The Coming of the Mass Market

Other books by W. Hamish Fraser

Trade Unions and Society: The Struggle for Acceptance, 1850–1880
(1974)

Workers and Employers: Documents on Trade Unions and Industrial Relations in Britain Since the Eighteenth Century, co-edited with J. T. Ward (1980)

The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850–1914

W. HAMISH FRASER

M

© W. Hamish Fraser 1981

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without permission.

First published 1981 by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
London and Basingstoke
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 978-0-333-31034-2 ISBN 978-1-349-16685-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-16685-5

The paperback edition of this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
INTRODUCTION	ix
 <i>Part I The Growth of Demand</i>	 1
1 Numbers	3
2 Incomes	14
3 Patterns of Consumption: Food	27
4 Patterns of Consumption: Shelter	44
5 Patterns of Consumption: Clothing	58
6 Patterns of Consumption: Luxuries	66
 <i>Part II The Stimulation of Demand</i>	 83
7 The Credit System	85
8 Pack, Stall and Shop	94
9 The Transformation of the Shop	110
10 Advertising	134
 <i>Part III Demand Satisfied</i>	 147
11 The Nation Fed	149
12 The Nation Clothed	175
13 The Nation Furnished	193
14 The Nation Entertained	208
 Caveats and Conclusions	 232
 NOTES AND REFERENCES	 241
 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING	 259
 INDEX	 261

List of Plates

- 1(a) A middle-class parlour, c. 1890
- (b) A Scottish working-class living room, c. 1880
- 2 A lady bicyclist of the 1890s
- 3 The pawnshop in 1894
- 4 A gable-end in Birmingham, 1868
- 5 Thomas Lipton's pound note
- 6(a) New Cut Market, Lambeth, 1895
- (b) A Home and Colonial shop in Barnstaple, 1908
- 7(a) A Victorian 'shopping centre' c. 1890
- (b) The Department store
- 8(a) Larkhall Co-operative Society, 1910
- (b) Liverpool Street station bookstall, 1909
- 9(a) Shop in working-class area of Glasgow, June 1900
- (b) Packing fish in Scarborough in the 1890s
- 10(a) Packing soap at Lever Brothers, Port Sunlight
- (b) Mass production at the Quinton Cycle Company, Coventry, c. 1895
- 11(a) Division of labour in a shoemaking garret, 1871
- (b) Co-operative Wholesale Society Shoemaking factory, Leicester
- 12(a) The milkman at the turn of the century
- (b) An ABC tearoom in 1900
- 13 Fair at Brodick, Isle of Arran, c. 1890
- 14 Bovril Advertisement, 1900
- 15 Bovril Advertisement, 1900
- 16 Weston super Mare, c. 1895

Acknowledgements

For anyone working in a university the debt to one's colleagues and students, built up over many years, is incalculable. I would, however, like to make special mention of Professor John Butt, who first suggested this to me as a possible topic for a book, and of Dr Gordon Jackson, who lent books and provided information on a whole variety of topics. He kindly let me see his most useful manuscript on the Humber ports, which proved invaluable when I was writing about the fishing industry. Another colleague, Mr John Hume, was an unfailing source of information on Scottish industries. Particular thanks are due to Dr J. H. Treble. Not only did Dr Treble read a substantial part of the manuscript, but, as a result of his own studies on urban poverty, regularly provided an antidote to any over-optimistic interpretations of the standard of living of the working class.

Librarians, particularly at the National Library of Scotland, at the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde, and at the British Library have, on almost all occasions, provided a splendid service. My typist, Mrs Jean Fraser, not only produced an excellent manuscript, helped bring order into the footnotes and even corrected blatant errors, but she displayed an encouraging enthusiasm for what she was reading, for which I was very grateful. Special thanks are due to her. At Macmillan Sarah Mahaffy and Susan Dickinson have, as in the past, been considerate and helpful with the editing.

All of these and others have contributed to what is worthwhile in the book. Any remaining errors, infelicities and misunderstandings are entirely my own.

Finally, thanks are due to my wife Helen, who, although not a historian, has generally succeeded in maintaining an impression of interest and enthusiasm for the subject of the growth of the mass market over many years. The love and gratitude due to her can never be adequately expressed.

For my daughter, Louisa Mairi

Introduction

This book examines how the mass of the British people spent their money in the decades after 1850, when a substantial majority of them had more to spend than ever before, and how commerce and industry adjusted to deal with the increased demand. In spite of problems and setbacks for many and the persistence of deep-seated poverty, for most people the late nineteenth century brought a real improvement in living standards. The British people were able to concern themselves with more than mere subsistence; they had a surplus to spend on more and better food, on a wider range of clothing, on more elaborate furnishing for their homes and on a greater variety of leisure pursuits. For the first time most people had a *choice* of how and where to spend their money. The first part of this book is concerned with the kinds of choices that were made.

Consumers were discontented with the lack of choice and the poor quality of goods generally available in existing shops, but it took time for the necessary adjustments in distribution to be accomplished. In Part Two the revolution in retailing that this brought about is examined. New kinds of retailing outlets were developed to meet a new kind of demand, and traditional shops had to learn from the multiples, the co-operatives and the department stores how to respond to the needs of new customers.

If this growing demand, stimulated by advertising and modern sales techniques, were to be satisfied, then changes had to take place in the manufacturing industries as well as in the service sector. Part Three is concerned with the transformation of particular industries: food processing, the production of clothing, furnishing and household goods and the whole range of industries which emerged to satisfy a growing desire to be entertained. To meet demand output was increased by changes in technology and organisation and by the introduction of a variety of new products. In other cases new industries were set up to grasp the new opportunities. Britain went through a second great phase of industrialisation, with the coming of factory production in

those consumer industries whose techniques had been largely untouched by the classic industrial revolution. In addition a whole new leisure industry was created as more and more people found time and money for reading, going on holiday, taking exercise or just sitting enjoying themselves in music hall and cinema. More traditional pastimes, like drinking or going to the races, had to be modernised if they were to meet the challenge of this greater choice.

The developments examined here are only part of a massive transformation of the *world* economy which was taking place in these crucial decades. Foodstuffs, raw materials and many manufactured goods were being drawn from all corners of the globe. For this to happen there had to be an effective and cheap transport network and a sophisticated financial and commercial system. Major changes also had to be made in the production of basic products like coal, iron, steel, rubber and cement. Much of the expansion of output and many of the changes in industrial organisation were only made possible by the increased availability of gas and electrical power. While all of these are obviously related to the changes that are being examined in this book, they have to be beyond its compass. The intention is to focus on those aspects of economic change which most directly affected people as consumers and laid the foundations of the mass market.