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Selling shaving in the age of the beard: The market for shaving products, c. 1850–90

The fashionable return of beards coincided with huge changes in the economic and social climate of Britain. The mid- to late nineteenth century saw the British economy booming, with massive industrial output and exotic goods imported from across the Empire. A growing affluent and aspirational middle class fuelled a ‘retailing revolution’, buying the latest goods and fashions from general shopkeepers and traders who proliferated in Britain after 1820, and spending their cash in one of the many new department stores in large towns and cities.¹ Men were an important part of this new market and were active and avid consumers. Among the goods they purchased were a growing number of products for personal grooming. As the previous chapter argued, the late eighteenth century saw a new concept of male personal grooming based around the consumption and use of products. For Georgian and early Victorian men, the use of often luxurious soaps, pastes and powders was acceptable, so long as it was not taken to effete extremes. This continued after 1850, with men devoting time and expense towards refining their bodies and dress, urged on by etiquette manuals and advice literature. The use of shaving soaps, oils, creams and scents was performative, enabling men to meet shifting ideals of masculine appearance. They also reflect the continuing appropriation of grooming routines, as men continued to take responsibility for their own appearance. But the period after 1850 saw a sustained attack on shaving, as support for facial hair grew. To what extent, therefore, did the emergent fashion for beards affect the market for personal grooming products after 1850.

While the place of Victorian men as consumers, and the products they bought and used, has attracted recent attention by historians, the availability and consumption of male personal grooming or ‘beauty’ products is less defined. Jessica Clark places men’s consumption of soaps, shampoos, oils and other paraphernalia within the highly gendered space of the barbershop. Such products were a useful means of boosting the income of barbers, who either made their own, or sold branded goods on at a small

¹ Brent Shannon, *The Cut of His Coat: Men, Dress and Consumer Culture in Britain, 1860–1914* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 3–4; Peter Winstanley, *The Shopkeeper’s World: 1830–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 12–13.

profit.² With little primary source evidence available from male consumers, however, it is difficult to assess how men themselves viewed such products, or from whom they purchased them. There are certainly questions about the place of male 'beauty' products and regimes within broader (and sometimes competing) Victorian concerns about men's bodies. Indeed, the concept of male personal grooming appears at some points to confirm – and at others to confound – expectations of male conduct. It is clear that there was no single or fixed understanding of the extent to which men should groom or 'beautify' their faces. There was certainly some resistance in advice literature to the use of cosmetics by men, or towards over concentration upon the minutiae of appearance, for fear of raising the ever-present spectre of effeminacy. In part this reflected the setting of nineteenth-century manliness against a feminine 'other', noted by John Tosh.³ In this reading, manliness implied separation from a feminine body and habit; it was everything that femininity was not.⁴ Practices that brought the male body closer in appearance or manner to the female were therefore, by definition, unmanly. At certain points too, as Matt Houlbrook has noted, the association of certain objects with feminine practices has seen their use, and even possession, by men as potentially dangerous. Men caught in possession of powder puffs or makeup in the 1920s were immediately and automatically suspected of deviant sexuality.⁵

But there were other aspects of masculinity with which personal grooming dovetailed neatly. One was a new focus on the head as the site of knowledge and learning, as well as the 'governor' of the body. Amidst popular interest in physiognomy and phrenology, the head and face, even if covered by a hat or beard, were still the most public of bodily surfaces and the means through which others made judgements about character.⁶ For gentlemen, keeping heads and faces neat, clean and, therefore, presumably also neatly groomed was important. As Stephen Rice notes, it was no coincidence that the primacy of the head was reinforced through the language of commerce and industry; the owners or managers of a business were its 'head', and heads governed hands – that is, exerted control over the body (and bodies) of workers.⁷ In the late nineteenth century too, amidst a new focus on bodily fitness and physicality, 'improving' the structure and musculature of the body was considered laudable and allowed individuals agency and control over their appearance.⁸ Refining the body and its surfaces could be argued to be equally 'improving'. As Paul Deslandes has also suggested, regulation of the male body went hand in hand with the regulation of

² Jessica P. Clark, 'Grooming Men: The Material World of the Nineteenth-Century Barbershop', in Hannah Greig, Jane Hamlett and Leonie Hannan (eds), *Gender and Material Culture in Britain since 1600* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 111–12. See also Shannon, *The Cut of His Coat*, 86–90.

³ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Longman, 2005), 91.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵ Matt Houlbrook, 'Queer Things: Men and Makeup between the Wars', in Greig et al., *Gender and Material Culture in Britain*, 120–1.

⁶ For the popularity of public or 'pocket physiognomy', see Sharon Pearl, *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 26–30, 116–8.

⁷ Stephen P. Rice, 'Picturing Bodies in the Nineteenth Century', in Michael Sappol and Stephen P. Rice (eds), *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Age of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 227.

⁸ Michael Hau, 'The Normal, the Ideal and the Beautiful: Perfect Bodies during the Age of Empire', in Sappol and Rice, *A Cultural History*, 167.

morals. Accompanying a new focus on purifying and regulating the body and concern with the physicality and attributes of male corporeality were attempts to prevent 'immoral' practices, most notably masturbation.⁹ Here, then, male bodily cleanliness – often emphasized in conduct and etiquette literature – formed part of a wider focus on bodily control, although the extent to which rampant facial hair should be actively controlled was a matter for debate.

The trajectory of the 'beard movement' itself has implications for our understanding of the market. It is perhaps too easy to assume that the Victorian 'beard movement' was a single entity: in fact, it contained several distinct phases. First was the gradual return of beards around 1853, after a brief foray into 'military' moustaches a few years before. The second phase, when the fashion was at its peak, occurred between the late 1850s and early 70s. But by 1880, as John Tosh argues, it was clear that younger men were beginning to reject the paternalistic and often austere manliness of their fathers.¹⁰ Around this time, etiquette manuals noticeably began to include instructions to men as to how and how often to groom their beards, and even to hint at a return to shaving. It is perhaps easy to assume that the 'beard movement' heralded the end of shaving products, but this was far from the case. As discussed below, however, there were distinct shifts in the marketing of such products, corresponding neatly with the various phases of the fashion. Before the early 1850s, shaving soaps had continued to emphasize feminine qualities such as softness, smoothness, ease and comfort, as well as scent. The 1850s and 60s, however, appeared to see a decline in the numbers and types of products available and also changes in emphasis in advertising, focusing on function rather than comfort. Others disappeared altogether. By 1880, however, luxury in shaving products returned amidst a proliferation of products, including scents specifically sold for men.

This chapter explores the complex and shifting landscape of shaving products and the material culture of men's personal grooming after 1850. What follows is a quantitative and qualitative study of the advertisements of named, branded or proprietary shaving products in several major newspaper databases: the British Newspaper Archive, British Library Newspaper Database and Welsh Newspapers Online, comprising of hundreds of titles from across the country and throughout the century. As discussed in the previous chapter, simply counting keyword 'hits' in newspaper databases is unreliable because of the unevenness of the data sample, but also due to the fact that raw numbers of advertisements are not proxies for demand; successful products might be advertised in greater numbers to further promote expansion, as much as they could seek to revivify demand for struggling goods. The alternative approach, taken here, is to explore the numbers of brands, or proprietary products. This has the advantage of smoothing potential fluctuations in newspaper numbers and hits, but also offers its own insights into the numbers of particular types of goods being marketed at given points. It seems reasonable to assume, especially given the close correlation between

⁹ Paul Deslandes, 'The Male Body, Beauty and Aesthetics in Modern British Culture', *History Compass*, 8:10 (2010): 1194.

