentedness was reflected in the 1962 report, which claimed common American counter-measures such as the fingerprinting of new employees and the photographing of customers who paid by cheque, were 'unacceptable to us'.[20] It also mentioned that the rewards offered to American retail workers who reported colleague dishonesty were 'not very British!' and thus unlikely to be replicated within Boots stores.[21] Therefore, despite acknowledging that self-service techniques would likely cause a rise in the rates of shoplifting, Boots executives confidently pressed ahead with the installation of the new format, believing it was a worthwhile and manageable risk for the company to take.

As it was the first Boots store to be designed specifically for self-selection principles, the 1959 advertisement for the brand new store in the Broadmead district of Bristol, accentuated the freedoms and sense of abundance on offer to customers (Image 5.1). Listing merchandise in shopping list form, the advertisement delighted in the store's 'well stocked departments' and its ability to offer a 'tremendous' and 'wide' range of choice. It also appealed to the more affluent post-war shopper by highlighting that it was 'full of things you'll want'.[22] By inviting customers to 'look at', 'compare' and 'browse' items, the advertisement also made it clear that the individual shopper had been positioned at the centre of the buying experience and that the autonomous, choice-centred mechanisms of modern shopping now formed a pivotal part of contemporary Boots stores. However, the promotion of consumerist

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] WBA/BT/11/45/2/199- Broadmead, Bristol Opening Advertisement, September 1959.

desires, coupled with the freedom to browse and handle merchandise without either the interjection of staff or the imperative to buy, carried latent criminal risks and demonstrated that the indeterminate characteristics of shoplifting—displayed so prevalently in the opening of the *Help Yourself* film—had now been introduced to Boots' self-selection shops.



Image 5.1: Newspaper advertisement promoting the opening of the Boots store at Broadmead, Bristol 1959. (WBA/BT/11/45/2/199)

Although the experiences on offer within Boots' self-selection stores were new, their associated systems of shoplifting abatement were largely a continuation of the company's inter-war methodologies. A significant element of these policies centred on the power of the police to make arrests and manage the issue of shoplifting. During the inter-war and post-war periods, Boots' head-office issued store managers with a folio of Direction Letters,

which outlined everyday branch procedures for activities including the handling of customer complaints, the completion of expenses claims and the display of merchandise.[23] The 1937 Letter for dealing with shoplifting contained detailed involvement from the police. It claimed that before confronting a shoplifter and instructing them to come to a private office, managers needed reliable eyewitness evidence of theft. Once satisfied that the felon had indeed stolen, branch managers were instructed to 'phone call the C.I.D office of the nearest police station'.[24] Upon explaining the incident to officers, managers were ordered to relinquish all authority to the police. The letters further instructed managers to comply with police orders, emphasising, ''you will act'' upon their given advice. These firm instructions continued with the directive, 'You will attend the Police Station and sign the charge sheet if so required by the Police'.[25] While the 1963 Letters contained some changes, such as the strict instruction to never touch or apprehend a suspected shoplifter, its instruction to call the police 'at once' after confronting a shoplifter, and its insistence that 'any further action should be left to the policeman', demonstrated the company's continued deference to state-backed law enforcement.[26]

While the police played a leading role in apprehending shoplifters, Boots employees were delegated responsibilities for the in-store prevention of theft, which focused primarily on non-technological and procedural measures. The self-selection store's emphasis upon more open interiors increased the opportunities for surveillance, with the low-slung, elongated aisles and

[23] WBA/BT/5/34/1/12- Direction Letters for Store Managers, various.
[24] WBA/BT/5/34/1/12- Direction Letters for Store Managers, see 1937 reprint.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

gondolas offering staff better lines of visibility around the shop-floor. While they were promoted as means of offering personalised service advice, the strategic positioning of cash-and-wrap stations at the end of aisles also allowed employees closer oversight of customer action, with one 1964 training document claiming that if these stations were 'correctly sited and operated', they would offer 'more safeguards than the traditional counter shop'.[27] Furthermore, while the retention of service-counters was promoted as a means of preserving the company's expertise in high-class advisory selling, the technique also doubled as a means of shielding higher-value goods from certain customers and the potential risks that their touch and autonomous selection implied. For example, a 1960 staff booklet advised against placing 'expensive merchandise' like cameras, perfumes and electric razors on open display and directed staff to place razor blades, lipsticks and 'high-priced patents' in small units directly alongside their cash-and-wrap stations, where they could be subjected to higher quantities of surveillance.[28] In addition, a 1962 *Sales & Selling* article described how perfume bottles needed to be housed in glass cases in order to 'avoid pilferage'.[29] The decision regarding which items to place on self-selection shelving and which to protect from customer interaction was therefore based on broader considerations than simply which products sold best via personalised service, to also included assessments of their susceptibility to theft and the impact such losses would have on company accounts.

[27] WBA/BT/5/34/1/105 – Staff-training on Self Selection c.1964, 6.
[28] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", Staff Booklet, September 1960, 18.
[29] WBA/BT/11/38/1/4- "Introduction of Self-Selection at Branch 360 (Uplands)", *Sales and Selling,* No. 42, July 1962: 47.

Bosses understood that it was impractical to protect every product and that merchandise needed to be shown and made available to customers in order for the benefits of self-selection to be appropriately realised.[30] They argued that properly carrying out daily tasks would reduce the risks associated with their new sales system, with the 1964 training document telling employees to undertake the routine work of cleaning, price marking and shelf-stacking during off-peak periods to ensure the shop-floor was closely monitored at the store's busiest time.[31] In addition, employees were instructed to always 'immediately' issue paying customers with a counterbill to ensure they could continue browsing around the enlarged stores after making their purchases without provoking suspicion.[32]

There is some evidence for the company's newly designed stores trialling novel technological deterrents. For example, in 1958, selected shops introduced chevron-effect lighting shades, which, according to the *Financial Times* created a natural flow of customers towards the rear of the store that when viewed from the opposing direction imposed a psychological 'barrier' that stopped them from 'rushing out' of the shop.[33] Nevertheless, such techniques were largely piecemeal in nature and demonstrated that security considerations were low-key and subordinate to the imperative of getting customers into the store and exposing them to the logics of abundant, personalised consumerism.

[30] WBA/BT/5/34/1/105- Staff-training, 6.
[31] Ibid.
[32] WBA/BT/5/34/1/12- Direction Letters, see 1963 edition; WBA/BT/5/34/1/24- Staff-Training Wallet, 1930s.
[33] Unknown, "Lighting Technique Keeps the Customer In", *The Financial Times*, 13th October 1958, 9.

The company's confidence in containing shoplifting was also reflected through the ways in which internal literature conceptualised and articulated the issue of theft. Numerous examples downplayed and trivialised the crime as an isolated, minor problem, with one 1960 staff booklet suggesting it only occurred as a result of those 'light-fingered' individuals who 'forgot to pay'.[34] In addition, the 1963 Direction Letter claimed shoplifting only happened from 'time to time', while the 1964 training document argued the counter-measures put in place by bosses were sufficient in discouraging the 'few customers who might have been tempted to pilfer'.[35] While these examples reflected the company's assuredness that its measures of shoplifting abatement could effectively manage the crime, they also further underlined that during the 1960s bosses prioritised the realisation of the efficiencies and increased customer choice promised by the self-service age over any affiliation to stringent security measures.

The Bristol Experiment

By the beginning of the 1970s, the rapidly increasing levels of shoplifting began to strain the ideological credentials of post-war self-service retailing. The minimal crime reduction methods witnessed during the 1960s were tolerable whilst shoplifting rates remained low, or at least remained within anticipated and acceptable levels. After the equilibrium of the 1960s had been shattered by escalating rates of shoplifting, the mainstream press regularly conceptualised British high-streets as being in the grip of a shoplifting epidemic, with one newspaper reporter describing the situation as

[34] WBA/BT/11/38/2/12- "Self-Selection Sells", 19.
[35] WBA/BT/5/34/1/12- Direction Letters, 1963; WBA/BT/5/34/1/105- Staff-training, 6.

the ‘malaise of our time’.[36] The apprehension surrounding what shoplifting’s presence meant for Britain’s post-war retail economy ultimately led to the introduction of novel crime-fighting measures and processes. At Boots’ 1971 annual meeting, Chairman W.R. Norman announced that losses had become ‘too high’, with bosses estimating that theft was costing the firm between one and two per cent of its annual turnover, or around £2.5 million a year. [37] In an effort to remedy these losses, the company created a new Security Officer position, which was granted increased strategic control over the company’s nationwide security operations. Discussing James Wilson’s appointment to the role, Director Douglas Appleby told the *Daily Telegraph* that as rates of dishonesty were ‘tending to escalate’, the company were now prioritising fresh and innovative forms of corrective action.[38]

In the autumn of 1971, Boots participated in a pioneering criminological investigation. Labelled ‘the first of its kind in the country’ by the *Bristol Evening Post*, ‘The Bristol Experiment’ sought to uncover how novel technologies of pilferage management could help to contain the surging tide of shoplifting cases.[39] Undertaken in the Broadmead and Clifton shopping areas of Bristol, the Experiment involved five different retailers of varying sizes and trades. Led by the Bristol Constabulary’s central ‘A’ Division and sponsored by the Bristol Chamber of Commerce, the project also received technical assistance from Maclanne Security Associates. This London-based

