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‘For Profit or Pleasure’: New Cultures of Retail, Shopping and Consumer Culture

Urban redevelopment and the manifestation of a rich civic culture that emerged in interwar Liverpool and Manchester also changed local shopping, retail and consumer cultures. In an article titled ‘The Renaissance of Bold Street’, local periodical the *Liverpolitan* offered a vivid depiction of the rise of a new culture of shopping in Liverpool by highlighting the revitalization of one of the city’s most important shopping streets by the late 1930s. ‘Bold Street is therefore itself again,’ the article proclaimed,

And what a delight it is: to a woman supreme. ... Some of the shops with their novel and artistic frontages invite you irresistibly to look first and then almost magnetise you to go in. Inside they are like elegant parlours with an intimate air that makes the purchasing of articles more a matter of friendliness than a blunt commercial transaction.¹

As the article shows, Liverpool’s shops became sights of enjoyment in their own right and the city centre became more closely associated with shopping and consumer practices, especially for women who enjoyed the practice of shopping as a form of leisure.

The new shopping culture presented a distinct shift in urban retail practices after 1918, particularly in terms of the role of the department store. Whereas scholarship shows the role of the department store in shaping the late Victorian city and in providing a place of leisure and consumption for women, it is strongly emphasized as an exclusive space for the middle and upper classes.² In contrast, historians stress working-class women remained excluded from this consumer culture, except as workers.³ More particularly, the post-1918 period is seen as a turning point in the fortunes of Britain’s department stores, and the general consensus is that department stores declined in importance as a site of retail experience. Rather, the rise of chain stores and co-operatives dominated

shopping culture in Britain.⁴ At the same time, historians tend to characterize British retailers in general as being unable to respond to the challenges of a wider consumer and shopping revolution wherein American forms of retail thrived. The prevailing image therefore is one of decline for Britain's once-dazzling department stores and an overall lacklustre culture of retailing between the two world wars.⁵

American retailers pioneered innovative trends between the two world wars. Innovations transformed department stores in Depression-era America and focused on the 'building, organizing, decorating, and systemizing the store'.⁶ This revitalization extended to all shops and the modernization of store fronts was especially transformative and 'served as a visual harbinger of imminent prosperity to inspire public confidence, stimulate consumption, and provide a focus for the redirection of civic self-representation'.⁷ There are notable similarities between accounts of the modernization of American shop fronts in response to interwar economic depression with reactions by retailers in interwar Liverpool and Manchester. This chapter highlights the ways in which shops in these cities, led by department stores, responded with imagination and ambition to both economic depression and wider urban transformation. As Asa Briggs argues of Lewis's department stores, which were modernized and dramatically expanded in the interwar period and had large branches in both Liverpool and Manchester, 'there was no suggestion of retrenchment ... not even in times when several owners of department stores faced imminent collapse'.⁸ We need to know more about how stores responded to the challenges they faced after 1918, particularly in light of the material in Chapters 1 and 2 that shows that Liverpool and Manchester saw the emergence of a rich civic culture and vibrant modern urbanism. Stores in Liverpool and Manchester did embrace these new strategies as they made the most out of the wider programmes of urban transformation. The innovations of department stores had important implications for shops and shopping culture throughout both cities and beyond.

Liverpool's most glamorous department stores, Bon Marché and George Henry Lee's, were under the ownership of the visionary American businessman and retail pioneer Harry Gordon Selfridge, who rose to fame in Chicago and whose creative team 'was part of the swelling army of copywriters and image engineers who helped to build an ideology of consumerism' in 1920s Britain.⁹ Selfridge was himself renowned for his ostentatious tastes and ambitious investments in expanding his Oxford Street store and although his 'personal vanity and pride' was criticized by Frederick Marquis, director of Lewis's and chairman of Liverpool Organization, they shared a commitment to revitalizing

consumer culture and shopping practices.¹⁰ On his appointment to Lewis's in 1920, Marquis quickly realized that retailers were considered to possess a lower social standing in local civic and political life; they were excluded from certain clubs and were absent from boards of large banks, insurance companies and the railways. Marquis sought to reverse this trend and, in doing so, became a vital link between business and local politics, which was essential for permitting the revitalization of local shopping and retail culture to occur.¹¹ Most notably, Marquis purposefully altered retail practices to improve wages and improve the condition of the working classes, emphasizing the shopkeeper's role 'in social improvement and national well-being'.¹²

The impact of these new techniques and approaches on shopping practices in Liverpool and Manchester, led by the stores run by Selfridge and Marquis, was profound. First, this chapter charts the geographical shift in the location of shops, and shows how interwar urban transformation caused Liverpool and Manchester's city centres to become increasingly associated with shops and consumer culture. Led by department stores, retailers dramatically altered the visual appearance of their shop fronts and interiors, transforming shopping experience. The marketing strategies of department stores, particularly through their careful use of the popular local press, show that the stores became places to see and be seen within; they increasingly aimed their appeal towards the many, rather than the few, and were transformed into populist and cross-class sites of leisure and pleasure. Smaller shops imitated the marketing strategies of department stores, and they altered the urban experience by transforming city centres into exciting sites of consumer culture.