¹⁰ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2007), 182–3.

shaving products and prevailing fashion, that product types or brands might fluctuate according to demand. If more men were shaving, for example, more perfumers might be enticed to enter the market, and vice versa.

Some qualifications must also be made regarding the nature of the data on which the following discussions are based. First, the numbers of brands here must be regarded as minima. They can only reflect products advertised in newspapers; many small perfumery businesses likely made their own preparations but did not advertise, so it is inevitable that some (perhaps many) more were available 'on the ground'. Second, the products discussed below only represent 'branded' products or those attached to an individual (proprietary), and not generic terms such as 'shaving soap' which appear in large stock lists, with no maker identified. Third are the potential variances in the numbers of available brands at given points, caused by limited (or indeed large) advertising runs, local or limited availability and gaps between advertising. To address these, the discussion explores the data in various ways, including numbers of brands advertised for each individual year as well as over longer periods, and both the numbers and averages available per decade. None of these approaches is failsafe, and no claim is made that the numbers are conclusive, but this study does at least offer the first potential glimpse of the impact of fashion upon commercial shaving products, as well as their nature, form and place within discourses of masculinity.

The landscape of shaving products

The onset of the 'beard movement' around 1853 saw a vociferous and sustained attack upon shaving. Being naturally beardless was problematic enough; removing it by choice was deemed nonsensical. Much literature sought to dissuade men from submitting to the razor. Some cited the impracticalities of shaving, along with the time lost in doing it, the expense of purchasing the necessities and the widely acknowledged discomfort of 'scraping from the tender skin of the face any or every vestige of hair'.¹¹ Others argued that shaving encouraged disease. A 1854 letter published in *The Leader*, supposedly signed by more than 400 Dublin police officers, argued that they should be allowed to grow beards because of the risk of 'diseases of the respiratory organs'. The terminology was telling; it was the 'practice which obtains of shaving off the beard' that was considered hazardous.¹² Danger apparently lay in pores and nerve tips being exposed by the razor as it rasped away the dermal layers of skin, inviting colds, hoarseness and sore throats. Among the many thoracic and pectoral woes supposedly engendered by shaving, consumption was 'bequeathed from generation to generation, from the shaven father to the shaving son'.¹³ If shaving was unhealthy it was also portrayed as unmanly. A hairless male chin imitated the smooth face of a woman; it was, almost by definition, effeminate. Again, as 'Artium Magister' contended, the removal of beard hair was 'the

¹¹ Ibid., 30–1; Magister, *Apology*, 4; Anon., 'A Short Chapter on Beards', *Preston Chronicle* (16 November 1867).

¹² 'News', *Leader* (25 February 1854).

¹³ Magister, *Apology*, 17.

most effectual neutraliser of the contrast between [the sexes].¹⁴ The act of shaving was therefore depicted as at best pointless and at worst calamitous. Furthermore, its end result, the shaved chin, was not deemed natural for a man. As beards grew in size and popularity in Britain, the products involved in shaving, now virtually regarded as a shameful process, should therefore presumably have become guilty by association and suffered declining demand. The question, then, is how far the market in general, as well as individual product types, were affected by these developments.

Around the mid-nineteenth century the commercial market for shaving products still encompassed many different product types, from essential razors and soaps, to other, smaller groups of goods for facilitating the removal of facial hair, such as shaving oils, pastes and creams. Because of their perhaps narrower appeal and more manageable numbers, it is instructive to begin by analysing these smaller groups in more detail. Shaving oils, for example, were an innovation advertised throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century. Unlike modern shaving oils, which are generally used to soften the beard before shaving, nineteenth-century examples were a form of concentrated liquid soap. A few drops were added to a brush, which was dipped in water, and the lather applied to the face. Shaving oil offered convenience by removing the need for a lather box or sink, rendering it useful for travellers or men in a hurry. Certain brands grew in prominence towards the mid-century, with vigorous campaigns for Ogden's 'Eukeirogenion' and Barber's 'Medicated Vegetable Shaving Oil'. 'Eukeirogenion', in particular, was advertised widely across the country throughout the 1830s and 40s. But the advertising of shaving oils appears to have stopped abruptly in the early 1850s, after which the product did not reappear.¹⁵ Only two Belfast manufacturers continued to advertise shaving oils after 1850 – 'Dr Locock's Cosmetic' in 1855 and 'Grattan's Shaving Oil' in 1858, with only a few advertisements between them.¹⁶ The same is true of shaving powders, another innovation promising efficiency and minimum fuss or equipment to make lather, and which required, according to one advertiser, only as much powder as would lie on a penknife.¹⁷ Shaving powders were advertised consistently after 1751, but had largely disappeared by 1860, only appearing occasionally among larger stock lists of perfumers. Cowan's 'Vegetable Shaving Powder' was advertised until 1855 but, by 1860, advertising of both shaving oils and powders in British newspapers had seemingly ceased entirely.¹⁸ In both cases there are clear suggestions that the new fashion for beards at the very least coincided with, and quite possibly had a marked effect on, the advertising of products.

A third product type, shaving cream, emerged around 1833 and proliferated quickly and, between 1833 and 1853, at least fifteen brands were available.¹⁹ Like shaving oils, shaving creams claimed advantage and convenience over soaps both in

¹⁴ Ibid., 51.

¹⁵ For a typical form of the advertisement, see 'Ogden's Eukeirogenion', *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (27 September 1841).

¹⁶ 'Dr Locock's Cosmetic', *Belfast News Letter* (26 January 1855); see also the reference to shaving oil within 'Currie's Rosemary and Honey Hair Wash', *Belfast News Letter* (5 June 1858).

¹⁷ 'Willis's Oriental Chemical Shaving Powder', *Leeds Intelligencer* (3 May 1819): 2.

¹⁸ For example, 'Cowan's Vegetable Shaving Powder', *Newcastle Courant* (10 December 1841).

¹⁹ Including 'Guerlain's Ambrosial Shaving Cream', 'Gosnell's Ambrosial Shaving Cream', 'Prince Albert's Ambrosial Shaving Cream', 'Ponting's Shaving Cream', 'Fishers's Shaving Cream', 'Royal Shaving Cream', 'Hendrie's Emollient Petroleum Shaving Cream', 'Hendrie's Ambrosial Shaving

Figure 12.1 Number of brands of shaving pastes in British newspapers per decade, 1830–99.

providing strong lather with little water and in rendering shaving pleasurable. In 1847, the makers of Ponting’s shaving cream sought to bring it ‘to the attention of all who are so unfortunate to be the owner of beards’.²⁰ Again, although based on low numbers, it seems that shaving cream was perhaps more resistant to the beard fashion, continuing to be advertised throughout the 1850s, 60s and 70s. The majority of these were products by large London perfumery businesses, such as Gosnell’s, available by post or from agents and advertised around the country.²¹ Gosnell’s was one of the earliest brands to appear, and their shaving cream was one among many perfumery products in their range. Others, such as the Barnstaple perfumer William Hill’s ‘Almond Shaving Cream’, were only advertised locally.²² Nonetheless, there were some potential signs of impact in the 1860s and 70s, as the ‘beard movement’ reached its peak, since only Guerlain and Gosnell, continued to advertise their product widely in England, with a scattering of local makers also taking out occasional advertisements.²³

Another product, shaving paste, was advertised fairly regularly in British newspapers, albeit with relatively small numbers of brands. Here, though, the greater frequency of advertisements allows for a limited quantitative study. Figure 12.1 shows the numbers of shaving paste brands advertised in English newspapers between 1830 and 1900.