[36] Roger Burton, “City Force Help to Make Film on Crime”, *The Bristol Evening Post,* 19th July 1972, 19.
[37] Annual Report published under heading, “World Sales- the largest increase in 20 years”, *The Times,* Friday 18th June 1971, 25.
[38] Unknown, "Boots Security Chief to Fight £2.5m Thefts " *The Daily Telegraph*, Friday 18th June 1971, 6.
[39] Pat Kavanagh, “Massive Bristol Drive Against Shop-Lifting,” *The Bristol Evening Post,* 13thAugust 1972, 12.

security firm was responsible for providing, at their own cost, nearly £10,000 worth of security equipment placed within participating stores.[40] As the Experiment was a significant collaboration between public and private enterprise, it mirrored the wider criminological context noted by sociologist David Garland, who has argued for the increased devolvement of crime-fighting responsibilities from the state to the private sector during the latter part of the twentieth-century.[41]

Over a three-month period, the Experiment measured the impact of security devices on the rate of shoplifting. Boots were the biggest high-street retailer to take part in the Experiment, which also included a small ladies fashion outlet called Tina Boutique, a small and a medium-sized supermarket called Tom's and Gateway respectively, and a jewellery and fancy goods store named The Clock Shop. Various items of security equipment were placed into each store. Tina Boutique was equipped with warning notices and the 'token' protection of two dummy CCTV cameras, while convex mirrors were placed within both Tom's and Gateway supermarkets. The Clock Shop was fitted with a CCTV unit, co-axial cable protection and a 'securishow cabinet'. The cable was an alarmed loop restraint that tied down and protected larger, open-display items, whilst the securishow cabinet functioned as a bespoke, glass-like cloche over high-valued merchandise. [42] Boots' contemporary Broadmead store received a suite of security technologies that the Bristol

[40] See letter published in, Duncan Maclanne, "Obtaining the Facts and Figures", *Security & Protection* 4, no.2 (1972): 10.
[41] David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[42] For review of Experiment see, "Tightening-Up Shop Security", *Chemist & Druggist,* January 22nd 1972: 99.

Constabulary described as being 'as comprehensive…as possible'.[43] By placing both fixed and mobile CCTV cameras, alarmed co-axial cables, security chains and convex mirrors conspicuously throughout the store, Boots executives were offered the opportunity to understand how these new technologies overlapped and integrated with the design of their modern self-selection spaces. Participation in the Experiment therefore marked a significant escalation in the efforts and measures hitherto used by the company to limit shoplifting's occurrence.

The city of Bristol was well qualified to host the trial. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Bristol Constabulary pioneered work in the types of collaborative crime prevention that epitomised the new criminological paradigm described by Garland.[44] In 1966, it established the country's first crime prevention unit, which fostered strong partnerships with a variety of local community and business groups in the pursuit of novel crime-cutting action.[45] As well as working closely with the University of Bristol's Sociology Department on a number of innovative crime reduction schemes, the Force was also instrumental in the creation of the *Help Yourself* film, which was produced as a direct result of the partnerships forged during the Experiment.[46]

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[43] See, Bristol Constabulary 'A' Division Crime Prevention Panel Anti-Shoplifting Campaign, Synopsis of Symposium's Conclusions in HO 287/1895- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Seventh Meeting, 20th April 1972, National Archives.
[44] Garland, *The Culture of Control*.
[45] Unknown, "Joint Panel to Fight City's Crime: Ideas Pooled in Monthly Review", *The Times,* 3rd February 1966, 6. See also, Bristol Chamber of Commerce Newsletter, Bristol: Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Shipping, July 1972. (Bristol Central Library)
[46] Unknown, "'Crimebusting' Team for Bristol", *The Bristol Evening Post*, 10th November 1970, 16. See also, Bristol Chamber of Commerce Newsletter, Bristol: Bristol Chamber of Commerce and Shipping, April 1972.

By 1971, leading figures within British policing believed shoplifting had reached such overwhelming levels that the orthodox criminal management approaches of detection and arrest had become futile. For example, in 1971 Chief Superintendent T.B. Walker of the Home Office Crime Prevention Centre claimed, any 'attempt to achieve security mainly by arresting shoplifters is like attempting to control a plague of locust with rifle fire'.[47] At the outset of the project, the Bristol Constabulary therefore decided to assimilate with these emerging ideologies by using the Experiment's technologies as tools of deterrence, rather than detection and intensified penal control.[48]

The Experiment also encapsulated an additional, emergent strand of later twentieth-century criminological thinking known as Situational Crime Prevention, which reasoned that many crimes occurred from specific social circumstances and were largely preventable through rational criminal management techniques. [49] In the case of shoplifting, the crime was felt to emerge from the specific *opportunities* inherent within self-service's offer of freedom and personal choice, with the opening paragraph of the Constabulary's Experiment report reasoning:

> If it is accepted that a person so inclined will steal where it is easy to do so and where the chance of avoiding detection is

[47] HO 287/1892- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Fifth Meeting, 12th January 1972, National Archives.
[48] See, Bristol Constabulary 'A' Division Crime Prevention Panel Anti-Shoplifting Campaign, in HO 287/1895- Seventh Meeting, 20th April 1972.
[49] Wetherell, *Foundations*, 119.

> greatest, it follows that petty crime must be in the main, preventable crime.[50]

While the Force appeared to blame self-service methodologies for the rises in shoplifting, the report also acknowledged that such techniques were 'obviously here to stay'. [51] They therefore hoped to find ways of making these new technologies work within the framework of modern self-service systems, by both limiting the temptation to steal, while also upholding the promises of contemporary choice-based shopping. This relied on making the potential shoplifter *feel* as if their actions were increasingly susceptible to detection, with the report going on to claim that:

> Some potential thieves at least, however motivated, might be helped to withstand temptation if the deterrence aids were effective enough to make them stop and think before acting.[52]

The emerging criminological ecology of prevention and deterrence was therefore conceptualised as the ideal complement to self-service retailing, as it preserved its routine operations, while targeting, through a mixture of fear and surveillance, only those heightened temptations to theft it was felt to provoke.

In January 1972, the results of the Experiment were unveiled at a special symposium held in the same suite of the Bristol Entertainment Centre that would later host the premiere of *Help Yourself*. It brought together journalists,

[50] See, Bristol Constabulary 'A' Division Crime Prevention Panel Anti-Shoplifting Campaign, in HO 287/1895- Seventh Meeting, 20th April 1972.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

Members of Parliament, police representatives, and stakeholders from the security, medical, and retail industries, with many media outlets reporting positively on its results.[53] For example, *The Times* claimed it had 'more than halved' incidents of shoplifting, while *The Western Daily Press* stated it had 'reduced losses' and 'cut thefts' within its participant stores.[54] In February 1972, *Security & Protection* ran a detailed and largely supportive review of the project claiming, 'the extent to which losses can be reduced by the installation of security equipment was clearly an eye-opener to many of the retailers who took part'.[55] This specialist journal reported that Tina Boutique had experienced no thefts during the three-month period, which amounted to a cash value saving of around £100. Similar results were found at The Clock Shop, where the owner declared the project 'very worthwhile'.[56] Tom's Supermarket also reduced its shrinkage rate from 4% to 2% of turnover— equivalent to around £17 a week— while Gateway apprehended two more shoplifters than it had managed in the corresponding period of the previous year. The journal also quoted James Wilson from Boots, who said that the 'in-store shrinkage figure…was reduced by a third in comparison to the corresponding period for 1970'.[57] All such reports therefore appeared to suggest that the Experiment's measures could be relied upon to contain shoplifting, while also protecting the pleasures of the wider retail economy.

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Peter Evans, "Chain Store Scrutiny More Than Halves Shoplifting Offences", *The Times*, 12th January 1972, 3; Anthony Parry, "Campaign Cuts the Shoplifting Bill", *The Western Daily Press*, 12th January 1972, 8.

[55] Unknown, "The Bristol Experiment Provides Some of the Answers", *Security & Protection* 4, no.2 (1972): 3.
See also, Unknown, "The Shoplifter- a Crime Prevention Experiment", *Security & Protection* 4, no.2 (1972): 14-17.

[56] Unknown, "The Shoplifter- a Crime Prevention Experiment": 16.

[57] Ibid.

Nevertheless, the Experiment's technologies were not the silver bullet that these results implied, with *Security & Protection* claiming it had only provided 'some of the answers' to the shoplifting problem.[58] Overall, it remained uncertain whether the Experiment's results could be sustained beyond its three-month test period and after customers had become accustomed to the technology's initial deterrence effect. Crucially, the preliminary impact of such technology was always liable to wane, due to the fact they functioned on the fragile paradox of heightening the threat of detection at the same time as police were retreating from their policy of containing shoplifting through arrests. When breaking down its results, Boots found a similar fading effect, with the rate of shrinkage initially reduced by 'more than 50%' during the Experiment's first month of operation.[59] Such diminishing returns created concerns within the company's executive and led to bosses going back on an original agreement to divulge their full results. The first month's figure was only disclosed to the Bristol Constabulary on the proviso it was kept strictly confidential, with the Force noting that Boots' management were clearly 'concerned about the effect such a figure will have on shareholders'.[60] Bosses believed that revealing such a figure not only uncovered the extent of the company's previous losses, but also imperilled the on-going deterrence effects of these new technologies. They therefore withdrew from any long-term involvement with the project, deliberately distancing themselves from

[58] Unknown, "The Bristol Experiment Provides Some of the Answers": 3.
[59] Bristol Constabulary 'A' Division Crime Prevention Panel Anti-Shoplifting Campaign, in HO 287/1895- Seventh Meeting, 20th April 1972.
[60] Ibid.