Urban transformation, economic depression and shopping culture

Liverpool and Manchester's transformation and the investment in redevelopment, as seen in Chapter 1, reshaped shopping practices significantly in these cities and the surrounding areas. Data from contemporary trade records reveal the direct relationship between economic depression, urban redevelopment and the emergence of a revitalized consumer culture in Liverpool and Manchester's city centres.¹³ A selection of Kelly's trade directories (chosen for their comprehensive and detailed information on shops and businessmen in both cities) across the interwar years shows the distinct connections between urban redevelopment, economic depression and shopping practices over the period. By focusing on

shops labelled as Boots and Shoe Sellers, Clothiers, Clothing Clubs, Costumiers, Drapers, Dressmakers, Hosiers and Glovers, Milliners, Tailors, Outfitters, Ladies Outfitters (listed as Ladies and Children's Outfitters in the Liverpool Directory) and co-operatives, the analysis permitted a clear numerical and locational comparison over the interwar years.¹⁴ By constructing a comparison of the inner and outer areas of Liverpool and Manchester, it was possible to make a spatial comparison of shopping practices over the period. Inner Area describes the comparatively small geographical area of the city centre, meaning the area that held the central business area, transport terminus, department stores and civic buildings of the city, whereas Outer Area describes the area beyond the city centre and older suburbs.¹⁵

The material from trade directories illustrates a notable shift in the location of clothing and clothing-related retailers between 1922 and 1938. More precisely, the ratio of shops in the inner and outer areas of Liverpool effectively reversed in proportion: in 1922, inner Liverpool housed 35 per cent of shops, but by 1938 the proportion nearly reached 60 per cent, whereas the percentage of shops in outer Liverpool fell from 64 per cent to just 40 per cent across the same period. Together, the table and graph show the proportion of shops in the inner and outer areas of Liverpool underwent a significant locational shift interwar. In 1922, there were 1,109 clothing shops listed in inner Liverpool and 2,025 listed in outer Liverpool. Conversely, by 1938, there were 1,209 clothing shops listed in inner Liverpool and just 830 in outer Liverpool. Clothing-related shops were therefore more likely found in Liverpool city centre, rather than the outer area, by the end of the interwar period.

The shift in the location of shops makes sense in light of the material offered in Chapters 1 and 2. As we saw, the investment in public transport and architecture placed the city at the centre of shared communication network and commercial culture. At the same time, department stores got larger and visually more impressive, particularly Lewis's following several phases of expansion in the 1920s and 1930s while under the management of Marquis.¹⁶ In this context, it made better commercial sense for business owners to have shops in Liverpool city centre than in the outer area because, quite simply, they would attract more customers. The need to attract more customers was particularly pressing due to Liverpool's difficult economic circumstances as its port trade was especially vulnerable to the world depression of 1929–32. In 1932, one in three workers in Liverpool was unemployed as economic depression hit the city's shipping industry particularly hard.¹⁷ By 1939, Merseyside's unemployment rate was 18.8 per cent, compared to a national rate of 9.6 per cent.¹⁸ The statistics

Table 3.1 Clothing shops, Liverpool 1922–38

	1922	1932	1938
Percentage of shops in inner Liverpool	35.38	36.72	59.29
Percentage of shops in outer Liverpool	64.61	63.27	40.70

Source: Kelly's Trade Directories, Liverpool 1922, 1932, 1938.

Figure 3.1 Proportion of shops in Liverpool expressed as percentages, 1922–38

Source: Kelly's Trade Directories, Liverpool 1922, 1932, 1938.

from Kelly's suggest the combination of Liverpool's economic problems and the city's redevelopment, particularly the corporation's investment in public transport and the emergence of impressive commercial architecture in the city centre, ensured that shops were more profitable in the city centre than in the surrounding geographical area. Clothing and clothing-related shops were less likely to survive commercially if they were outside the city centre, particularly following the 1929–32 slump.

Redevelopment helped to produce important shifts in the nature of retail culture and encouraged retailers to focus their trade in the city centre. One of the most striking aspects of Liverpool's interwar geographical redistribution of clothing and clothing-related shops was how far it affected particular kinds of shops and signalled broader changes in the nature of retailing. This data shows that shops in the city centre moved away from being shopkeepers who had only one premise or building, as the chain stores and multi-business owners moved into the centres of Liverpool and Manchester. The numbers of drapers

and dressmakers, for instance, changed sharply across the period. According to the information from Kelly's, in inner Liverpool the number of drapers rose, from 314 in 1922 to 393 in 1938 and in contrast, the amount of drapers fell in outer Liverpool, from 455 in 1922 to just 128 by 1938. The substantial shift suggests that, as the period progressed, draper shops were more profitable in the city centre and fewer people bought material from local shops in the outer area. Interestingly, the number of dressmakers fell sharply in both areas of Liverpool: there were 149 dressmakers listed in Kelly's in outer Liverpool in 1922, and just 38 by 1938. Similarly, inner Liverpool saw numbers of dressmakers also fall, from 158 to 106 in the same period. It seems the depression particularly affected dressmakers as few people could afford to use 'professional' dressmakers. While, at the same time, we do know that women in 1930s Liverpool often took on dressmaking tasks to supplement their family income.¹⁹ Without the need for advertising, premises or other overheads, these women charged far less than professional dressmakers and remained unlisted in Kelly's Directory. Chapter 4 examines women's use of dressmakers more explicitly and these findings support the chapter's argument that although some women used professional dressmakers, many relied on home dressmaking skills, semi-professional or non-professional dressmakers, including family members or neighbours. Urban transformation and economic depression do seem to have signalled the demise of the 'professional' dressmaker in Liverpool as part of a wider process of democratization of glamour and fashion.

The demise of the professional dressmaker allows us to trace the emergence of the modern shopping 'high street' between the two world wars. For example, the number of shops listed as hosiers and glovers remained fairly steady within inner Liverpool across the period, with twenty-one in 1922 and twenty in 1938. Outer Liverpool was markedly different, however, and hosiers and glovers fell dramatically in numbers, from seventy-two in 1920, to only eighteen in 1938. These statistics further suggest Liverpool city centre became the focus of local consumer experience during the interwar period, since hosiers and glovers survived the depression in the city centre but struggled in the city's outer area. Taken together, from these examples it seems that not only did shoppers in Liverpool increasingly visit the city centre for clothes and clothing-related shopping but, while in the city, they were also more likely to purchase materials for home dressmaking (drapers but not professional dressmakers) or items they could not easily make themselves (hosiers and glovers). Again, the material presented here illuminates the findings of Chapter 4, which show women were

more likely to purchase token items like hosiery or items relating to home dressmaking, rather than actual dresses.