Cream’, ‘Euston’s Eureka Shaving Cream’, ‘Wick’s Almond Shaving Cream’, ‘Fred Lewis’s Royal Irish Shaving Cream’.

²⁰ ‘Never Shaved So Easy in My Life’, *Liverpool Mercury* (27 August 1847).

²¹ For examples, see ‘Gosnell’s Ambrosial Shaving Cream’, *Daily News* (5 May 1856); ‘Guerlain’s Ambrosial Shaving Cream’, *Morning Post* (22 October 1864); ‘Ponting’s Shaving Cream’, *Essex Standard* (26 July 1865).

²² ‘W. Hill, Haircutter and Perfumer’, *North Devon Journal* (11 December 1851): 1.

²³ Aside from Gosnell and Guerlain’s advertisements, ‘Gilbert’s Ambrosial Shaving Cream’ was only available in London, and ‘Butcher’s Shaving Cream’ in Cheltenham.

The trend here appears even more compelling, suggesting that shaving pastes survived the early years of the 'beard movement', with various brands continuing to be advertised throughout the 1850s and 60s, before declining markedly. But it should also be noted that the data is based on very low numbers and is far from smooth. No shaving pastes were advertised between 1844 and 1849 for example, skewing the data for that decade. In the 1850s, the numbers of brands being advertised annually varied from one to three; four years in the 1860s saw only one brand being advertised and then only in Leicester newspapers. It seems certain however, that none at all were advertised between 1869 and 1886, with only two brands appearing thereafter, one in 1886 and a further in 1891. Again, this might suggest that, as the 'beard movement' took hold, smaller, niche shaving products were marketed less. It may have been no coincidence that one Liverpool auctioneer was left with 200 boxes of 'perfumed shaving paste' to try and shift in August 1863.²⁴

To seek deeper insights into the Victorian shaving product market, it is necessary to explore a bigger product group. By far the largest category of shaving products was soap. In certain respects, the market for soap might be expected to have been more resilient than that for other products. The fact that shaving was often one among several stated uses, for example, made them more resilient if one area of demand declined. The discussion here is based on products either specifically styled as shaving soaps or expressly identifying shaving as an attribute and includes brands as well as proprietary soaps under the name of the maker – for example, 'John Williams' Incomparable Shaving Soap. To facilitate discussion, all are included and grouped under the single broad term 'shaving soap'. Figure 12.2 shows the numbers of branded shaving soaps advertised per year in British newspapers, between 1830 and 1899. Figure 12.3 shows the numbers of brands per decade from 1830–1900, and Figure 12.4 shows the average number of shaving soap brands advertised per year for the same period.

The numbers represented here are clearly not high, never reaching double figures in any given year, but the pattern in each case appears striking, suggesting a period of growth in during the early nineteenth century, reaching a peak in the late 1850s, then falling away markedly in the 1860s and 70s, only recovering some of the lost ground after 1880. This appears to coincide with the trajectory of the 'beard movement', and it seems logical to assume that demand for shaving soaps would fall as men returned to growing beards. But the situation was more complex than the raw data suggests. A closer look at the data in Figure 12.2, for example, shows that advertising was not uniform, with one peak in the numbers of brands occurring in 1852 (and therefore before the 'beard movement'), followed by a marked fall in the middle years, before a second peak in 1858. It is hard to account for this volatility. Variations in the numbers of available newspapers for these years cannot be discounted. The numbers of brands advertised per decade are also potentially problematic since not all were available at the same time, and their longevity varied. Large perfumery companies such as Guerlain, Rigge's, Mechi's and Pears produced products over many decades. Some, such as 'Pear's Transparent Shaving Stick', for example, were available for long periods, in this case

²⁴ 'Two Hundred Dozen Pomatum, Circassian Cream, Perfumed Shaving Paste &C', *Liverpool Daily Post* (27 August 1863): 2.

Figure 12.2 Number of advertised shaving soap brands per year in British newspapers, 1830–99.

Figure 12.3 Number of advertised shaving soap brands per year in British newspapers per decade, 1830–99.

between at least 1849 and 1888. Others, such as perfumer Charles Grossmith’s ‘Original Shaving Soap’, had shorter runs, available between 1851–6, although he also sold other varieties of his proprietary shaving soap. Some, such as Kay’s *Almond Shaving Soap*, advertised in the *Preston Guardian* in 1852–3, seemingly only lasted a year.²⁵

²⁵ For example, ‘Kay’s Almond Shaving Soap’, *Preston Guardian* (7 February 1852): 1.

Figure 12.4 Average yearly numbers of shaving soaps advertised in British newspapers per decade, 1830–99.

But if the fashion was adopted as swiftly as has been assumed, it seems strange that apparently the greatest numbers of shaving soaps during the whole century – at least thirty-one brands, were available and advertised between 1850–9. These included products from large, longstanding perfumery companies including Pears (established 1789) and Gosnell (established as a perfumer in 1760) and brands such as Dunn's *Worcester Concentrated Shaving Soap*; Carter's *Botanic Shaving Soap* and the *Albion Milk and Sulphur Soap*, each of which was advertised widely throughout the period and across the country.²⁶ Others, such as the shaving soaps of Wallington's of Birmingham or Groux's of Buckingham, were made and advertised only locally.²⁷ Several more fell in between, being advertised widely over several years. This raises questions about the ubiquity of the fashion for beards and the rapidity with which it was adopted. On the one hand, it is possible that demand continued and that many men continued to use these products. This would certainly appear to be supported by the evidence presented in Chapter 9. On the other, however, it is possible that the peaks in advertising represented a reaction by manufacturers to falling demand caused by the adoption of beards.

²⁶ See 'Arthur Dunn's Concentrated Worcester Shaving Soap', *Berrow's Worcester Journal* (7 February 1850); 'Shaving Made Easy', *Bradford Observer* (7 November 1850): 8; 'The Albion Milk and Sulphur Soap', *Luton Times and Advertiser* (2 February 1855): 6.

²⁷ 'Wallington's Saw-Edged Razor', *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* (18 December 1854): 3; 'Dickens' Chemist &c', *Bucks Chronicle and Bucks Gazette* (2 September 1854): 1.