the *Help Yourself* film and the symposium, while also ensuring discussions of the Experiment were omitted from internal staff publications.[61]

While *Security & Protection* were convinced of the overall utility of security devices, they warned retailers that such technologies needed to be 'seen to be used' in order to have the desired deterrence effect.[62] This ultimately raised questions about the extent to which retailers needed to impose these new technologies upon modern sales-floors. The Experiment's participants welcomed their pronounced visibility, with the manager of Gateway supermarket claiming the installation of convex mirrors caused 'no undue reaction' from customers.[63] Tina Boutique's manager also said he was convinced of the need for some form of 'visual deterrent' after receiving 'no complaints' from customers regarding his store's new cameras and warning notices.[64] The *Help Yourself* film also argued that while some retailers still resisted the installation of security hardware, experience had shown that many shoppers had largely 'come to accept them'.[65] Nevertheless, not everyone appeared quite so accepting of the encroaching tide of this seemingly ever-suspicious technology.[66] For example, a *Sunday Times* article of May 1971, argued many women shared a nagging anxiety of 'inadvertently' attracting suspicion and being 'wrongfully accused of shoplifting' by the large supermarket chains.[67] A *Sunday Mirror* investigation

[61] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5-"We All Foot the Bill", *Boots News,* 1st March 1972, 15. Although published shortly after the symposium and inclusive of a number of its ideas and recommendations, the article fails to discuss the company's involvement in the Bristol Experiment.
[62] Unknown, "The Shoplifter- a Crime Prevention Experiment": 17.
[63] See advertisement "The Bristol Experiment Sponsored by Maclanne ", *Security & Protection* 4, no.3 (1972): 28.
[64] Ibid.
[65] NWFA 4555- "Help Yourself".
[66] Nell et al., "Helping Yourself," 382-83.
[67] Margaret Beddoes, "The Frightened Shopper", *Sunday Times*, 9th May 1971, 35.

of November 1972 also concluded that modern self-service stores created unsettling environments, with many women believing such shops were overly watchful and 'afraid of pilferage by mothers with prams'.[68] While its tone was comical, the *Daily Mirror's* regular 'Old Codgers' column also expressed the anxieties many consumers felt towards encroaching anti-shoplifting technology. Its authors stated:

> We Old Pair are beginning to resent this trend of treating all customers as crooks. We've stopped using one big store, where spying TV cameras hanging over our heads made us feel like prisoners in some flippin' penitentiary.[69]

As Boots had a policy of deterring shoplifters 'by overt means', its approach was fraught with risks and represented a very fine margin for error.[70] While the *Boots News* commented that customers broadly tolerated these new technologies and even found new CCTV cameras 'entertaining', bosses remained mindful that this new security hardware had to be introduced in ways that were 'acceptable to honest customers'.[71] Managers claimed they were 'evaluating' these new technologies 'closely' in an effort to maintain goodwill and keep customers 'on our side', whilst also providing a powerful enough deterrent to potential shoplifters.[72] After 1971, bosses therefore sought to use their experience on the Experiment to install anti-shoplifting

[68] Eve Pollard, Barbara Marks, and Judy Gould, "How Super are our Supermarkets?", Sunday Mirror, 19th November 1972, 12-13.
[69] Old Codgers, "Live Letters", *The Daily Mirror*, 1st April 1970, 16.
[70] See Boots evidence in HO 287/1889- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Evidence from Retail Organisations, c.1971-1973, National Archives.
[71] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "We All Foot the Bill", *Boots News.*
[72] Ibid.

technology in ways that allied with, rather than undermined, the personal freedoms on offer within their self-selection stores.

Anti-Shoplifting Technologies

In 1972, a *Boots News* article claimed the retailer was faced with the '£100 million question' of how to distinguish the shoplifter from the vast majority of its law-abiding customers.[73] In ways that mirrored the sense of expanded consumer participation brought by the post-war era's affluent retail economy, the article argued there was 'no typical shoplifter' and that it was extremely 'difficult to generalise' about contemporary thieves.[74] Declaring that modern shoplifters ranged from '8 to 80' and were men and women from any social class, the article declared, 'somehow we have to deter and detect this small percentage of our 'customers' without offending the honest majority'. It suggested the 'first (and best)' means of achieving this was through 'an attentive and well trained staff', arguing that alert employees 'provided the attention that the honest customer wants and shoplifter doesn't'.[75] In theory, this practice asked employees to refrain from pre-emptively picking-out prospective shoplifters and instead to align the tenets of good salesmanship with attentive security measures. It therefore appeared to preserve the freedoms of post-war shopping in favour of the honest, law-abiding customer.

The informal policing provided by employees was common across the post-war retailing sector. In 1972, the Home Office created a Working Party to investigate the nationwide problem of shoplifting and to establish a series of recommendations intent upon its curtailment. It heard evidence from a range

[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

of businesses and groups including Boots, M&S, Tesco, Woolworth's, Trade Unions and the Consumer's Association.[76] When giving his evidence, Boots' Security Officer James Wilson repeated the claim that good service and good crime control went hand-in-hand.[77] In addition, Woolworth's Chief of Security told the Committee that 'good supervision' was more effective than any other crime fighting method, while W.H. Smith's Security Controller claimed his staff were always on the 'alert' for shoplifters.[78] Despite these claims, Wilson believed the high-quality service skills assigned to their self-selection employees differentiated the company from its high-street rivals and offered customers superior forms shoplifting curtailment (see also chapter four). He told the Working Party that Boots' supervisors held an advantage over 'retail managers in other spheres' because their pharmaceutical qualifications afforded them a greater 'intellectual capacity to operate security systems'.[79]

However, there were limitations to using customer service as a means of criminal-control. Principally, it placed expectations upon staff to maintain a state of near perpetual vigilance. While methods of customer service and interaction were good in theory, it was implausible for sales staff to observe every customer, in every area of the shop, during every moment of the working day, particularly after Boots had purposely embedded an element of customer autonomy within its new stores. A further drawback of this system

[76] See collection HO 287/1889-1901-Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Evidence from Retail Organisations, c.1971-1973, National Archives. Also, Home Office, *Shoplifting and Thefts by Shop Staff.*
[77] See Boots evidence in HO 287/1889- Evidence from Retail Organisations.
[78] Quote taken from Woolworth's evidence to Working Party, HO 287/1896- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Eighth Meeting, 16th May 1972, National Archives. For W.H. Smith evidence see, HO 287/1889- Evidence from Retail Organisations.
[79] HO 287/1889- Evidence from Retail Organisations.

was its continued reliance on staff being able to make a correct distinction between the honest and dishonest customer, the risk being that innocent members of the public would feel put off from their shopping experience if wrongly surveilled by staff. It therefore placed an additional onus onto customers to behave appropriately and to move through the store in ways that were entirely above suspicion. Janice Winship noted the 'new self-disciplines' and 'routines' the inter-war chain-store required of its female consumers, with Lawrence Black & Thomas Spain furthering these arguments by claiming that shopping within self-service stores was an 'art' that needed to be 'learned'.[80] This process of education extended to the avoidance of suspicion, with customers needing to adopt new behaviours and corporeal codes in order to regulate their shopping practices and appear trustworthy. In a system lacking any definitive shoplifter typology, the ways in which shoppers moved through, and interacted with, sales spaces therefore became increasingly important markers for identifying transgression. For some supermarket detectives, the failure to collect a complimentary wire basket offered signals of potential wrongdoing.[81] In addition, *The Sunday Times* advised customers to adopt reputable behaviours when shopping within self-service stores and to make it 'abundantly obvious' they intended to pay for goods whenever they moved products from a 'shelf, counter or drawer'.[82]

According to the *Help Yourself* film, the majority of law-abiding customers were capable of conforming to these unwritten rules, which conversely

[80] Winship, "Culture of Restraint," 27; Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 168.
[81] Nell et al., "Helping Yourself," 378.
[82] Ewan Mitchell, "How Not to Get Charged with Shoplifting", *The Sunday Times*, 21st July 1968, 46.

created a series of 'tell-tale' signs for noticing a shoplifter. These included the rearrangement of merchandise 'without apparent reason' and the presence of a customer 'who looks out of place'.[83] Boots executives formulated their own checklist for identifying potential offences, with the *Boots News* telling employees that as 'bulky clothes, large sleeves' and even 'umbrellas' were used to hide goods, they needed to be on the lookout for items that failed to accord with outdoor weather conditions.[84] Shop-floor employees were trained to look out for other subtle clues, such as those customers 'who talk a lot', those who used 'the branch several times a day' and 'people working together'.[85] Nevertheless, attempting to identify transgressive behaviours solely via these criteria was fraught with ambiguities. For example, rearranging stock on a shelf could justifiably reflect a customer's right to browse, while a return visit on the same day could simply affirm the promoted convenience of Boots' retail spaces. While many of the behaviours listed on the employee checklist were atypical of contemporary retailing codes, they could never denote, in themselves, an admission of shoplifting guilt. Employees consequently relied on their trained intuition, and perhaps even their own social and cultural prejudices, as much as any direct observations of customer misbehaviour, with the company only ever issuing the rather nebulous advice that noticing a shoplifter often relied upon an assistant's 'practiced eye'.[86]

This situation can perhaps explain the paradox of post-war juveniles, who despite the admission that shoplifting occurred across all social groups, still