The data collected from Manchester's trade directories do not immediately present such a clear picture of change as in Liverpool. Overall, the statistics suggest the proportion of clothes-related shops in the inner area remained relatively unchanged over the period, shown in Table 3.2. Yet Manchester possessed some distinct features that may explain the lack of change. First, the legacy of Manchester's cotton trade probably ensured that cheap cloth remained available throughout Manchester and allowed drapers or dressmakers to set up easily and semi-officially, therefore making them less vulnerable to broader economic and structural changes. Second, Manchester covered a greater geographical area than Liverpool and contained several significant satellite towns with their own concentration of clothing shops. Towns like Stockport (famous for its own hat industry), Oldham, Bolton and Salford acted as shopping centres for the areas immediately surrounding them and so might have developed their own thriving shopping centres. These factors may therefore obscure the relationship between economic depression and retail practices in Manchester.

A closer and more detailed examination of the data taken from Manchester's trade directories does reveal some striking trends in retail culture that also suggest that we can see the emergence of the modern shopping 'high street'. Interestingly, there was an average of 1,200 drapers in outer Manchester throughout the period, but only ever around thirty in the inner city area. Inhabitants of the outer Manchester area may well have visited the city centre more often and made use of the expansion in public transport to peruse clothes shops but they may have also still purchased items nearer to home, which probably cost less due to the ease of access to cloth suppliers.²⁰ A decline in the numbers of clothing-related shops in the outer area of Manchester, does seem to have taken place, however, which suggests redevelopment and economic decline reshaped shopping practices. For example, the quantity of boot and shoe sellers

Table 3.2 Clothing shops, Manchester 1922–38

	1922	1932	1938
Percentage of shops in inner Manchester	12.5	11.4	10.99
Percentage of shops in outer Manchester	87.49	88.57	89

Source: Kelly's Trade Directories, Manchester 1922, 1932, 1938.

in outer Manchester halved over the period, from 426 in 1922 to 218 in 1936, and tailors also fell significantly in number within Manchester's outer area, from 563 in 1922 to 390 in 1938. These statistics suggest the economic change and urban transformation did impact clothing-related shops in outer Manchester as redevelopment ensured shops were increasingly located in the city centre.

Further inspection suggests the redistribution of Manchester's clothing-related shops also caused its city centre to become increasingly associated with retail experience. The numbers of dressmakers in inner Manchester fluctuated between twenty-one in 1922, ten in 1932 and eighteen in 1938. In the outer area they numbered 348 in 1922, falling to 290 in 1932, and by 1938, there were only 232. These numbers suggest that, as in Liverpool, dressmakers left the city centre in response to urban redevelopment. As the statistics for Liverpool indicate, there is evidence to suggest that shoppers in Manchester also increasingly frequented clothing-related shops for items they could not make at home and, at the same time, tended to rely on shops in inner Manchester to purchase these items. There were twenty-eight Hosiers and Glovers in inner Manchester and seventy-seven in outer Manchester during 1922: by 1938, the numbers were nineteen for inner Manchester and only thirty for the outer area. Similarly, there were nineteen milliners in 1922 within inner Manchester, falling to fifteen by 1938, whereas the number of milliners in outer Manchester fell much more significantly, from 304 in 1922 to just 198 in 1938. The data compiled from trade directories show retailers left the outer area as a consequence of urban redevelopment.

Manchester's fluctuating interwar economy helps to explain the nature of the city's distribution of clothing and clothing-related shops, and the complicated fortunes of its local economy mirror the ambiguities of the statistics produced by the analysis of the trade directories. For instance, Manchester's cotton industry suffered an irreversible crash, creating substantial unemployment throughout Lancashire, yet Manchester's official unemployment levels never met the national rate. Poverty and unemployment spread unevenly throughout the Greater Manchester area.²¹ The area around Trafford Park, to the west of the city, for example, saw increased prosperity after Ford set up a factory in 1910 (although the company departed for Dagenham in 1931 to be nearer the European market); Kemp's biscuit factory began production there in 1923, followed by Kellogg's in 1938. 'Trafford Park firms generally survived the Crash of 1929/31 without bankruptcies, which was not the case elsewhere in Lancashire.'²² Trafford Park was part of a wider attempt to broaden the city's economy and investment centred on the area's factories, the Manchester Ship Canal and Manchester

Airport, although pockets of poverty and unemployment persisted, particularly in the areas of Miles Platting, Chorlton-on-Medlock, Hulme, Ancoats, Angel Meadow and Redbank.²³

Manchester's cotton collapse, and the subsequent unemployment of mill workers and warehouse staff, may help explain why clothing-related shops left the outer area during the interwar years. It is possible to speculate that the decline of the export market left a glut of cotton in and around Manchester, explaining the survival of drapers, whereas other types of retailers faced far harder times. Conversely, the diversification of the city's economy and the concentration of unemployment in particular areas imply the depression did not affect clothing and clothing-related shops in outer Manchester as extensively as were their Liverpool counterparts. Manchester's particular commercial, geographical size and number of satellite towns, each with its own micro-economy, make it difficult to place the city within a particular model of economic growth or decline. Nevertheless, as the next part of the chapter shows, both city centres became increasingly associated with shopping practices as the interwar period progressed.