Across all product types, however, it seems clear that the early 1860s brought change, and a sharp fall in the average numbers of advertised brands, represented in Figure 12.2, appears compelling. In 1858, nine brands were marketed; the following year this had fallen to five and, in 1861 only two – Moorley's 'Eukeiristic' shaving soap, and another simply styled 'The Best Shaving Soap Ever Used'.²⁸ Between 1872 and 1877 I have found no specific advertisements for branded shaving soaps in newspaper databases, with only generic, unbranded examples appearing within stock lists of large perfumery businesses or general warehouses. Remarkably, except for these occasional references, no advertisements for any types of cosmetic shaving products appear in the sample data between 1871 and 1876. It is also worth noting that most soap-makers continuing to advertise through the 1860s and 70s were long-established large businesses, such as Pears and Rigge's, who sold a wide variety of beauty and perfumery goods as well as their shaving soaps. They may have been more resilient than smaller perfumers, who perhaps felt that the expense was no longer justified. Seemingly few new shaving soap brands became available at all between 1860 and 1878, coinciding precisely with the peak period of the 'beard movement'.²⁹

In addition to numbers of brands, however, there were also changes to the style of advertising during different phases of the 'beard movement'. In the early 1850s was a continuing emphasis upon utility, with many advertisers still promoting improvements to the process of shaving or for easing the passage of the razor.³⁰ Themes of comfort and luxury also still prevailed. Products such as 'Dunn's Worcester Concentrated Shaving Soap' promised not to irritate tender skin and to make shaving a pleasure.³¹ Others were still described in florid terms such as 'perfectly delicious in all respects ... a toilette luxury'.³² Even some 'military' or 'service' soaps, perhaps surprisingly given the usual emphasis upon tough, martial masculinity, promised to prevent damage to tender or sensitive skins.³³ But by the late 1850s, both the language of advertising claims and the veracity of 'campaigns' began to suggest the effects of negative attitudes towards shaving. One was the paring back of rhetoric and the reduction of space devoted to shaving products. Early advertisements for Moorley's 'Eukiristic' shaving soap, for example, were accompanied by detailed testimonials and a long list of its attributes.³⁴ By the early 1860s, however, it had been relegated to a secondary position within a larger advertisement and then only advertised occasionally in a single newspaper. Instead of a detailed puff, the advertisement merely stated that the soap was suitable

²⁸ 'Rose's Shaving Soap', *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (6 July 1861); 'Moorley's Eukeiristic Shaving Soap', *Hampshire Advertiser* (31 March 1861).

²⁹ Only five brands were advertised between 1861 and 1868, for example.

³⁰ See advertisements for 'Dunn's Worcester Concentrated Shaving Soap', *Berrow's Worcester Journal* (1 January 1852); 'Royal Metropolitan and Universal Shaving Soap', *Liverpool Mercury* (28 October 1853); 'John Williams' Incomparable Shaving Soap', *Blackburn Standard* (17 June 1857).

³¹ See advertisements for 'Dunn's Worcester Concentrated Shaving Soap', *Berrow's Worcester Journal* (1 January 1852); 'Kay's Almond Shaving Soap', *Preston Guardian* (7 February 1852); 'Royal and Universal Shaving Soap', *Daily News* (30 March 1853).

³² 'John Gosnell and Co.'s Ambrosial Shaving Cream', *Daily Post* (16 September 1856); 'Royal Eukiristic or Easy Shaving Soap', *Birmingham Daily Post* (19 April 1858).

³³ For example, 'Kay's Almond Shaving Soap', *Preston Guardian* (7 February 1852); 'Rigge's Celebrated Military Shaving Soap', *Morning Post* (5 October 1868).

³⁴ 'Moorley's Eukiristic', *Birmingham Daily Post* (9 January 1862).

for either hard or soft beards.³⁵ In the winter of 1868, J. T. Rigge of London took out a few advertisements in two London newspapers for their 'Military shaving soap', headed 'Real Comfort in Shaving', but gave little detail.³⁶

Another apparent change was the virtual disappearance of scent from shaving soap advertising after 1850. Between 1850 and 1870, only one product (Kay's Almond Shaving Soap) contained a fragrance in its brand name, and none specifically mentioned scent within the list of attributes of their products.³⁷ The same was true of advertisements for shaving cream, where mention of fragrance disappeared almost entirely, and advertisements generally reverted to basic details of product name, price and seller.³⁸ Gosnell's advertisements continued to stress luxury and convenience in the 1850s and 60s, but these were essentially reproductions of their adverts of 20 years previously. The suggestion is that shaving products lost their associations with comfort and luxury and instead concentrated upon utility and expediency. As masculinity 'hardened', with increasing focus on physicality and a 'natural' (albeit clean and hygienic) appearance was embraced, it is possible that luxury, scent and comfort was no longer popular. There was certainly some cultural pressure on men to abandon cosmetic products and go 'natural'. The American poet Walt Whitman versified on the honesty of the natural, physical body, with all its attendant odours and imperfections. For Whitman, writing in 1855, 'washes and razors [were] for foofoos'.³⁹ For roughly two decades after 1853, therefore, the effects on both the availability and marketing of shaving products appear to have been significant.

The 1870s, however, again saw signs of change and the gradual decline of beard-wearing. In part this was likely due to simple and organic changes in taste and style. After nearly 30 years of beards, men were perhaps tiring of their facial hair, while the various arguments made in support of beards had also likely begun to pale. Those men who had first embraced the 'beard movement' were, by the 1880s, middle aged and, in some cases, approaching old age. As Figure 12.3 reveals, the mid-1870s appear to represent the nadir for branded shaving products but, after 1877 the numbers of brands advertised began to rise, reaching five in 1880/1, falling back in 1882, but rising continually thereafter until the end of the century. One obvious interpretation is a gradual return to shaving and corresponding increasing demand for cosmetic products. If true, it might seem strange that the apparent rise in shaving soap brands was neither steep nor steady, never returning to the peaks of the 1850s. But, again, the figures do not reveal the whole story. What actually occurred was a marked shift in the landscape of shaving products, one that brought moves away from small-scale local products linked to individual makers and instead towards large companies, advertising

³⁵ 'By Royal Letters Patent', *Birmingham Daily Post* (13 February 1865).

³⁶ For example, 'Real Comfort in Shaving', *Morning Post* (9 November 1868). 'Field's United Service Soap' was advertised briefly in *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* in 1870, among other products, stating that it was the 'most delightful shaving soap ever invented'.

³⁷ 'Kay's Almond Shaving Soap', *Preston Guardian* (7 February 1852).

³⁸ Again, with one exception, 'Gilbert's Ambrosial Shaving Soap', *Standard* (22 December 1870), which claimed to be beautifully perfumed.

³⁹ Quoted in Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men: The Revealing History of Facial Hair* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 185.

nationally and prolifically. This can be usefully illustrated by brief case studies of individual products. The 'Albion Milk and Sulphur' soap, for example, styled as 'the very best for shaving' had been available since the mid-1850s, although not advertised in great numbers. The mid-1880s, however, saw a systematic, nationwide campaign. In 1885 it was advertised only six times. The following year this rose to 57, increasing to 237 separate advertisements, across British newspapers, in 1887. 'Vinolia' shaving soap was the subject of at least 315 advertisements between 1890 and 1899, in thirty-nine different newspapers, while 'Cuticura' was advertised on at least 436 separate occasions between 1880–9, again across Britain.⁴⁰ Cuticura also appears to have been one of the only brands to translate its advertisements into Welsh, to cater for readers in the Principality. Rather than the small artisan firms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, therefore, shaving soap production became dominated by large companies, who established themselves nationally as commercial leaders in the field.