[83] NWFA 4555- "Help Yourself".
[84] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "We All Foot the Bill", *Boots News.*
[85] WBA/BT/5/30/66- Security Training, c.1982-1985.
[86] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "We All Foot the Bill", *Boots News.*

received a disproportionate amount of blame for shoplifting cases.[87] A questionnaire distributed by the Home Office Working Party confirmed that amongst retailers there was a 'majority opinion that shoplifters' came from the 'young age group'.[88] Commission member, Chief Superintendent T.B. Walker, also told the committee that in 1971 'juveniles accounted for almost one half of the total detected cases of shoplifting' in Birmingham, with truanting schoolchildren spending their afternoons 'shoplifting in the city centre'.[89] Sainsbury's executives noticed a parallel trend, declaring that juvenile shoplifting was a 'special problem', particularly within their New Town stores.[90] Training given to Boots employees tended to uphold this trope of the recalcitrant teen, with staff specifically directed to be on the lookout for the 'problem of youngsters', particularly during lunchtimes.[91] The threat posed by juveniles was further outlined in instructions given to the company's contracted security personnel, who were tasked with guarding against 'problem…gangs of youths' and preventing them from entering Boots stores.[92]

These accusations were nonetheless significantly over-determined and were informed by wider stereotypes perpetuated within the mainstream media surrounding the teenager's supposed antagonism to mainstream societal practices and values.[93] Informed by these prejudices and fears, the teen consequently became an easy target for blame, with their propensity to shop

[87] Kefford, *Life and Death of the Shopping City*, 277.
[88] HO 287/1899-Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Evidence from Retail Organisations, c.1971-1973, National Archives.
[89] HO 287/1892- Fifth Meeting, 12th January 1972.
[90] Quote taken from Sainsbury's evidence to Working Party, HO 287/1893-Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Sixth Meeting, 7th March 1972, National Archives.
[91] WBA/BT/5/30/66- Security Training, c.1982-1985.
[92] WBA/BT/5/35/16/37- Executive Development Programme: Retail Security at Boots, July 1986.
[93] Fowler, *Youth Culture* 127-43; Green, *All Dressed Up*.

differently from adults—such as in large, collective groups—attracting the accusations of delinquency and mistrust outlined in chapter three. While not all teens were actively seeking to confront the established conventions of contemporary shopping, it was nevertheless the case that their actions and methods of buying were distinctive enough to lead them to falling foul of heightened levels of suspicion and mistrust. The fragility of these prejudices was actually confirmed by Sainsbury's own figures, which found that under-17s committed only 10% of infractions, which made their offences roughly proportionate with other demographic groups.[94]

As Boots executives had accepted that youths were as likely to steal as any other social group, they largely conceptualised their indiscretions as stemming from their status as inexperienced retail consumers. Perhaps in an attempt to retain their friendly avuncular appearance as a family business upholding traditional values, Boots stores extended a unique level of leniency towards the teen, with those caught stealing a 'very small item' largely excused of their transgressions.[95] This meant that branch managers were instructed to overlook small contraventions such as a teenaged girl stealing an inexpensive lipstick or eye shadow. Further discretions were applied to those youths caught stealing more expensive goods, with managers trained to seek the advice of police and to resolve the incident in the 'best interests of the child' without having to 'involve a prosecution'.[96] As their stores had courted the teenaged market through the sale of own-brand merchandise like Seventeen, it was inconceivable that Boots executives would ever seek to

[94] See Sainsbury's evidence in HO 287/1893-Sixth Meeting, 7th March 1972.
[95] WBA/BT/5/34/1/12- Direction Letters, 1963 edition.
[96] Ibid.

de-incentivise affluent youths from entering their stores. They therefore worked to mitigate the risks associated with this new group of consumers in ways that upheld the financial interests and reputation of the company. As chapter 3 demonstrated, they did this by lavishing special attention on Seventeen's teenage customer, integrating them within the codes of acceptable retail behaviour whilst also subtly bringing them within the remit of increased surveillance and criminal control.

Although individual employee action remained important, Boots stores kept pace with broader retail trends by gradually adopting more technologies of shoplifting deterrence during the 1970s. While visibility and a sense of space were already fundamental elements of modern retail design, the introduction of convex mirrors sought to intensify surveillance even further. The mirrors dovetailed comfortably with the extended lines of sight already offered within self-selection stores, with many positioned strategically in corners or at aisle junctions to enhance the sales floor's sense of elongation (Image 5.2). Reporting on the Experiment's symposium, the *Bristol Evening Post* noted how the fear of being caught increased significantly once thieves felt someone, or something like a camera or mirror, was watching them.[97] Convex mirror manufacturers such as the Volumetric Company therefore began persuading retailers to integrate this 'cost effective' new technology within their sales spaces.[98] Encouraging shop owners to 'Cash in on the Mirror Miracle!', the company's 1970's advertisements detailed how their

[97] Pat Kavanagh, "Shoplifting Unlikely- If Someone is Watching", *The Bristol Evening Post,* 12th January 1972, 3.
[98] Extract and advertisements from journal *Self-Service & Supermarket*, July 8th 1971 included within HO 287/1891- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Evidence from the Customer, c. 1971-1973, National Archives.

product's 'wide angle of vision' illuminated the 'blind spots' and dark recesses where shoplifters tended to gather.[99]



Image 5.2: An example of a security mirror in use within the Middlesbrough branch of Boots. c.1974 (WBA/BT/21/46/1/608/5)

The first half of the 1970s saw convex mirrors become a regular feature of modern retail spaces. *Self-Service and Supermarket* reported that alongside their installation by Fine Fare and Sainsbury's supermarkets, Tesco had added them to 40 of its newest stores. Equally, they were now considered 'standard security equipment' for the Spar and VG convenience store groups.[100] From 1973, Boots' branch managers began receiving guidance on their usage and potential impact. A circular from the company's Central

[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

Security Services stated new mirrors needed to be positioned 'with the purpose of reducing the privacy of any potential shoplifter'.[101] The memo went on to state that mirrors needed to be positioned at heights of between '6' 6' and 7' 6' because they were considered to have the greatest impact when positioned lower to the ground. After noting there was 'continual evidence of losses' within the company's newly converted self-service record departments, the Central Security Services team recommended placing Volumetric mirrors 'on scanning motors around the perimeters of such areas, at a density of 1 per 250 square feet'.[102]

Although the staff circular suggested mirrors should not 'obstruct' the sales-floor and that 'due regard' needed to be given to the 'overall appearance' of the branch, Image 5.3 illustrates the challenges branch managers faced in achieving a balance between effective deterrence and over-imposing, unsettling scrutiny. [103] Taken within the company's Stratford store in around 1973, this image features five convex mirrors packed tightly along just one central aisle. The near saturation of mirrors in this instance indicates that there were no firm directives issued by company directors concerning the number and position of in-store anti-shoplifting technologies. Individual branch managers were expected to exercise their discretion, with factors including the pre-existing layout and design of stores, the particular merchandise in need of protection and the local patterns of crime influencing their decision. When Wilson gave evidence to the Working Party Committee, he acknowledged Boots stores experienced crime in uneven, regionally

[101] WBA/BT/25/39/4/1- Security Circulars, including "Look Out!", c.1976-1979.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.

inflected ways, claiming rates tended to be higher in 'London, Liverpool and Glasgow'.[104] Such differences demonstrated that Boots customers never experienced the impacts of shoplifting in homogenous ways, with an individual's exposure to crime-cutting technology often contingent upon the measures introduced within their regular store.



Image 5.3: Interior of Boots Branch Stratford, London, 1973. (WBA/BT/21/46/1/560/157/6)

The intensified forms of patrol seen within the Stratford branch therefore raised fundamental questions about the efficacy of these technologies and how they might watch-over customers without making them feel they were being over-watched. While branch managers wanted these technologies to register with both shoplifters and honest customers, they also needed to ensure their decisions navigated the unformulated distinctions between negligible and domineering crime-fighting action. Although the company was

[104] See Boots evidence in HO 287/1889- Evidence from Retail Organisations.

reflecting *Security & Protection's* advice by making it clear they were using mirrors as a form of shoplifting control, such overt displays risked diminishing their psychological impact by making them a normalised part of the retail experience. Conversely, deploying them in marginal ways risked eradicating their crime-cutting capacity altogether. In the absence of any evidence for a correlation between the number of mirrors used and the number of shoplifters they deterred, branch managers were therefore left to individually weigh-up the impact such technologies would have on criminal deterrence, the overall tone of their stores, and the levels of enjoyment experienced by their law-abiding shoppers.

Alarmed anti-shoplifting cables also gained popularity during the first half of the 1970s, with Boots' security department confidently proclaiming their use would 'reduce to the exceptional' the theft of protected items.[105] By allowing customers to continue handling and inspecting goods, the cables appeared to uphold the imperatives of self-selection, whilst also offering a helpful level of protection for higher-value items. While this appeared to be a successful compromise, security cables nonetheless tethered and wrapped the tactile sensations of self-selection shopping in a new cloak of suspicion. Unlike the cost-effective, indiscriminate gaze provided by convex mirrors, security cables offered a more expensive, and thus more selective, form of protection. Drawing attention to the cable's £10 cost, a staff circular informed branch managers that it would be both an 'inconvenience' and a 'false economy' to consider using the technology to protect all merchandise.[106] Branch managers consequently had to determine the price point when such

[105] WBA/BT/25/39/4/1- Security Circulars.
[106] Ibid.

technologies could justifiably interfere with the customer experience, with such decisions carrying the implicit suggestion that while some items were undeserving of safeguarding, others warranted exceptional levels of protection. For example, despite the presence of cable technology, Boots' security officer told the Home Office Working Party that stores continued to place 'high value' audio and electrical equipment behind glass.[107] While these value judgements sat awkwardly with the promoted freedoms of self-selection, they nonetheless illustrated the balance branch managers needed to strike between the implementation of anti-shoplifting methods and the preservation of the company's more prestigious, class-coded forms of retail experience.