Shops as 'the poetry of the streets'

The statistics suggest a link between urban redevelopment and shifts in retail culture. Urban commentators recognized the significant changes in both cities' fabric and appearance from the mid-1920s and highlighted the important visual role of shops in shaping these changes. The *Manchester Guardian Yearbook* of 1925, for example, described two developments in the city during the previous year. 'One has been a very striking improvement in the window display,' claimed the *Yearbook*, 'and the other – and a very remarkable one in view of the general depression in trade – a rapid growth in the number of shops for women's clothes and footwear.'²⁴ Similarly, in 1928, architectural expert Sir Charles Reilly wrote that behind Liverpool's office quarter 'will spread the shopping and amusement area, ever brighter and gayer.'²⁵ Department stores were responsible for this development, as they both exploited and contributed to the ongoing urban redevelopment and investment in infrastructure to attract greater numbers of customers.

Shop windows, in particular, became increasingly important as selling tools during the 1920s, and shop managers created exotic window displays to draw

shoppers to their stores. Department stores pioneered these fantastical window displays, as a journalist recognized in 1927, 'The window displays at the Bon Marché are always good and at times so good that to alter them seems a pity. The colour schemes are especially outstanding. The general character of the advertising ... attains novelty.'²⁶ Influenced by innovative trends from Paris and New York, which pioneered the 'cult of window-dressing', shop windows in Manchester and Liverpool became increasingly decorative and filled elaborately with items for sale.²⁷ Shop windows helped to transform the visual experience of shopping and drew in visitors from the surrounding areas, as the *Manchester Guardian* noted in 1926: 'Shopping in Manchester appeals to thousands of people outside the city's boundaries', key were shop windows, which were part of the shops' aims to 'encourage sightseers and visitors.'²⁸ Urban commentators credited the new culture of shop windows with changing the nature and role of shopping as shopping became 'a joy as well as a necessity, and part of the pleasure arises from the contemplation of beautiful articles artistically arranged in the spacious windows.'²⁹ As we shall see in Chapter 4, women's engagement with retail culture in Liverpool and Manchester did change between the two world wars and the rich culture of window-dressing was fundamental to the new demotic culture of shopping that women from a range of class backgrounds could enjoy.

As larger shops' window displays became more exotic and elaborate, smaller retailers began to imitate them to attract customers. Mass Observation, a social research movement that established an anthropological study of Bolton, a town to the north of Manchester, in the late 1930s, noted the emphasis shop owners placed on the aesthetics of their windows.³⁰ A young female draper admitted to imitating larger shops: 'For ideas I go to the big shops and note the best displays, I started with the cardboard displays and as I increased my stock I tried to show the different goods I had.'³¹ Another female draper reported something similar in a separate interview with Mass Observation: 'I do my own window dressing and I try to change the windows once a week', stating she used her newest stock and most fashionable items for the displays.³² For shop owners in Bolton, windows were essential selling techniques and smaller retailers were directly inspired by larger city centre shops.

The fantastical shop windows also contributed to the increased marginalization of the poorest street sellers from the revitalized cultures of shopping. Not only could street sellers not compete with the strategies pursued by these shop owners, but became perceived as unwanted and incompatible with new retail

forms. In 1924, for example, Councillor John Nield brought the plight of the 'extreme poverty and distress' of street sellers to Liverpool Corporation. Nield declared:

The motorcars of the idle rich are permitted to obstruct the busy thoroughfares, also the window displays of the shops (in particular large business concerns) causing the sidewalks to be blocked, this Council expresses its disapproval at the officious and despotic treatment inflicted on the hawkers and pedlars by the Police and Magistrates, in so far the hawkers and pedlars are 'hustled', 'moved on', and fined, and thus prevented from selling the goods ... they persecute a woman if she happens to stop within view of certain shops with her barrow of goods.³³

Interestingly, the Council immediately dismissed Nield's complaints and the message was clear: there was no room for hawkers or pedlars in the transformed city.³⁴

Department stores contributed to urban culture more generally in the late Victorian and Edwardian years.³⁵ This process continued into the interwar period, but department store style changed and window displays in the 1930s followed a particular aesthetic of abundance, which reflected the interwar economic depression. Rather than fetishizing single objects through a minimalist aesthetic, objects for sale overloaded shop windows. One report by Mass Observation noted the packed displays: 'Magnificent displays in five shops just off and around Deansgate. They are all, without exception, pink. In one window fifty-seven pairs, then forty-five, thirty-eights, twenty-five and fifteen. They are mostly exceedingly complicated with bones running vertically and slopingly and intricate lacing.'³⁶ Similarly, the revitalized storefronts in America were central to a new form of retailing and included overcrowded displays that offered 'an image of modernity that was deliberately at odds with the dismal present because it symbolised a hopeful future.'³⁷ Images of abundance dominated shop windows in Liverpool and Manchester also and offered an enticing image of consumer culture that was contradictory to the economic context of the period. For instance, one window for Woolworths in 1931 displayed numerous items for 'Household Week', which overwhelmingly packed out the window making it difficult to focus on any one item. Ordinary household objects like saws and hammers were organized so they formed a scene of entertainment and spectacle. Nurturing an image of abundance, Woolworth's window projected a fantastical and other-worldly representation

of the objects.³⁸ Similarly, the *Manchester Guardian* described the particularly decorative displays the shops invested in during the Civic Week and highlighted their use of light to maintain their appeal into the evening, when ‘the pavements are crowded with little groups of tired women and babies gazing into the brilliant caves of bright stuffs and colours where exquisite wax ladies are gowned for balls or theatres or for study tramps through heathery moors’.³⁹ There are parallels between the cultures of shopping that emerged in interwar Liverpool and Manchester and with Walter Benjamin’s insights relating to phantasmagorical experiences of the modern city. For Benjamin, shop windows made objects other-worldly and department stores and the way they displayed their goods meant, ‘the circus-like and theatrical element of commerce is quite extraordinarily heightened’.⁴⁰