The absence of sales data renders long-term quantitative comparison impossible, but one surviving set of figures for Pear's Soaps offers insight into the potential growth of this portion of the market. Frustratingly the figures only run from 1884 until 1900, but this at least coincides with and apparently confirms the apparent growth seen in product advertising. Usefully the accounts give separate figures for washing and shaving products, the latter consisting of shaving cakes and shaving sticks – small tubes of compacted shaving soap, similar in appearance to a large lipstick, which were rubbed over a moistened brush to produce lather. Pears had produced shaving sticks since the late 1840s and advertised them vigorously towards the end of the century. In 1884–5, the company sold 45,252 dozen cakes and 281,928 dozen sticks equalling 327,180 dozen, or 3,926,160 products in total. By 1890 this had risen to 430,908 dozens or 5,170,896 total units. A decade later, the company regularly still sold anything between four and four and a half million units per year.⁴¹ Compared to the sales of their other soap products the sales of shaving soaps initially appear miniscule. In 1884–5 sales of shaving soaps were only around 3 per cent of those of washing soaps and generally hovered around that figure for the following fifteen years. But it should be noted that the 'washing' category contained five different types: soap balls, tablets, squares and the extremely popular glycerine and unscented soaps, the latter regularly exceeding fifteen million dozens sold per year, or a staggering 180 million units.⁴² Also Pears was just one maker among a number selling similar products. By the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, the market for shaving cakes, sticks and other such products was likely substantial. It seems logical to conclude that men had returned to shaving.

This same period also saw changes again to the form of advertisements, both in the language of advertising and also the increasing use of imagery. Notably, health was now attributed to shaving, rather than beard-wearing. In 1876, a small notice in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, partly a puff for James Murray's 'Fluid Magnesia', apparently

⁴⁰ Based on keyword searches of advertisements in the British Newspaper Archive, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>.

⁴¹ Unilever Archives and Records, MS AFP-9/1/2/(2), 'Pieces' ledger for Lever Brothers' Soap products, 1884–1904.

⁴² *Ibid.*

confirmed this apparent shift in attitudes. 'The conditions of existence in the present day are very artificial, and in order to promote health, without which life becomes almost a burthen, it is necessary to adopt artificial means.'⁴³ 'First and foremost in the ranks,' it stated, 'are those appliances which promote cleanliness and disinfection.' Shaving cream was third on the list, only exceeded by toilet soap and tooth powder, identifying it as an essential tool in the preservation of health.⁴⁴ *Fin de siècle* shaving advertisements showed the strong influence of ideas relating to the permeability of the skin and the notion of pores as gateways or doorways to germs. As Justin Bengry has argued, advertisements such as 'Little Doors' (in which a barber holds a magnifying glass to the face of a customer to reveal his skin pores) promoted the idea that the skin was vulnerable to penetration.⁴⁵ Another, for 'Dagmar shaving cakes,' stressed that it 'contained no baneful substances' and was 'eminently adapted for cleaning the pores of the skin, without deteriorating the capillary bulb.'⁴⁶ Any type of vulnerability, such as that represented by the pores, was potentially emasculating. Men were encouraged to draw on masculine traits of strength and virility to be masters of their bodies and minds and to counter the threat.⁴⁷

This is not to say that shaving had entirely lost its negative associations. One nasty cut from a razor, after all, threatened to throw open a whole building's worth of 'little doors'. There was plenty of evidence to support the potential lethality of shaving cuts. In 1857 the Rev. Lockhart of Kilmaurs died suddenly after cutting himself while shaving whereupon 'some poisonous substance, supposed to have been in the soap passed through his whole body'.⁴⁸ After cutting his chin slightly, a patient in Boston hospital suffered an infection causing his lip to swell, rapidly spreading to his neck and face and obstructing his breathing. Death swiftly followed 'from exhaustion and partial suffocation'.⁴⁹ Suddenly, emphasizing health, safety and protection was a useful marketing strategy, especially in brand names. Cuticura's 'Medicinal Shaving Soap' was advertised in 1880 while another, 'Dr Nichol's Sanitary Soap', managed to incorporate both a medical practitioner a nod to hygiene in its brand name.⁵⁰ 'Dr Mackenzie's Arsenical Toilet Soap', listing shaving among its many uses and was touted as a hygienic beautifier. Perhaps the fact that it was potentially toxic and actually used by taxidermists, as well as being subject to regulation in France, led the makers to stress that it was 'warranted harmless'.⁵¹ Others stressed the cleansing properties of their shaving soaps. The 'Magic Shaving Soap' was marketed as having 'extraordinary washing properties'.⁵²

⁴³ Jackson's *Oxford Journal* (8 July 1876): 7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Justin Bengry, 'Consuming Men: Masculinities and Shaving Advertisements', Paper delivered at 'Framing the Face: New Perspectives on the History of Facial Hair', 28 November 2015, 3.

⁴⁶ 'Dagmar Shaving Cakes', *Graphic* (1 May 1886).

⁴⁷ Bengry, 'Consuming Men', 3.

⁴⁸ 'Miscellaneous General News', *Bury Free Press* (29 August 1857): 3.

⁴⁹ 'Death through Shaving Cut', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (23 February 1914): 8; see also 'Infection Due to Shaving', *Derry Journal* (27 July 1891): 7; 'Infection in Shaving Water', *Lincolnshire Echo* (16 October 1895): 4.

⁵⁰ 'Cuticura Remedies', *Daily News* (25 February 1880); 'Tuckwoods of Sheffield', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* (16 March 1878).

⁵¹ 'Dr Mackenzie's Arsenical Toilet Soap', *Morning Post* (12 December 1895).

⁵² 'American Toilet Soaps', *Belfast News Letter* (13 January 1880).

But as well as health and hygiene, the late nineteenth century also saw narratives of softness and luxury returning to advertising, after seemingly disappearing during the 'beard movement'. From the mid-1880s through to the end of the century, shaving soap advertisements again began to stress gentleness, lack of irritation and utility for men with 'sensitive and delicate skins'.⁵³ Products such as Ferris and Co.'s 'Thymol' soap claimed to leave skin soft. Cleaver's 'Juvenia Shaving Soap' was agreeable, pure and invigorating, while Pears offered '12 months luxury for twelve pence'.⁵⁴ After nearly three decades of absence, scent also returned to shaving product advertisements, with many advertisers stressing the 'pleasant' or 'agreeable' odour of their products.⁵⁵ But the late 1870s also saw the introduction of a number of shaving lotions and colognes aimed specifically at men, and these give some insight into what were considered acceptable scents for men. Arnold Cooley's 1873 study of perfumes noted several preparations used by men to soothe irritated skin after shaving. These included 'cherry laurel water', a distilled water used described as a 'shaving wash', along with a 'shaving lotion' known as 'emulsion of bitter almonds'. Cooley advised caution due to the poisonous effects of potassium cyanide, which was present in both preparations.⁵⁶ Lavender, citrus and 'woody' scents were popular choices. The London perfumer George Trumper introduced a number of colognes in the late nineteenth century, including 'Marlborough' in 1877, containing lavender, geranium and cedar 'West Indian Limes'; 'Astor' cologne, which combined sandalwood and caraway; and by 'Curzon' in 1882, which contained spice and citrus. Both Penhaligon's of London and the soap-maker Yardley also sold their own Lavender colognes, which were intended for both sexes.⁵⁷

If, as John Tosh argues, younger men were beginning to reject the hard, patriarchal model of manliness of their fathers towards the later nineteenth century, it is possible that the apparent changes in the market for shaving products reflected demand from younger men, desiring comfort and luxury after decades of being assured that real men avoided them.⁵⁸

A final key change in the advertising of shaving products came in the use of images, which were used both to highlight the product, but also to reinforce new expectations of manly behaviour and appearance. Here again there are some suggestions that younger men were the intended audience. Many advertisers still promoted shaving as a manly activity, emphasizing strength, virility and mastery over technology, and a common device was to depict men in the act of shaving. Far from being vain

⁵³ See advertisements for 'Vinola Soap', *Era* (24 May 1890); 'Homocea Shaving Soap', *Liverpool Mercury* (21 December 1894); 'Cuticura Shaving Soap', *Graphic* (20 January 1900).