According to the *Help Yourself* film, these new technologies needed to be accompanied by a series of 'bold notices' and warning signage, which clarified to customers that their interests were 'being protected' by the retailer.[108] While one part of this protection related to limiting shoplifting to keep prices as low as possible for customers, the other part concerned preserving the values of genuine, honest customers. Taken within the company's Chiswick High-Road store in around 1975, Image 5.4 demonstrates how Boots prominently displayed 15' x 10' 'Shoplifters will be prosecuted' signs throughout its sales floors.[109] While repeatedly displaying these bright orange notices upon the store's central columns appeared to extend the pervasiveness of crime-fighting technologies, they nevertheless aimed to instil an element of selectiveness within the wider ecology of

[107] See Boots evidence in HO 287/1889- Evidence from Retail Organisations.
[108] NWFA 4555- "Help Yourself".
[109] Signage discussed within, WBA/BT/25/39/4/1- Security Circulars.

deterrence. By directly singling out the shoplifter's subversive actions, the signs sought to quietly reinforce the normative behaviours of law-abiding citizen-shoppers, by preserving their identity as one worthy of celebration. They also offered tacit reassurances that customers could accumulate virtue and bypass the rigours of anti-shoplifting technology simply by adhering to convention and shopping correctly within Boots stores. This was underlined within a 1980 staff-training document, which discussed how the company's anti-shoplifting measures needed to protect and uphold the values of Boots' 'Community' of shoppers, which in this case related to the body of upstanding customers who had always been integral to the company's success.[110] By building a consensus around the virtuous behaviours of these customers, Boots executives aimed to demonstrate that in spite of the encroachment of anti-shoplifting technology, preserving the freedoms and choice-centred approach of self-selection remained the firm's overriding priority.

[110] WBA/BT/5/30/66- Security Training.



Image 5.4: Interior of Boots Branch Chiswick, High-Road, London c.1975
(WBA/BT/21/46/1/560/29/8)

Nevertheless, the use of such signs reflected the increasingly hollow and ambivalent nature of efforts to deter shoplifting through the latent threat of detection. In 1979, the persistently high levels of shoplifting prompted the company to update its signage to include tougher, more threatening language. This echoed the 1976 Direction Letters' revised terminology, which signalled growing official concern by framing shoplifting as a 'very prevalent' issue.[111] In addition to the Letters showing a reduced level of leniency toward shoplifters, the notices appeared to suggest that Boots had adopted a toughened, zero-tolerance policy on the crime. For example, the larger display signs now read, 'Shoplifting is theft. Thieves will be prosecuted', while smaller notices placed upon rows of shelving declared, 'Thieves will be prosecuted'.[112] However, it remained uncertain as to whether Boots

[111] WBA/BT/5/34/1/12- Direction Letters, 1976 edition.
[112] WBA/BT/25/39/4/1- Security Circulars.

executives ever truly believed in the veracity of these threats, with Wilson acknowledging to the 1972 Home Office committee that the deterrence effect of prosecution was 'negligible in London and other big cities'.[113] There was consequently always something rather hopeful and futile about this hardened language, with bosses left in the weak position of only being able to use such signage as a means of reasserting the psychological threats of technologies known to have diminishing deterrence effects. Paradoxically, the notices underscored the vulnerability of modern anti-shoplifting technology, as they were consistently incapable of delivering the zero-tolerance approach implied by their rhetoric.

While Wilson told the committee that technologies 'must be shown to be effective in detection' in order to have the desired deterrence effect, the company's use of CCTV equipment demonstrated that it continued to rely on the indeterminate effects of psychological restrictions as its primary means of shoplifting control.[114] Provided by the Photo-Scan Company, this technology represented a significant cost to the business, ensuring that by 1978 it remained reserved for those branches with the highest rates of shoplifting. During that year, selected branch managers received the system's operations manual, which outlined both its 'deterrence/surveillance roll' and the wider 'practical and psychological uses of Closed Circuit Television'.[115] The company's Central Security Services also demanded that this new technology was used alongside the store's authorised security notices, claiming that without them 'a considerable amount of the deterrence value'

[113] See Boots evidence in HO 287/1889- Evidence from Retail Organisations.
[114] Ibid.
[115] WBA/BT/25/39/4/1- Security Circulars. See also, HO 287/1893-Sixth Meeting, 7th March 1972.

would be lost.[116] Taken from the Slough branch in the 1970s, Image 5.5 illustrates how the technology's psychological effects worked at a practical level. Hung conspicuously from the ceiling and appearing like futuristic, otherworldly domes, the camera units had various protruding lenses that cast an omnipresent sense of surveillance into different areas of the store. As these units had the capacity to rotate, they were intended to make customers feel as if the threat of detection was more immediate and targeted than the fixed angles of sight offered by convex mirrors. In an effort to demonstrate that these units were in operation, stores broadcast their live-feed through large video monitors. As well as casting a more unsettling, watchful atmosphere across the stores, this approach heightened the technology's sense of collective surveillance, with the store's customers able to observe the real-time actions of others within separate areas of the shop. The image also demonstrates that by placing these screens directly above cosmetics counters, managers were hoping to target the technology's regulative psychological effects into an area of the store that contained higher-value, yet easily pilfered goods.

[116] WBA/BT/25/39/4/1- Security Circulars.



Image 5.5: Interior of Slough branch, 1970s. (WBA/BT/21/46/1/810/10)

Despite introducing these new technologies, Boots executives never aimed to reduce shoplifting to a particular level. While bosses declared that this new hardware was symbolic of their deep-rooted ambition to 'beat the thief' on behalf of both their own interests and those of wider society, Wilson's comment to the Working Party that there was 'no acceptable level of losses' did not suggest the company strived for zero incidents of the crime.[117] He instead spoke in terms of containing shoplifting, with bosses keen to ensure their outlay on security measures was relational to, but never exceeded, their losses through shoplifting. While he claimed this situation had 'not yet been reached', the company's attempt to uphold shopping freedoms and stop its

[117] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5-"We All Foot the Bill", *Boots News;* See Boots evidence in HO 287/1889-Evidence from Retail Organisations.

stores from becoming overly fortified spaces ultimately ensured that shoplifting remained a difficult issue for the retailer to overcome.[118]

Procedures of Criminal Control

During the 1970s, the security procedures of Boots' retail environments increasingly fell under the remit of the company's Central Security Services.[119] Situated in Boots' Nottingham headquarters, the department circulated security rules and advice on matters including branch signage, the safe handling of cash, bomb threats and customer fraud.[120] This ever-widening remit of retailer responsibility reflected many of the recommendations made within the *Help Yourself* film and indicated how security management was increasingly seen as a core function of Boots' retail operations. The film had emphasised how the individual attitude of staff was now a critical component in the retailer's fight against the shoplifter, with company's expected to deploy a series of professionalised and methodical schemes of operation that recognised both the seriousness of the new criminal context and their responsibilities towards correcting it.[121] According to the film's narrator Stratford Johns, anti-shoplifting technologies would be nothing more than 'expensive ornaments' without the collaboration of effective staff-training and specialised operating techniques.[122] His comments emphasised that the onus of responsibility was now on the retailer to literally help themselves, by not only anticipating Britain's new criminal

[118] See Boots evidence in HO 287/1889- Evidence from Retail Organisations.
[119] WBA/BT/25/39/4/1- Security Circulars.
[120] Ibid.
[121] NWFA 4555- "Help Yourself".
[122] Ibid.

inevitabilities but also having the correct procedures in place to defend against them.

From 1974 to 1977, Central Security Services conducted a campaign titled 'Look Out!', designed to realise the company's goal of integrating in-store salesmanship with efficient security operations. It therefore provided branch managers and employees with what it felt were 'common sense reminders' of the company's shoplifting and security protocols (Image 5.6).[123] In anticipation of the busy Christmas period, a 1977 'Look Out!' circular sought to provide a timely reminder of the logical and easily repeatable security behaviours expected of Boots employees. It reinforced the company's six-point plan for beating 'deliberate distractions' and protecting stock, with assistants told to never count money next to the cash register and to lock all cash into a safe at the close of business.[124] It also contained a four-point check-list for managing in-store theft, which included 'giving clear instructions on the action to be taken if staff see someone shoplifting', as well as ensuring no individuals were left to their 'own devices' when visiting back of store areas.[125] In a demonstration that the company's security policy relied upon reducing the opportunities and temptations for theft, the memo also asked employees to make sure locks were fitted to glass showcases and that the keys were 'kept on a responsible assistant's person'.[126]

[123] WBA/BT/25/39/4/1- Security Circulars.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.