The phantasmagorical role of shop windows also shaped the visual experience of city centres. From the mid-1920s, Manchester’s visual transformation led by shop managers in their desire to attract greater numbers of customers struck local urban commentators. In 1926, the *Manchester Guardian* wrote, ‘Nowadays the shop windows are the poetry of the streets. On melancholy autumn days, they are like bright, enchanted caves edging the pavements.’⁴¹ The newspaper also made grander claims about the changes in the city during the 1920s, which helped to feed into the images of Manchester disseminated through corporation-produced publicity material and the local press. The *Manchester Guardian* Yearbook of 1925 proclaimed,

Within the past twelve months the buildings which first ousted residentialism from Manchester are being effaced and reconstructed. In their stead have risen expansive and imposing showrooms for the display and accommodation of clothing, drapery. ... Gradually, Manchester is taking a bigger toll of the county’s shoppers. ... No opportunity is being neglected to increase the attractiveness of the shops, and just as Manchester is informally treated as the capital of the North of England, so it is destined by the solidarity, worth and value of its service, to become the shopping centre of the North of England.⁴²

According to the *Manchester Guardian*, the new shopping culture changed the city centre during the mid-1920s and this contributed to Manchester’s marketed image – a shopping destination. As the extract suggests, Manchester’s role as the ‘shopping centre of the North of England’ was a product of the economic depression. As one shop owner in Bolton told Mass Observation, he lost customers to the larger city shops, who could sell goods more cheaply: ‘A woman

will take a penny bus ride ... and thereby save 6d or 1/ as it is worth it.⁴³ The experiences of the shop manager and his customers again support the findings of the statistics collated from Kelly's directories, which suggested shops in the outer areas of Manchester were more vulnerable to the economic depression of the 1930s, particularly in light of the advances in public transport that made access to city centres easier, cheaper and faster. By implication, shops and a more glamorous retail culture increasingly became associated with Manchester's urban centre.

Similar changes also occurred to the culture of shopping in Liverpool city centre. In 1921, Liverpool architectural expert Charles Reilly complained about Bold Street and urged shopkeepers to form a league 'to maintain and improve the character and standard of what might be. ... On gala days they should beflag it as New York does Fifth Avenue.'⁴⁴ By 1935, consumer culture visibly transformed the city's streets. 'Lime Street at night is now a favourite rendezvous for numerous visitors, on account of its numerous electric signs, while the majority of our modern cinemas and music halls have their frontages outlined with neon tubing,' wrote one journalist in the *Liverpolitan*, in an affectionately named article, 'The City is getting Gayer!'⁴⁵ Technological developments were important as they allowed department stores to produce fantastical visual displays and ensured the buildings themselves were a form of entertainment. Department store historiography emphasizes not only the 'urban monumentality' of their architecture, but also their decline in the interwar period.⁴⁶ In contrast, department stores and smaller shops in cities such as Manchester and Liverpool seem to have increased their investment in technology to enhance the appearance and visual spectacle of their stores.

American department stores pioneered developments in technologies of light during the early twentieth century, in the belief that it led to increased sales. 'Between 1911 and 1936 the intensity of illumination in the typical store tripled,' writes historian Susan Porter Benson, 'with indirect lighting and accent spotlights replacing older direct lighting.'⁴⁷ Smaller shops in Liverpool borrowed department stores' use of light to attract customers. 'The glamour and variety of modern lighting must be reckoned in the renaissance of Bold Street,' wrote *Liverpolitan*, in a description of the impact of the technologically advanced lights on the shop fronts.⁴⁸ In 1938, the Liverpool Gas Company bought premises on Bold Street to create a 'great new "temple of gas" ... a lavish display amid spacious and ornate appointments.'⁴⁹ There was a link between interwar investment in infrastructure, technological developments and urban consumer culture after

the mid-1920s, turning the streets into objects of spectacle and entertainment. A poem published in the *Liverpolitan* in 1937 described Bold Street as a place of leisure in itself:

Straight as an arrow, slim as any girl,
Of roadway narrow, disapproving whirl,
It seems a sacrilege to speed your car
Amidst a mart that's just one long bazaar.⁵⁰

The author encapsulates how the shops' new selling techniques turned Bold Street into a place of amusement as the redeveloped city provided the infrastructure for a popular urban consumer culture to manifest. Department store managers and shopkeepers invested in enhancing the visual experience of shopping in response to economic depression and Liverpool and Manchester's interwar transformation. Yet they did not stop there and, as the next section examines, the use of advertisements further reshaped consumer culture and shopping practices in both cities.

Advertisements

The material presented above shows how shopping culture changed as a result of Liverpool and Manchester's interwar redevelopment. At the same time, department stores were in no way immune from the pressures of economic depression and the interwar years were especially challenging. Chain stores and wider fluctuations in the economy and income levels threatened the very existence of department stores.⁵¹ Department stores' advertisements and promotional strategies in Liverpool and Manchester reveal how they survived and prospered between the wars. Generally understood as exclusive sites of consumption for upper- and middle-class shoppers, they needed to broaden their customer base in response to economic depression, alongside wider changes such as suburbanization, which took the middle-class consumer further away from the city centre, and the rise of working-class 'affluence'.⁵² An analysis of the quantity and content of advertisements placed by the main department stores in Liverpool and Manchester reveals the stores' change in approach. Briggs suggests Lewis's department stores (a chain of department stores found throughout the country but with considerable autonomy and influence of store managers) were highly innovative in their advertising campaigns interwar and

followed methods 'as far removed from the sensational advertising of the middle of the nineteenth century as they could have been'.⁵³ In Liverpool, Lewis's led a clear shift in their approach to marketing and advertising and their leadership was in part to the contribution of Marquis, who as chairman of Liverpool Organization represented a key point of collaboration between the council and private business. Marquis transformed the way Lewis's was run and combined his expertise as an economist with his passion for social responsibility, turning Lewis's into a slick, organized machine with increased productivity and turnover, which was used to improve workers' wages and conditions. In his own memoirs, Marquis claimed, 'Efficiency in management and capital risk-taking were producing better conditions of employment and improving the standard of living of the general public.'⁵⁴ By implication of the vision and innovation shown by businessmen such as Marquis, department stores in Liverpool and Manchester purposefully reinvented themselves as populist sites of leisure and consumer culture which offered crucial protection from interwar economic depression.