⁵⁴ 'Ferris and Co.'s Thymol Soap', *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (16 June 1888); 'Cleaver's Juvenia Shaving Soap', *Yorkshire Herald* (28 April 1891); '12 Months Luxury for 12 Pence', *Graphic* (21 July 1888).

⁵⁵ See, for example, 'Field's Fleur De Lys Shaving Soap', *Morning Post* (2 September 1895), which was 'delightfully perfumed' while Juvenia, noted above, had a 'perfectly delightful' fragrance.

⁵⁶ Arnold Cooley, *Respecting the Selection and Use of Perfumes, Cosmetics and Other Toilet Articles* (Philadelphia, PA: Spottiswoode, 1873), 417–18, 712.

⁵⁷ 'Yardley and Co.', *Star* (14 September 1875).

⁵⁸ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), 109–10; John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 150–2.

creatures, effeminately powdering and puffing themselves, these were typically young, muscular and virile males, whose shaving enhanced, rather than diminished their manliness. Late 1880s advertisements for Pear's Shaving Soap, for example, depict a heavily whiskered man lathering his face with a shaving brush. His open shirt and muscular frame imply sexuality, strength and vigour, while his dark, curly hair and whiskers suggest youth. The tightly framed image places the man in the centre; one hand operates the brush, while the other (tightly clenched) rests on the table, next to an array of toilette instruments. But all was not rugged utility, however: the most prominent word in the advertisement was 'comfort'.⁵⁹ Advertisements for J. B. Williams's shaving sticks portrayed a handsome, fashionable young man wearing a stud-collar shirt and holding lather brushes to either side of his face, one with his previous brand (unsurprisingly with little lather) and the other using Williams's products.⁶⁰ The product itself was described variously as soft, rich, comforting, cooling and healing. Advertisements for Cuticura shaving soap depicted a similarly fashionable and youthful man at his shaving mirror, with the razor to his face, while the headline read 'To Tender-Skinned Men', and the text again stressed comfort, ease and prevention of irritation.⁶¹ Such ambiguity recalled the longstanding tensions in male product advertising, of negotiating 'conventionally female beauty concerns' while appealing to masculine hardness and virility.⁶² By 1898, though, it seems that all caution had been thrown aside. This advertisement for the J. B. Williams company depicted a host of cherubs in a cloud of lather, each brandishing a banner extolling the virtues of Williams's shaving soaps. The banner words included 'luxurious', 'cream-like', 'rich', 'healing' and 'delicate'.⁶³

Razors in the age of the beard

So far, the evidence for the marketing of cosmetic shaving products appears to suggest that the onset of the Victorian 'beard movement' did affect the types and numbers of available brands. This seemingly occurred in three distinct phases: First was a period of growth from the early nineteenth century up to the early 1850s. This was followed by an apparently marked contraction in the market, lasting for roughly twenty years after the reappearance of beards, with less brands being advertised and some types of shaving goods disappearing altogether. The third phase, from the early 1880s, though, suggests a resurgence in the market as the 'beard movement' gradually lost its potency and as (perhaps especially younger) men began to reject the patriarchal manliness of the previous generation and returned to shaving.

One important product, the razor, remains to be analysed. Of all shaving products, razors might logically be expected to show strongest evidence of the

⁵⁹ '12 Months of Comfort for 12 Pence', *Illustrated London News* (7 April 1888).

⁶⁰ 'Williams' Shaving Soaps', *Illustrated London News* (6 April 1895).

⁶¹ 'To Tender-Skinned Men', *Graphic* (20 January 1900).

⁶² Shannon, *The Cut of His Coat*, 89.

⁶³ 'Williams's Shaving Soaps', *Illustrated London News* (15 October 1898). Author's own image.

Figure 12.5 Advertisement for Williams' shaving soaps, *Illustrated London News*, 15 October 1898, 573. Author's own image.

effects of the return of beards. To replicate the methods used above for razors, however, is difficult. The sheer volume of newspaper references to them, which can include anything from advertisements to reports of suicides, renders a full quantitative study unfeasible. Furthermore, while shaving soaps, powders, pastes and oils were commonly given specific brand names and can therefore be tracked with relative ease, razors could be found among the stock of various retailers, including cutlers, ironmongers, general stores and warehouses, and often listed simply as 'razors' or 'steel razors'. Matters are further complicated by technological developments in razor production which saw a huge expansion and diversification of the market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This included the proliferation of both open razors and safety razors, which competed for space in an increasingly crowded market, causing a corresponding leap in razor advertisements, from the late 1880s onwards, again making a quantitative analysis

unmanageable. Little academic attention has yet been paid to razor manufacturing and marketing in late Victorian Britain, and a full study is beyond the scope of this chapter. For these reasons, this section of the chapter stops at 1890, in order to focus upon the potential impact during the period of the 'beard movement'. As such it is less concerned with the developing technology of razors.⁶⁴ With these issues in mind and acknowledging the limitations of the data, this chapter now turns to the landscape and form of razor advertising, based on the same search criteria as cosmetic shaving products, to allow some basic comparisons.

Throughout the 1830s and 40s, the pattern of razor advertising remained fairly consistent, reflecting both proprietary razors and examples within generic advertising. In 1830, for example, seven proprietary razors were available in England. In 1835, there were four, and in 1840 nine. But the relatively limited number of advertisements for individually made proprietary razors were dwarfed by the hundreds placed by large companies such as 'Mechi's Manufactory and Emporium of Elegance', located in Leadenhall Street, London, selling everything from stationery and cutlery to chess sets. Mechi's advertised widely and repeatedly in newspapers across England and Scotland, and their own branded razors were commonly noted throughout the century.⁶⁵ To explore the longer potential trajectory of razor advertising and to keep the sample manageable, Figure 12.6 shows the minimum numbers of branded razors advertised at two-yearly intervals, between 1850 and 1880.⁶⁶

It is immediately apparent that the patterns here do not closely match those of cosmetic shaving products. While there appears to be a general decline in numbers after 1858, broadly agreeing with the trajectory of soap brands, the fall is neither consistent nor dramatic. Also, unlike soap brands, razors clearly continued to be advertised throughout the period, with only 1872, 1874 and 1876 appearing to show marked drops in numbers. The data does, however, seem to correlate to the upturn noted above, from 1880, coinciding with the return to shaving. To address this, it is useful to draw on other types of evidence to explore the nature of razor-making and marketing during this period.

The 'beard movement' coincided with a period of innovation in razor-making. Following the pattern of metallurgical innovation in razor production of the later eighteenth century, the early 1850s saw razor manufacture and design in full flourish. The catalogue for the Great Exhibition of 1851 included several of the latest types of razors as examples of technological prowess. In the North Gallery, among the 'Cutlery, Edge and Hand Tools' could be found 'the Clydesdale razor', 'exhibited for symmetry and execution'; the 'organic razor', with various improvements to the design of the blade; and the 'Hypenetome or Beard Plane ... a new instrument for shaving, constructed on the principles of the carpenter's plane' and able to be

⁶⁴ Between 1870 and 1879 there were roughly 8000 database hits; between 1890 and 1899 the number rose to 19,000. For a detailed study of the technology of razors and patents in the nineteenth century, see Robert K. Waits, *Before Gillette: The Quest for a Safe Razor. Inventors and Patents 1762-1901* (Raleigh: J.IV.IX, 2009).