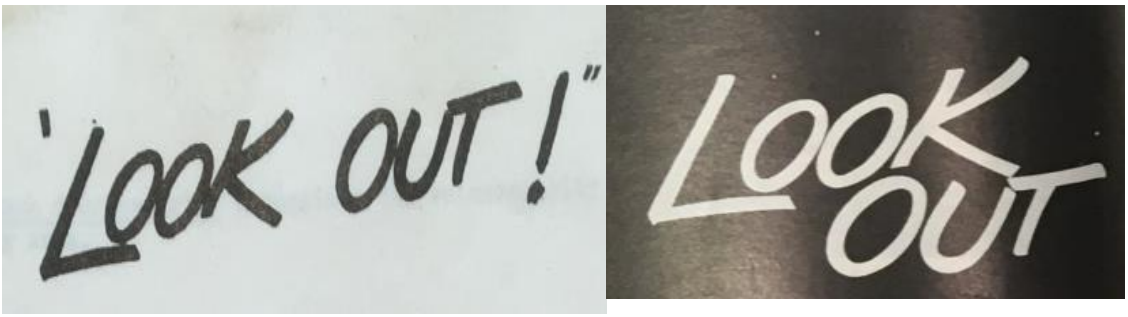


Image 5.6: Examples of 'Look Out!' campaign typeface, 1974-77. (see WBA/BT/25/39/4/1)

From November 1974, the 'Look Out!' campaign released a series of educational posters intended for prominent display within the staff rooms of individual Boots branches.[127] Released six weeks apart, each of the posters covered a different element of the company's security operations, with the first of these discussing how to deal with shoplifting. Image 5.7, which is taken from episode eleven of the *Boots News* cartoon 'The Adventures of Sue' (see chapter four), demonstrates the educative role these posters were envisaged to perform, with groups of colleagues expected to gather around these displays studying and discussing their contents. In an effort to secure the maximum level of employee buy-in, company bosses ran a competition that required staff to read all five of the published posters before completing a quiz on their contents. Enticed by a first prize of a weekend in Malta, entrants were asked to complete ten questions, including 'which groups of merchandise do shoplifters favour the most?' and 'if you found a stranger in the back shop area…what should you do?'.[128] While the posters and the competition illustrated the increased reliance upon the professionalised training of staff as a central pillar of Boots' crime fighting plan, they also exemplified that the firm were using its individual responsibilities to define not

[127] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Look Out- For retail Staff only", *Boots News,* 13th November 1974, 6.
[128] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Win a Weekend to Malta!", *Boots News,* 25th June 1975, 16.

only what counted as an incident of wrongdoing, but also the measures it was prepared to take in confronting it. For example, the competition asked employees to define the 'correct security procedure' for when customers purchased higher-value handbags, toilet bags or suitcases via counter-service methods.[129] This outlined how bosses were shaping these procedures to align with the wider methods of selling encouraged within their own system of self-selection.



Image 5.7: Excerpt from 'The Adventures of Sue' cartoon, *Boots News*, June 25th 1975: 12.

The 'Look Out!' name sought to encapsulate the expectation that employees would attentively patrol shop-floors and use their service skills to confidently enact the company's processes of security management. One way this was evidenced was through its proposals for counteracting the 'increasingly common' form of stealing known as price switching, where customers would remove price tickets from cheaper self-selection items and place them on

[129] Ibid.

more expensive goods before paying for them at the register.[130] Bosses reasoned that an employee's thorough knowledge of their store's product range and prices was the best means of averting this crime. As the autonomy of self-selection made it difficult for staff to be certain that it was the paying customer who had actually switched the ticket, the company's circulars instructed employees to use their superior service skills to instead politely inform the paying customer that the article 'appeared to have been incorrectly priced', before then calmly charging them the correct amount.[131] The measure therefore reflected the gradual internalisation of the company's processes of security management, with bosses seeking to fill the void left by the police's partial withdrawal from policies of arrest and sentencing by making their employees increasingly responsible for the everyday procedural containment of shoplifting.

This gradual shift was also evidenced in the 1976 Direction Letters, which described how branch managers were expected to supervise incidents of in-store theft in much more authoritative terms than had been the case between the 1930s and 60s.[132] While the procedures for spotting, confronting and questioning a shoplifter remained largely unchanged, managerial staff were given significantly more discretion about when to relinquish control to the authorities, with police entering proceedings much later and generally in much less authoritative terms than before. The 1976 Letter instructed, 'if there happens to be a store detective in your branch…on shoplifting patrol,

[130] WBA/BT/5/34/1/12- Direction Letters, 1976 edition.
[131] WBA/BT/5/30/66- Security Training.
[132] WBA/BT/5/34/1/12- Direction Letters, 1976 edition.

let the store detective deal with the [offending] customer'.[133] It also claimed, 'there may be extreme cases…when it may be advisable not to refer the matter to the police'. The growing scepticism towards Britain's penal system was reflected in the claim that managers 'may' sign a charge sheet, but only if the police 'assure you…they are satisfied there is a good case'. Branch managers were also expected to defer to the 'Area Security Officer or Security Services Department', rather than the authorities, if they were ever unsure about the case or encountered a security issue they could not resolve themselves.[134]

During the 1970s, there was a growing consensus amongst retailers that newspaper articles covering shoplifting prosecutions carried dwindling levels of impact as a form of criminal deterrence. This marked a significant change from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when newspapers closely followed both the court proceedings and legal penalties handed down to shoplifters.[135] When submitting evidence to the Home Office Working Party, Mr V. Ely of the British Retail Consortium argued 'indifferent reporting' by many post-war newspapers had significantly undermined both the 'probity' of the criminal justice system and the seriousness of shoplifting cases, with many potential offenders encouraged to commit crimes as a result.[136] Boots executives largely agreed with Ely, with a 1972 *Boots News* article bemoaning how 'these days' shoplifting prosecutions attracted little attention

[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] The following works therefore rely strongly on the criminal reportage of contemporary newspapers to construct their arguments. Meier, "Going on the Hoist."; Scott, "Booster, the Snitch."; Wildman, "An 'Epidemic of Shoplifting'?."
[136] See evidence SWP/72 (41) submitted within, HO 287/1900- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Eleventh Meeting, 14th November 1972, National Archives.

within the local press.[137] Security Officer James Wilson also acknowledged this situation during his evidence to the Working Party, claiming that, 'unless there was an unusual feature in the case to attract the press, the prosecution was known only to those immediately involved'.[138]

In a reflection of the internalised nature of the company's wider security procedures, executives repurposed criminal reportage as a tool for the education and awareness of their own employees. Throughout the 1970s, the *Boots News* carried a number of stories related to shoplifting and retail crime, which tellingly, were almost entirely absent from the 1960s editions of its predecessor publication, *The Bee.* While the prevalence of these articles reflected the period's upsurge in shoplifting rates, their increased visibility in a publication directed at staff readers, illustrated that Boots were using these reports to reiterate its procedures for combatting shoplifting. By seizing control of the narratives surrounding the crime, Boots' managers were demonstrating their capacity to mould both the perceptions and necessary responses to its occurrence. Moreover, the reports further positioned the company's employees as surrogates for police involvement and thus the first line of defence against incidents of in-store theft.

An article within the July 1972 edition detailed the crime-fighting efforts of Mrs. Holmes and Mr. Watkins within the Photographic Department of the company's central Bristol Branch. It claimed both employees deserved 'great credit' for 'immediately' noticing, and then halting, the theft of the store's

[137] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "We All Foot the Bill", *Boots News.*
[138] See Boots evidence in HO 287/1889- Evidence from Retail Organisations.

'most expensive projector'.[139] Noting the exemplary behaviours of both members of staff, the report described how they both pursued the young felon to another shop, whereupon they shouted 'Stop Him!' to alert other members of public into supporting his apprehension. The feature portrayed the pair as brave, alert and conscientious, describing how they correctly suspected the young man after recognising him from a previous day. In doing so, it reflected company procedures back onto its readers, instructionally emphasising how the studious fulfilment of staff guidelines had helped detain the thief and contribute to the on-going success of the business. At the end of the piece, branch manager Mr. K.E. Burge acknowledged the pair's valour, noting that without their 'instant action' the company would have been down one £39.95 projector.[140]

The report's positive tone underlined how the company's procedures played a crucial role in the successful confrontation of the shoplifter and how staff action remained the essential front line in battling the crime. It was not an isolated example. A similar report from December 1973 noted how sales assistant Carol Downey had witnessed a shoplifter 'coolly' pilfer a display case of watches worth over £200.[141] As well as praising the employees 'quick thinking', the article noted Carol's ability to enlist the support of colleagues and the police in her pursuit of the shoplifter. Using her actions as an exemplar for other employees to follow, the report heard from Head of Security Julian Joffe, who claimed, 'Carol certainly did not lack the will to act.

[139] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5-"Foiled by Staff", *Boots News,* 26th July 1972, 13.
[140] Ibid.
[141] WBA/BT/27/39/2/5- "Carol Foils the Watch Thief", *Boots News,* 12th December 1973, 4.

Notice she called for assistance…In these circumstances, exactly right'.[142] The ways in which such articles were used to project lessons of security protocol were exemplified in the final line, when Joffe appealed to the consciences of the readers. Referring to the Timex cases stolen by the thief, Joffe said, 'it is advisable to secure them to counter tops', before rhetorically adding, ARE YOURS?'.[143]

This style of reporting saw a growing recognition amongst Boots employees that, in the absence of widespread police involvement, they had a significant role to play in reducing shoplifting. For example, during the 1980s, a staff-training scheme highlighted how workers were beginning to self-define their role as that of 'community policeman', who needed to defend against in-store criminal activity for the benefit of their genuine, law-abiding shoppers. [144] While the company's trainers treated these community-minded values positively, their presence nevertheless exposed deeper questions about the balance of responsibility between post-war retailers and law-enforcement and whether the police could be relied upon to support and uphold the wider ecology of deterrence with effective punishment and prosecution.