By counting and analysing the number of advertisements placed by Liverpool's key stores, which were Bon Marché, George Henry Lee's and Lewis's, in comparison to Manchester's Affleck and Brown, Lewis's and Kendal's in the local press (the *Manchester Evening News* – hereafter *MEN*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Liverpool Echo*, and *Liverpolitan*), it is possible to chart their change in marketing strategies in response to economic depression and urban transformation.⁵⁵ Liverpool and Manchester's press targeted different spending groups, as defined by Seebohm Rowntree's second poverty survey, which identified four groups with A as the highest and D the lowest: the *MEN* and *Echo* each cost one penny and focused on local interest stories, sensational murder reports, cinema and sport and spending groups C and D were more likely to make up their readership.⁵⁶ Both newspapers mirrored developments in the national popular press, led by Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*, which demoted politics and parliament from the front pages in favour of human interest stories and advertisements, aiming to attract a more female audience.⁵⁷ Northcliffe's strategies implemented in the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* also incorporated some features of women's magazines, such as fashion and retail advertisements, and the local press also took up these additions and innovations.⁵⁸ Conversely, *Manchester Guardian* (which cost three halfpence in 1919 and two pence in 1939) focused on national and international political events and economics. *Manchester Guardian* was both a national and local newspaper from the later nineteenth century (despite not

dropping 'Manchester' from its title until 1959). Yet the newspaper experienced a period of 'Manchesterisation' from the late 1920s and the introduction in 1928 of a regular 'Manchester Letter' in opposition to the newspaper's London Letter, was part of a wider return to a focus on Manchester issues. As we saw in Chapter 1, the newspaper did include many features promoting the council's investment in urban transformation.⁵⁹ *Liverpolitan* (which cost three pence) was a monthly periodical that dealt with local and national politics and current affairs. People from spending groups A and B were therefore more likely to be readers of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Liverpolitan*. Nevertheless, these newspapers were not immune from the broader changes sweeping through press culture after the First World War and, for example, in 1922 the *Manchester Guardian* introduced a regular women's page.⁶⁰

This use of the local press reveals the regional-specific marketing approaches employed by Liverpool and Manchester's main department stores. Advertisements are especially illuminating because they provide a form of communication between the capitalist and the consumer that aims to persuade the consumer to make particular choices about certain products.⁶¹ Studies of American advertisements suggests their message, content, attitudes and values remained constant during the 1920s and 1930s, even throughout the economic crash.⁶² Department stores in Liverpool and Manchester continued to advertise through the depression years, although their message, content and attitudes did change as the stores altered their marketing approach to attract a wider customer base. There were also broader technological changes in Europe that shaped department stores' ability to advertise differently: in 1919, the typical department store advert was small, consisting of a frame surrounding the logo and perhaps some prices. A decade later, 'the breakthrough of graphic representations in advertising becomes apparent, as both illustrations and a variety of fonts are added to the earlier concept thereby setting a standard which has persisted until the present day.'⁶³ These broader changes show the importance of the press in permitting department stores to nurture a spectacular culture of shopping that reached a broad, cross-class audience.

Department stores did not just change their style of advertisements but also altered where they placed their advertisements to reflect the new customer base that they sought to attract. Figure 3.2 shows the number of advertisements placed by department stores in the popular press increased significantly over the interwar period. As the graph shows, there was an appreciable rise in those placed by the main department stores in the newspapers most likely read by those from spending groups C and D. For instance, between 1920 and 1938,

Figure 3.2 Numbers of advertisements placed by department stores, 1920–38

Source: *Liverpool Echo* and *Manchester Evening News*, 1920, 1932, 1938.

the number of advertisements placed in the *Manchester Evening News* (MEN) rose by 40 per cent. This was all the more significant considering they also grew in size and were increasingly decorative and eye-catching. The statistics suggest department stores had a growing presence in the popular press, which may have been a national trend, and drapery and department store advertising constituted the single largest category of promotional expenditure in the press in 1935.⁶⁴ The quantity of department store advertisements in the popular press within Liverpool and Manchester certainly rose markedly: During January and February 1920, Lewis's, Lee's and Bon Marché placed a total of sixty-four advertisements in the *Echo* and one hundred in the same months of 1938, an increase of over 50 per cent. Similarly, Kendal's, Affleck and Brown, and Lewis's placed a total of twenty-six advertisements in the *MEN* during October and November of 1920, and seventy-four in the same period of 1938, meaning the quantity in the *MEN* nearly trebled over the period. These statistics illustrate department stores advertised more heavily in the later 1930s in comparison to the early 1920s. They also promoted their goods and services within newspapers more likely read by those in the lower spending groups.