⁶⁵ For example, 'Mechi's Elegancies', *London Evening Standard* (2 December 1840): 1.

⁶⁶ These again include all 'named' razors and not examples in stock lists, unless the name is also provided there.

Figure 12.6 Number of branded razors advertised in British newspapers, 1850–80.

used in either the left or right hand.⁶⁷ In the context of the exhibition, razors were evidence of the wonders of technology and of mastery over nature and the body. Makers were keen to demonstrate that they could be beautiful as well as functional. Patriotic pride in British technological prowess was reflected in the grandiose names given to many mid-century razors. Evoking images of historical chivalry, Stewart and Co. of Bristol made and advertised their ‘Plantagenet Guard Razors’, promising that they could be used in bed, in the dark or aboard ship.⁶⁸ Tyzack’s ‘New British Razors’ offered durability and solidity, promising to stand the test of time.⁶⁹ Some invoked martial imagery in their product names: The Sheffield cutler John Heiffor created his own brand of ‘Army Razors’, available from 1850, and other military brands included Manchester cutlery firm Gradwell’s ‘Army and Navy Razors’ and ‘Sutton’s Army Razors.’⁷⁰ Others linked their products to other areas of technology and engineering. Perhaps hitching a ride on the mid-nineteenth-century ‘railway mania’, Ross and Co. of London styled their product the ‘Triple-Converted Railway Razor’ – one of their ‘four essentials for a comfortable shave.’⁷¹ The brand names of razors, then, were closely linked to mid-Victorian technological triumphalism and patriotism.

⁶⁷ Waits, *Before Gillette*, 18.

⁶⁸ ‘C. Stewart and Co.’, *Daily News* (4 January 1850).

⁶⁹ ‘New British Razors’, *Norfolk News* (12 January 1850).

⁷⁰ ‘Heiffor’s Army Razors’, *Manchester Courier* (14 September 1850); ‘Gradwell’s Army and Navy Razors’, *Manchester Courier* (31 May 1856); ‘Sutton’s Army Razors’, *Hampshire Advertiser* (14 August 1858).

⁷¹ ‘Ross and Co.’, *Morning Post* (5 May 1850).

The period between 1850–70 also saw various applications for patents for razors and related items, including razor handles, shaving brushes and cases, continued to be lodged throughout the apparent height of popularity for beards between the 1850s and 70s, again suggesting innovation and some expectation of potential demand for new products, even despite the ‘beard movement’. These included variations such as spring guards or detachable blades, to improve safety, or improvements to the production of blades.⁷² Others proposed machines to facilitate the processes of shaving, such as devices to heat razors, or rapidly heat water.⁷³ Some specifications even combined emerging technologies to produce innovative variations on the razor. In 1860, for example, Benjamin Matthewman of York applied for a patent for his new method of inserting photographs into the handles of instruments, including razors, offering shavers the chance to gaze adoringly upon their inamorata as they swiped away their stubble.⁷⁴

It is also clear that razors, unlike some cosmetic shaving products, continued to be advertised throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In April 1854 the London perfumer Mechi’s advertised their razors, strops and soaps widely.⁷⁵ Makers such as Mappin and Sons, whose ‘lancet-edged razor’ was regularly promoted in the 1840s, continued to advertise as the beard movement took hold.⁷⁶ In 1850, at least eleven different razor brands were being advertised ranging from individual makers to nationally available products, and by the end of that decade, there were at least thirteen. Some, like Tyzack’s ‘British Razor’, Heiffor’s ‘Army Razors’ and Mappin’s razors, were available for more than ten years, allowing manufacturers to claim ‘celebrated’ status in their advertisements. While the numbers of brands did fall in the 1860s, razors were clearly still commonly available.

Nevertheless, there were changes. By 1860, the numbers of branded or named razors appear to have dwindled. Rather than warranting their own dedicated advertisements, razors now more commonly appeared within ironmongery or cutlery advertisements, or as part of larger stock lists. Where branded razors appeared, they were usually noted among many similar products. In January 1865, for example, Rodgers and Sons advertised their table cutlery and simply noted selling their own brand of razors and scissors, without even including the price.⁷⁷ It does seem that manufacturers felt less inclined to devote much effort or advertising space to razors at the height of the fashion for beards. There was certainly some sense of disquiet among cutlers and razor-makers about the popularity of beard-wearing. With more than a hint of whistling in the dark, the 1866 article ‘Razors and How to Use Them’ (perhaps tellingly from a newspaper in Sheffield, the centre of cutlery and razor production) claimed that shaving was still

⁷² See, for example, BL, Patent 1856/223, Specification of Henry Hilliard, 28 January 1856; BL, MS Patent 1856/1006, Specification of Thomas Heiffor, 26 April 1856.

⁷³ BL, Patent 1858/2621, Specification of Henry Bailey, 19 November 1858; BL Patent 1883/1731, Specification of W. Williams, 6 April 1883.

⁷⁴ BL Patent MS 1860/241, Specification of Benjamin Matthewman for ‘Inserting photographs into the handles of cutlery items’, undated, c. 1860.

⁷⁵ See, for example, ‘Comfort in Shaving’, *Daily News* (24 April 1854).

⁷⁶ ‘Razors, Razors, Razors!’, *Daily News* (18 April 1854).

⁷⁷ ‘Rogers and Sons’ Table Cutlery’, *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (11 January 1865): 1.

a frequent operation despite the 'beard movement'. Extensively quoting Benjamin Kingsbury's earlier treatise on razor maintenance, the article implied that shaving was linked to civilization and that only 'savage men ... except themselves from shaving altogether'.⁷⁸

There were also changes in the language of advertising. Throughout the 1850s and 60s, razor advertising remained firmly focused on utility, with manufacturers keen to stress sharpness, durability and price. One of the most common razor brands was Mappin's of London, whose widespread campaigns focused upon 'quality and excellence' and adaptability for 'hard and soft beards'.⁷⁹ Here the emphasis was on practicality, rather than ornamentation. Also important was safety, since razors made from cheap or inferior 'pig metal' were blamed for much of the discomfort suffered by men in shaving. While a bad knife might still make a pen, or cut food for dinner, a cheap, blunt, 'detestable scraper' would ever cause smarting and 'daily misery'.⁸⁰ Various contrivances sought to prevent men from cutting themselves. One 'guard razor', exhibited at the Great Exhibition, had a detachable toothed comb guard, which was placed over the razor, protecting the face while leaving enough of the cutting edge free to shave efficiently.⁸¹ Guard razors swiftly became popular, with several different variations appearing in patent applications in Britain and America and advertised in newspapers in the 1850s in particular, including one that boldly promised that it was 'warranted not to cut the flesh while shaving'.⁸²

But if razors needed to be durable and sharp, they also had to be affordable, and from the late 1850s came a growing emphasis on low price as a selling point and, in particular, the growth of so-called shilling razors. An early example was Mappin's 'shilling razor', first advertised in London newspapers in 1855.⁸³ While other companies initially distanced themselves from this approach (Mechi's, for example, advertised its products in Ireland using the tagline 'Makes no shilling razors'), Mappin's was joined by a further nine such products by 1868 and others, such as 'Razors for the Millions', which also played on low price in their product names.⁸⁴ Precisely why low price became a selling point during this period is hard to pinpoint. In the face of the 'beard movement' it is tempting to see price reductions as a direct reaction. Since razors were not generally expensive in the first place, however, a further discount would seem unlikely to entice bearded men back to the lather, brush and bowl.