This issue was consistently raised during the Home Office Working Party meetings. At meeting eleven, Mr. Ely filed a report that claimed the nationwide 'variations' in police attitudes 'towards prosecuting suspected offenders', was one that caused continual concerns for retailers.[145] Earlier, in March 1971, Mr Duncan of the British Security Industry Association claimed

[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] WBA/BT/5/30/66- Security Training.
[145] HO 287/1900- Eleventh Meeting, 14th November 1972.

that while the Hampshire Force was 'prepared to prosecute in every case' with sufficient evidence, the neighbouring Surrey Constabulary 'very rarely did so'.[146] This was largely substantiated within the Surrey Force's written evidence to the committee. This framed the prosecution of shoplifting offenders as a process laced with caveats and ambiguities that were based around acquiring 'direct evidence' of theft.[147] It also claimed that where the offender was a local person of previous good character, and the value of the stolen property was small, the complainant was informed that it was not 'considered a suitable case in which to accept the charge'. Citing the evidence provided by shop staff and store detectives as often 'suspect or unsatisfactory', the Force also stated that those stores with security staff employed to detect shoplifting should, 'when in possession of the evidence…be responsible for its prosecution'.[148]

This created differences of opinion across Britain's major high-street retailers as to the viability of the police response. Although a 1972 *Boots News* article claimed the company felt 'obliged' to pursue the prosecution of its shoplifters, Mr S.G. Reynolds from M&S told the Working Party that the decision to press charges was 'always taken by the manager'.[149] Reynolds suggested that much of this discretion was weighted towards the customer, with the retailer preferring 'to risk losing money than damage the store/customer relationship'. W.H. Smith's policy was to prosecute 'all found stealing',

[146] HO 287/1890- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, The Police and Prosecution Policy, c. 1971-1972, National Archives.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] "We All Foot the Bill", *Boots News;* Quote taken from Marks and Spencer evidence to Working Party, HO 287/1892- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Fifth Meeting, 12th January 1972, National Archives.

believing this was the 'only way to deter thieves'. The company also wanted stronger involvement from the criminal justice system, telling the Working Party that its 'wish' was for prosecutions to be handled by the police rather than the retailer.[150] Waitrose executives tended to agree, believing it was the firm's 'social responsibility' to prosecute as a form of deterrent.[151] Others took an even harder line. President of the National Grocers' Federation, Mr L.E. Reeves claimed that while 'some foolish people' persisted in blaming self-service retailers for the rises in shoplifting, the issue could only ever be contained if it was 'met with punishment' from the police.[152] However, not everyone agreed. Woolworth's evidence to the same committee included a statement from the company's Security Manager Mr Slade, who declared that the 'company's policy did not favour the prosecution of detected offenders'.[153] Arguing that any prosecution was 'bad for the company's image', Slade said theft-prevention was not a major consideration of his business because, 'the sympathies of the police, the courts and the public are with the offender rather than the shop'.

While these retailers all operated their stores under the broad ideological remit of self-service, the examples demonstrated how individual customers were exposed to different processes and conceptualisations of shoplifting abatement. Some retailers were mindful that this uneven approach was not only problematic for the consumer, but also perpetuated society's inability to confront shoplifting issues, with managers from the John Lewis Partnership

[150] HO 287/1899- Evidence from Retail Organisations.
[151] Ibid.
[152] HO 287/1897- Home Office: Police Files, Working Party on Internal Shop Security, Tenth Meeting, 19th September 1972, National Archives.
[153] See Woolworth's evidence in HO 287/1896- Eighth Meeting, 16th May 1972.

telling the Working Party that those retailers who were 'soft' on prosecutions merely served to attract crime to the high-street like a 'magnet'.[154] The creation and use of the era's new deterrence mechanisms had therefore created a level of uncertainty, with even the simple question of whether individuals would be criminalised for their offenses now subject to interpretation and debate. With retailers unable to create a cohesive crime-fighting approach that could function at an urban, as well as an individual store level, the everyday shopping experiences of customers—and the ways they were either suspected of, or protected from shoplifting—therefore became as distinctive as the models of self-service implemented by separate retail concerns.

Conclusion

In the mid-1980s, Boots executives launched a fresh staff-training initiative aimed at addressing the 'huge security problem faced by the company'.[155] Although bosses claimed to be 'alarmed at the recent dramatic increases in branch losses', the presence of the new scheme served to illustrate that the previous decade's influx of new anti-shoplifting technologies, and their associated reliance on policies of deterrence, had proved largely unsuccessful in containing shoplifting cases.[156] Yet, despite this realisation, the new scheme continued to rely on the ideologies of the previous decade, with bosses insisting that alert, attentive workers provided the best means of preventing opportunistic theft. The initiative therefore perpetuated the rather

[154] HO 287/1899- Evidence from Retail Organisations.
[155] WBA/BT/5/30/66- Security Training.
[156] Ibid.

idealistic premise of Situational Crime Prevention, arguing that watchful forms of staff surveillance would, 'deter crime, reduce opportunities given to criminals… prevent first timers from committing an offence' and lead to the police having more time to deal with 'serious offenders'.[157]

Although the persistence of these policies appeared slightly perverse, they were nevertheless necessitated by the hegemony of self-service ideologies and the company's desire to preserve its sense of freedom and choice on behalf of their regular, law-abiding shoppers. From as early as the 1950s American research visits, Boots executives had understood that self-service methodologies would cause a rise in shoplifting. They nevertheless took a rational approach to the format's implementation, believing it was justifiable to induce these criminal risks on account of the system's promised efficiencies and increased financial rewards. However, the format created complexities that proved more difficult to manage than was initially expected. Firstly, the new retail system's emphasis on customer-orientated touch and browsing made it difficult to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate customer action. Secondly, the desire to preserve customer goodwill alongside the sensations of self-service shopping meant there were always limitations on the type, and number, of controls branch managers were willing to impose. When taken together, these factors ultimately preserved a space within Boots' everyday retail experience where the tenets of self-service could be exploited, and shoplifting could continue to prosper.

While bosses sought to curtail the early 1970s rises in shoplifting through the introduction of new anti-shoplifting technologies, these proved to have only a

[157] Ibid.

momentary effect. Technologies such as convex mirrors, CCTV and alarmed cables merely diversified the ways in which Boots stores observed and scrutinised their customer's actions, with many testing the limits of how much the simple surveillance of customers could curtail the temptation to steal. While company bosses maintained its search for the elusive balance between curbing shoplifting and preserving the joys of shopping, they ultimately never found a universal template for the successful deployment of these technologies and processes. Alongside the police's partial withdrawal from policies of conviction, many customers also came to recognise that the threats associated within these technologies were largely hollow and unfulfilled, leaving many to become as ineffectual as the processes they had replaced. As well as locking the company into a perpetual cycle of refreshing and updating its procedures of shoplifting management, it also created discrepancies in how different retailers conceptualised and tackled the crime. The autonomous role retailers were afforded in managing their own systems of theft-control therefore saw company's implement solutions that suited their specific stores and ultimately resulted in the sector's uneven and fragmented approach to the persistence of shoplifting.

Conclusion- 'Evolution, not Revolution'

By the mid-to-late 1970s, Boots stores had begun to evidence a shift towards more conventional self-service approaches, with fixed position checkouts and complimentary wire baskets becoming a feature of its in-store experience.[1] It is nonetheless inaccurate to describe this moment as the point at which Boots finally became a self-service retailer. Such experiences maintained the availability of personalised employee expertise by continuing to coexist alongside advice-based service counters. Furthermore, by occurring in a gradual, piecemeal fashion, such upgrades followed the same flexible and adaptive patterns to retail modernisation and development previously adopted by the company. This illustrated that the retailer's 'new' system of selling merely built upon and extended the service-based imperatives initiated within its preceding model of self-selection. Of course, this tempered approach had always been the hallmark of the company's operations, having been in evidence since the days of the Packeteria. In 1933, bosses demonstrated their ability to look beyond the hyperbolic assessments of the Packeteria, to challenge the commonplace assumptions that it was an innovation ripe for unadulterated insertion within Britain's retailing cultures.[2] The more compromised view taken on the Packeteria's potential set the tone for how the retailer accepted and accommodated retail change and ultimately opened the door to the significant forms of diverse self-service practice explored within this thesis. It has argued that Boots' hesitant response to the Packeteria ultimately enabled the company to

[1] WBA/BT/5/17/5/9- "Staffing Policy and Practice in the Eighties", 2.
[2] WBA/BT/27/39/2/2- "The Shop of 1950", *The Bee*: 196-197.

renegotiate the principles of self-service trading in ways that accorded with its own values, tradition and ethos.

Boots The Chemist was an important presence on the British high street and the company unquestionably saw merit, and commercial advantage, in embracing those new methods of operation that demonstrated its connectedness to modern retailing cultures. Nevertheless, these impulses were never absolute, with the company's bosses always conscious that it had practical and reputational considerations to both balance and uphold within any potential scheme of modernisation. This thesis has been able to understand more about this process of compromise, and the ways in which elements of the Packeteria's idealised forms of retailing modernity ultimately made it into the firm's shops of the 1950's and beyond. The theme of negotiation has formed a central part of the analysis and has allowed the project to take a more pluralistic, nuanced view of the significant new sensations promised by the arrival of self-service techniques. In doing so, it has emphasised how self-service practices interacted with, rather than supplanted, the traditions and values of a pre-established retail firm.