The statistics above illustrate the increased number of advertisements placed in the popular press in Liverpool and Manchester across the interwar years. Looking at the more elite press, however, offers a different story. As Figure 3.3 shows, far fewer department store advertisements appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* as the period progressed. The number placed by Kendal's fell especially sharply over the period: in January and February of 1920, the store placed seventy-seven advertisements, falling to just seven during January and February of 1938. Contrastingly, the store chose to place fourteen in the *MEN* during the same period of 1920, and twelve in 1938, albeit much larger and more illustrative advertisements. The shift in Kendal's marketing practices suggests

Figure 3.3 Number of department store advertisements in the *Manchester Guardian*, 1920–38

Source: *Manchester Guardian*, 1920–38.

the store turned away from focusing on attracting customers from spending groups A and B. Advertisements placed by Affleck and Brown follow a more complex pattern but also point to a similar shift: Affleck and Brown placed over forty advertisements in each of the *MEN* and the *Manchester Guardian* during January and February 1920. During the October and November period of 1938, the store placed only one advertisement in the *Manchester Guardian* and fourteen in the *MEN*. It seems that if Affleck and Brown did choose to advertise in the press during the late 1930s, they did so within a newspaper more likely read by those from the lower spending groups.

The decline in the quantity of department store advertisements placed in the *Manchester Guardian* after 1932 reflected the 'catastrophic' decade faced by the newspaper, which, in turn, reflected in a decline in advertising revenue throughout the 1930s.⁶⁵ Fortunately, the company bought the *MEN* in 1930, which continued to attract significant advertising revenue and helped the *Manchester Guardian* survive a difficult decade. Department store advertisements provided an important source of revenue for the *MEN* and contributed to the newspaper's success. In 1931, Lewis's booked a record advertising contract with the paper, placing a full-page advertisement for three days a week over an extended period.⁶⁶ In contrast, the *Manchester Guardian's* fortunes followed those of the city's cotton industry, which severely limited the wealth and prosperity of businessmen (and thus advertisers) in the Manchester area and the newspaper earned £300,000 a year in advertising revenue until the Slump. The newspaper's annual income from advertisements fell to £230,000 in the late 1920s, decreasing

by a further £40,000 in the year after March 1930, and again by £40,000 during the following year.⁶⁷ Despite these damaging figures, the collapse of the cotton industry was not the newspaper's most pressing concern. 'More lasting, and therefore more damaging', however, was the 'diversion of display advertising to the "popular" papers which could offer the mass audience needed for the marketing of mass-produced consumer goods.'⁶⁸ The *Manchester Guardian* lost advertising to newspapers like the *MEN* because there was a wider shift among advertisers to target those who read the popular press.

Statistics relating to the number of advertisements placed by stores in Manchester suggest that by the end of the interwar period all three stores focused on attracting customers from lower spending groups. In January and February of 1920, Lewis's, Lee's, and Affleck and Brown placed nineteen, forty-one and fourteen advertisements each in the *MEN*, and none, forty-three and seventy-seven each in the *Manchester Guardian*. By the same period of 1938, the number placed in the *MEN* stood at thirty-five for Lewis's, nineteen for Affleck and Brown, and twelve for Kendal's. In the *Manchester Guardian*, there were three, ten and seven respectively. There are parallels here with findings on British cigarette advertisements, which emphasize a shift away from Victorian styles of advertisements (which appealed to specific individuals) as interwar cigarette manufacturers sought 'to capture as wide a market as possible for each branded commodity'.⁶⁹ Department store managers, like cigarette companies, attempted to attract a wider market reflected by the changing nature of their advertisements over the course of the interwar period. The choice made by department stores to advertise in the *MEN* rather than the *Manchester Guardian* was reflective of this shift. The marketing strategy of department store managers in Liverpool and Manchester related to a wider populist and demotic consumer culture that developed in 1930s Britain.

In Liverpool, a more populist marketing approach also emerged in direct response to economic depression and the number of department store advertisements in the *Echo* increased when the city experienced its most challenging economic problems, as Figure 3.4 illustrates. During the November and October period of 1920, Lewis's placed thirty-five advertisements in the *Echo*, Lee's placed sixteen and Bon Marché thirteen. By the same period of 1932, the numbers reached fifty-seven, twenty-one and twenty-four, respectively and, in 1938, stood at thirty-six, fourteen and twenty. These numbers suggest that during times of economic hardship department stores in Liverpool were enthusiastic to invest in advertising within a newspaper more likely read by those from lower

Figure 3.4 Department store advertisements in the *Liverpool Echo*, 1920–38

Source: *Liverpool Echo*, 1920–38.

spending groups. Taken in conjunction with the earlier material on the locational redistribution of clothing-related shops in Liverpool, it seems the emerging shopping culture in the city centre intensified a sense of competition between the department stores. The number of advertisements placed by department stores in both Liverpool and Manchester indicates they sought to attract customers from lower spending groups and chose not to focus on attracting a smaller number of customers from the higher spending groups. There were important implications following this change in department stores' advertising practices in Manchester and Liverpool. They cultivated a shopping revival, drawing clothing-related shops into the city centre, changed the way women shopped, and encouraged a further link between the city and consumer practices.

‘The modern store can be a social centre
as well as a shop’: Department stores as
demotic sites of leisure and pleasure

The changes in advertisements and the new approach of department store managers towards their customers reflected wider developments in the nature of retail culture. In the immediate post-war years and early 1920s, department stores placed very small advertisements that typically acted as an announcement to declare special in-store events.⁷⁰ Department stores seemed only to advertise during special promotional events, like the sales, when their customer base changed temporarily. For instance, the only advertisements placed by Affleck and Brown and Kendal's in both the *MEN* and the *Manchester Guardian* during

January and February 1920 promoted their January sales.⁷¹ As a consequence of developments in technology, advertisements placed by department stores in interwar Liverpool and Manchester not only increased in number but also became larger and more eye-catching. Department store managers also expanded their promotional tactics to appeal to an increasingly broad audience. Stores focused their promotional activities around several important sales strategies during the 1930s: themed weeks, amenities, aspirational fashion, glamour and the lure of Hollywood, promotional activities and entertainment. They indicate a significant shift in the marketing and promotional tactics employed by department stores.