As Figure 12.6 shows, however, the late 1870s appears to show evidence of an upturn, increasing from three brands in 1876, to twelve in 1880. At the same time, it is noticeable that patent applications for razors and shaving products increased

⁷⁸ Anon., 'Razors and How to Use Them', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* (17 April 1866): 7.

⁷⁹ 'Mappin's Razors', *Era* (5 February 1860).

⁸⁰ Rev. Dyonisus Lardner (ed.), *The Cabinet Cyclopaedia, Vol. II, Iron and Steel* (London: Longman et al., 1833), 25–6.

⁸¹ Waits, *Before Gillette*, 16.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸³ 'Mappin's Shilling Razor', *Globe* (20 March 1855): 1.

⁸⁴ For Mechi's, see 'Comfort in Shaving', *Cork Examiner* (20 February 1854). Other cutlers and makers advertising their own brand of 'shilling razor' included the Mappin Brothers, Rogers and Sons, Moses and Sons and Shaw and George, all of Sheffield, Taylor's 'celebrated shilling razor', Piccadilly, Snowden's, Shaw's, Miller's and Joseph Gleave of Manchester.

Figure 12.7 Number of patent applications lodged for shaving-related products, 1850–80.

dramatically. Whereas the 1850s and 60s both saw only two applications for razor patents and three in 1870, the 1880s saw thirty specifications lodged. For razor strops and sharpeners, patent applications rose from three in the 1860s and one in the 1870s, to twenty-five in the 1880s. Figure 12.7 shows the combined totals of all patent applications for shaving-related products, comprising razors, strops and sharpeners, razor handles, shaving brushes, shaving cases and boxes and other related devices such as razor warmers. Between 1880 and 1885 alone, there were more than forty patent applications for razors and related products.

As was the case with shaving soap advertisements too, there appears to have been a corresponding change in the rhetoric of razor advertising from the mid-1870s. First was a return to detailed advertisements, extolling the virtues of razors in their own right. The long-established London firm Mechi's took to including lines of self-aggrandizing verse in its advertisements for razors and strops, filling an entire column of page space.⁸⁵ Imagery also began to appear in razor advertising, with products such as 'Edward Smith's Hollow Ground Razors' depicting a young, curly haired man shaving his lathered face, underneath the caption 'Makes shaving a pleasure'.⁸⁶ Others, such as Kropp's, chose instead to depict their razors, shown half open, with accompanying text stating price, durability and pleasure in use.⁸⁷ Hovenden's 'Midget Safety Razor' was even depicted in great detail and at actual size in their advertisements of the early 1890s, allowing consumers to see exactly what they were buying.⁸⁸ Also as occurred

⁸⁵ 'Mechi's Magic Strops, Pastes and Razors', *Daily News* (29 January 1880).

⁸⁶ 'Makes Shaving a Pleasure', *Field* (3 June 1882): 63.

⁸⁷ 'Kropp Real German Hollow Ground Razor', *Field* (26 September 1891): 16.

⁸⁸ 'The Midget Patent Safety Razor', *Field* (24 September 1892): 63.

with soaps and other products, the end of the nineteenth century also saw a return to luxury in the rhetoric of razor advertising. Wood and Co.'s razors were advertised in 1880 under the headline 'A Luxurious Shave'.⁸⁹

As with shaving soap products, therefore, it seems that razor advertising followed a similar trajectory, with changes in availability, the form and nature of advertising and the language used to appeal to masculine consumers. After an apparent lull in the 1860s and 70s, razors again became goods to be advertised in their own right and, on the evidence of patent applications, subject to a new phase of innovation and experimentation.

Conclusion

Both studies in this chapter appear to confirm that the availability and advertising of both cosmetic shaving products and razors changed during the second half of the nineteenth century. The remaining questions are how far such changes are linked to the 'beard movement' and what they might reveal more broadly about the extent of the fashion. The 'beard movement', as we have seen, emerged in the early 1850s and has been argued to have grown rapidly in popularity through the 1860s and 70s, before coming to gradual end in the 1880s as young men began to favour moustaches, while older men still cleaved to their beards. Also, by the 1880s, the various health and medical arguments made in support of beards had begun to pall and began to be associated with the older, more conservative generation.⁹⁰

First, both analyses appear to confirm an impact on the commercial market for shaving between the 1860s and late 70s, although they differ in extent. The data for shaving soaps, pastes, oils and powders seems to point very strongly to a decline in advertising during the 1860s, falling away virtually to nothing in the 1870s, before rising again in the 1880s. Although not as dramatic, the numbers of razor brands advertised also fell noticeably during the same period. This tends to support an argument that the fashion for beard-wearing did have a marked overall effect. During the same period, the rhetoric of advertising changed, moving from luxury and comfort around the mid-century to more of a focus on utility and safety through the decades of the 'beard movement', before returning to luxury and the increasing use of imagery from the 1880s.

The data for both shaving soap products and razors, however, does raise an interesting question regarding the rapidity with which the 'beard movement' was assimilated and its extent. In both product groups it appears that the number of brands not only continued to grow throughout the 1850s, coinciding with the first years of the 'beard movement', but in some cases reached their highest points. Why, then, would shaving products apparently expand when it might be assumed that demand would fall? There are several possible explanations. First, this might suggest that men were

⁸⁹ 'A Luxurious Shave', *York Herald* (6 April 1880).

⁹⁰ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, 'The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain', *Victorian Studies*, 48:1 (2005): 29.

slower to join the fashion than previously assumed and that demand remained for such products. As the evidence of prisoner photographs and continuing demand for barber services both attest, potentially large numbers of men remained clean-shaven or still shaved part of their face. This could account for the continuing – indeed apparently growing – numbers of shaving soap brands in the first decade of the beard movement. Conversely, however, it is possible that soap-makers and perfumers innovated and advertised to stimulate demand in the face of declining business due to the return of beards. (It is perhaps worth noting that the manufacturers of modern razors and shaving products experienced similar pressures during the ‘hipster’ beard trend of c. 2012–7.⁹¹)

A second question relates to the apparent disjoint in the patterns of both product groups. If the data presented for razors is in any way representative, why it does not correspond more closely to shaving soaps and other products? Why might razors continue to be advertised while soap products – after all a requisite for shaving – fell away? This is more difficult to answer, not least since the availability of razors does not necessarily reflect demand and, here again, it may have been the case that advertising was used to stimulate flagging demand, rather than catering to a ready audience of shavers. But it may be instructive here to revisit to the conclusions of Chapter 9 and the photographic evidence of the wide variety of facial hair styles worn by men throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. As the images of prisoners suggest, many facial hair styles still required at least some part of the face to be shaved, making razors necessary accoutrements for styling and managing facial hair.

⁹¹ In summer 2019, changes in male personal grooming habits forced the global healthcare company, Procter and Gamble, to devalue their Gillette shaving business by \$8 billion. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-procter-gamble-results/pg-posts-strong-sales-takes-8-billion-gillette-writedown-idUKKCN1UP16R> (accessed 17 August 2019).