In undertaking the first, detailed analysis of Boots' post-war history, the project has repositioned the retailer as an important participant within Britain's first-wave of self-service experiments. In showing this, it has also emphasised the important role non-grocery retailers played in the development of self-service ideas within post-war British retailing. However, while it has demonstrated the importance of the 1951 Burnt Oak experiment, the thesis has not sought to portray Boots as a pioneering, revolutionary initiator of Britain's first self-service chemist. It has rather used the trial as a

springboard for a broader investigation into how self-service ideas influenced practices as wide-ranging as the role of staff, the abatement of crime and the introduction of new, own-branded forms of merchandise. This approach has enabled the project to extend the analytical gaze of previous self-service histories, which have often been confined to the 'moment' companies introduced the system's newest ideas in layout and shop floor hardware.[3] What has been presented is not a straightforward history of self-service at Boots, but rather a more complex history of how a large-scale, non-grocery retailer both responded to, and operated within, a post-war retailing culture dominated by self-service ideologies.

Taking this approach has enabled the thesis to broaden historical understandings and appreciations of self-selection systems. Although Boots' position within the history of British self-service has been overlooked on account of its 'partial' rendering of the format, this thesis has argued that such analytical positions downplay the importance of both Boots and the wider system of self-selection.[4] While Boots' own-brand version of self-selection had an outwardly incomplete appearance when compared with full self-service operations, it was nonetheless heavily informed by the format's prevailing ideas and methods. It also played a significant role in the modernised retail experiences offered to post-war British shoppers during a time of relative affluence. Self-selection techniques consequently have an important role to play within the wider understandings of Britain's post-war shopping history and deserve to be interpreted in conjunction with complete

[3] Shaw, Curth, and Alexander, "Selling Self-Service."; Shaw and Alexander, "British Co-Operative Societies."
[4] Morrison, "The Great New Shopping Idea," 217; Stobart, *Spend!*, 198.

versions of the model. The project makes the case for future historians to begin recognising the system as part of an important 'second-wave' of Britain's relationship with the format. The example from Boots has demonstrated that the company absorbed self-service's over-arching ideas, before repackaging them into retail experiences that held a significant influence over the quotidian shopping practices of post-war British consumers.

The thesis has underlined this position by demonstrating that the company's decision to avoid implementing full self-service methods came not from a position of ignorance or incapacity, but rather one of strength, having fully engaged with, researched and understood the implications of the new model. Through its extensive use of the company's American research visits, it has advanced existing interpretations and contributed to the correction of Black and Spain's assertion regarding the underrepresentation of such visits within the wider literature.[5] The study has afforded the reports such prominence because they demonstrate the in depth executive-level scrutiny applied to self-service ideology and illustrate, perhaps better than any other single source, that despite adopting self-selection methods, the company never took a limited or fragmentary approach to the wider ecology of self-service practice. The reports also highlight how Boot's own-branded version of self-selection occurred from a series of progressive interactions between self-service's over-arching ideologies, as well as the company's own judgements that its stores needed to remain loyal to certain long held traditions and values. By representing Boots' post-war history as a dialogue between its

[5] Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 161.

future and its past, the thesis has therefore been able to explain why, after initially rejecting the approaches adopted at Burnt Oak, the company could continue to formulate its plans within a tight ideological orbit of self-service's modernised ideas and practices.

The company's continued emphasis upon high quality, respectable retail experiences and its status as a professional pharmacist were crucial to this process of negotiation. Both values remained pivotal to all of the company's post-war operations, offering executives the confidence to alter self-service methodologies on their own terms. Such modifications could also be justified in the name of Boots' customers, with executives striving to offer them a style and tone of retail experience that was in keeping with the standards established during the inter-war period. The desire to appease and protect customers from the most efficient, impersonal aspects of self-service methods consequently explains why the company continued to insist upon the availability of quality, personalised service.[6] This in turn, bolstered the company's credentials as a respectable, middle-class retailer, while also helping to offer a significant point of difference from its major high-street competitors.

It is important to note that while Boots' model of self-selection evidences the diversity of practice across the post-war British high street, the company also adopted a flexible approach in how this distinctive sales system was deployed within its own portfolio of shops. While there was a strong 'family resemblance' between the look and feel of Boots' self-selection stores, bosses deliberately avoided homogenous patterns of trade, with it often left

[6] du Gay, "Self-Service," 157.

undecided exactly which lines of merchandise would be placed on self-selection shelving or retained behind service-based counters.[7] In addition, the size and location of shops had a significant bearing upon the extent and depths to which self-selection methods were introduced. This underlined that bosses viewed the system as an adaptive, evolving 'tool-kit' of options, which could be adjusted to suit the changing needs and expectations of its customers. The concept of negotiation thus extended to the company's entire relationship with self-service techniques, a fact evidenced most clearly in how the retail experience was modulated towards affluent teenagers after Seventeen's 1968 launch.

The presence of such considerations challenges those interpretations that suggest self-service methodologies were largely imposed on British consumers by retailers seeking a competitive advantage.[8] While it is true that Boots pressed ahead with its programme of modernisation from the late 1950s, such activities were always undertaken with regards to the sense of care and service they felt had always been offered to customers. The endurance of the company motto, 'we are always Chemists first', served as a constant reminder for both staff and customers of where bosses believed the company's values and identity truly resided.[9]

The unique variation of self-selection adopted by Boots stores also offers important evidence for reassessing the extent of post-war Britain's Americanisation. The ability to adjust the format for the company's own ends demonstrated that the system was not effortlessly, nor thoughtlessly,

[7] WBA/BT/28/52/4/67- "New Look for Boots the Chemist": 4.
[8] Black and Spain, "How Self-Service Happened," 175.
[9] For example, WBA/BT/28/40/4/5- *Building for the Future,* 10.

transferred from one national context to another. Instead, mediation and moderation were always vital. The ways in which Boots indigenised the precepts of self-service for its own customer base was also pivotal to its targeting of Britain's newly affluent teenage consumers. While contemporary observers (and some subsequent historians) understood the consumer-oriented teenager to be an imported American concept, Boots' own-brand Seventeen utilised these patterns of renegotiation to produce a cosmetic with a distinctly British flavour.[10] Seventeen's moderated appeal between tradition and modernity, coupled with its efforts to control teenage cosmetic usage around the middle-class values of tastefulness, conformity and moderation, therefore underlined that much of the company's post-war approach to retailing stemmed from a relationship with, rather than a replication of, American commercial practices.

It is nonetheless important to emphasise that Boots' ascription to middle-class values and pharmacy traditions was not a policy intent upon shielding the company from post-war change. The thesis has demonstrated that although the company valued its traditions, it never sought to act in regressive ways. The shopping experiences available within Boots' mid-1960s stores were unquestionably different to those on offer within the company's inter-war shops. Some of the most overt processes of modernisation included the construction of larger city-centre stores that offered customers the freedom to browse and select their own merchandise without the interference of a sales assistant. It also included in-store design features such as the prominent use of glass, which invited customers to

[10] Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, 435-37; Jon Savage, "Time up for the Teenager?," *RSA Journal* 160, no. 5557 (2014): 19.

perform a new role as rational, informed consumers and observe the newly expanded affluent retail economy of which they were a part. However, unlike the revolutionary characteristics ascribed to self-service within sections of academic literature, Boots executives always sought to undertake these changes in a gradual and tempered way.[11] Even when constructing stores anew, the company continued to use mechanisms like colour and signage in ways that moderated these novel approaches towards the company's longstanding values and tastes. Furthermore, the company's retention of smaller, neighbourhood chemist stores ensured that it is largely inaccurate to understand either affluence or the age of self-service as having initiated unitary modes of shopping experience.[12] The thesis has therefore helped forward and nuance scholarly understandings of how constituent stores within Britain's newly constructed urban environments sought to accommodate and facilitate the needs of the affluent post-war shopper.

Nevertheless, despite always seeking to uphold the firm's values and heritage, the thesis has demonstrated that such ambitions were never absolute. By being both an established high-street retailer and a firm adoptee of new self-selection methods, Boots executives had connected themselves to a variety of external forces that strained the seemingly oppositional urges of being aligned with both tradition and modernity. This was evidenced most clearly in the expectations of Boots' self-selection employees, who were placed in a contradictory position of being asked to provide exceptional high-skilled service, whilst simultaneously participating within a wider economic

[11] Dawson, "Innovation Adoption in Food Retailing," 22; Gardner and Sheppard, *Consuming Passions*, Volume 1, 183; Morrison, *English Shops*, 275.
[12] See comment about 'sameness' within Stobart, *Spend!*, 196.

logic promoting cost saving methods that slowly eroded the standing and wages of their labour. Such tensions also became particularly visible during the 1970s, in a period that saw dramatic rises in shoplifting. While Boots executives initiated novel measures for the crime's abatement, the company's actions demonstrated they were always wedded to self-service's core ideals of consumer freedom and choice. In this instance, the company's unwillingness to rely more heavily upon traditional counter-service systems and its continued pursuit of greater profits and efficiencies raised challenging questions about its inclination and ambition to contain a situation they had played an important role in facilitating.

The fact that Boots The Chemist continues to operate as a central component of Britain's twenty first-century retailing cultures nevertheless indicates that the company's moderated approach to self-selection provided a useful foundation for its success.[13] The company's ability to manage and navigate modernity and tradition, freedom and control, commerce and health-care provision was an integral part of its enduring appeal and success. The findings of this thesis can encourage historians of self-service shopping to accommodate more pluralistic and malleable understandings of how this significant retail innovation was adopted and developed within post-war Britain. By illustrating the complexities and compromises associated with Boots' deployment of self-service techniques, the thesis has therefore underlined that interpretations of the format should accentuate evolution, rather than revolution.

[13] This is in contrast to the difficulties the Co-operative movement had in reconciling their own split model of retail selling, see Black, *Redefining British Politics*, 46-74.

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