Department stores originally aimed to attract middle- and upper-class women shoppers only.⁷² Designed for the comfort and leisure of women from the higher spending groups, advertisements presented stores as exclusive sites for these social groups. For instance, one promotional poster for G. H. Lee's in 1919 depicted shopping as a very small aspect of the services provided and portrays the store primarily as a meeting place for ladies:

All the Facilities of a Ladies' Town Club ... newspapers and periodicals of the day may be perused, correspondence conducted, and your letters received and posted. ... Every amenity, in fact, usually associated with a Ladies' Town Club may be enjoyed.⁷³

The poster invited wealthier women to spend their social and leisure time within the store and indicates department stores were exclusive in the women they sought to attract and promoted a clear notion of middle- and upper-class femininity. Department store managers used women's clubs to lure in shoppers from the Edwardian period, when 'clubs were no longer seen as socially daring, dangerous or even feminist'.⁷⁴ In contrast, by the later 1930s, stores maintained their role as a social centre but embraced a wider clientele. An advert placed by Lewis's in *Liverpolitan* in 1937 also suggested the store saw itself as a demotic leisure space; it claimed: 'The larger Lewis's will show how the modern store can be a social centre as well as a shop' and marketed itself explicitly to all classes.⁷⁵ By the later 1930s therefore, the new marketing strategies presented department stores as sites of leisure and pleasure, rather than just somewhere to make purchases and, crucially, at the same time moved away from their elitist associations. This shift is also illustrated by statistics from G. H. Lee's which show the most popular department in 1933 was the Restaurant, which had had 7,954 recorded customers in 1933, whereas the next most popular department was the Haberdashery with 4,396 recorded customers. The popularity of the restaurant suggested that it, too, had moved towards becoming a site of leisure and pleasure as well as aiming to be a shop for all classes by the early 1930s.⁷⁶

In the immediate post-war years, advertisements for department stores emphasized the exclusivity of the clothes they sold and clearly sought to encourage potential customers from the higher spending groups, as the women they depicted tended to be well dressed but not particularly glamorous or fashionable.⁷⁷ During the 1920s, department stores in Liverpool appear to have only invited women from lower spending groups on specific terms. In 1920, Lee's promoted the season's new fashion collection to wealthy women, by describing it in exclusive terms. The collection was made up of 'dainty examples of New Season's goods have the charm of distinction', claimed the advert.⁷⁸ Contrastingly, Lewis's in Liverpool sought to attract a different kind of customer during its 'Household Bargains Week' in February 1920. 'Housewives! You know what this means! Low prices on prodigious quantities of all kinds of usable things, household draperies and linens for the home.'⁷⁹ Similarly, Bon Marché held a 'Stocking Week' with 'six days of stocking value which you will not meet again for many months' and, in the same advert, urged 'thrifty women' to also buy fabric for their spring dresses.⁸⁰ Advertisements in the early 1920s appear to have identified specific moments when women from particular spending groups were invited to the stores.

By the early 1930s, Manchester's department stores used themed promotional weeks to encourage customers from lower spending groups by presenting their stores as places to find bargains. An advert placed by Affleck and Brown in 1932 to promote 'Household bargains' informed the housewife: 'These prices cannot be maintained when the stock is cleared' and claimed 'the goods were bought when the market was at its lowest in preparation for the Annual Sale ... wise folk will replenish their future needs now as it is a rising market.'⁸¹ At a time of economic difficulty, department stores in Manchester used these advertisements to create a sense of urgency. They implied it was the housewife's only opportunity to purchase goods in a store normally beyond their budgets. Lewis's set up a Central Buying Office in 1923, which allowed the company to buy in bulk and enabled them to provide goods to customers at lower prices.⁸² In the 1920s and 1930s therefore, stores deliberately targeted customers with less spending power and this marked a clear shift in their marketing practices from the period before 1918 and reflected a wider democratization of glamour, which we will explore in more detail in Chapter 4.

Themed sales weeks continued in Manchester's department stores, but advertisements targeted a broader range of customers. For example, one advert placed by Lewis's suggests that by the early 1930s, themed weeks also began to

attract shoppers as a mass market, rather than isolating and targeting specific spending groups at certain times. Significantly, there were no pictures of women or women's clothing as this prevented the store from alienating anyone, either from lower or higher spending groups. Promising 'New 5/merchandise to the store', the advert recreated the images of abundance that were apparent in shop windows. The advert, and the many others like it, presented the store as having inexpensive and useful items, like bedspreads and curtains, as well as more fashionable and more frivolous items, like stockings and dresses.⁸³ Interestingly, the store placed a very different advertisement for the 'Million Pound Sale' in the *Manchester Guardian*, in order to target women from higher spending groups and actually depicted a wealthy woman waited upon by a shop assistant in Lewis's during the 'Million Pound Sale'.⁸⁴ The advertisement explicitly invited women from wealthier spending groups to attend the sale but promised a very different consumer experience to those who read the *MEN*. The two differing advertisements illustrate how department stores in Manchester targeted customers with different spending power to attend the same promotional events.

Department stores employed aspirational images of fashion during the later 1930s, which represented an important shift in department store advertising strategy because they were able to appeal to women as a mass market. Rather than using different advertisements to target different groups of shoppers, stores began to use glamorous, fashionable images, which women could aspire to emulate. These aspirational fashions were not necessarily out of the reach of women from the lower spending groups. George Orwell described the nature of trade in the 1930s, which meant it was cheaper to buy luxury items than necessities: 'One pair of plain solid shoes costs as much as two ultra-smart pair'.⁸⁵ By implication, aspirational (rather than essential) items of clothing, such as fur coats, could actually be affordable and accessible for women from lower spending groups.⁸⁶ An advert placed by Lewis's in October 1938 set out how the modern woman should dress. '5 fundamentals for the well-dressed woman' informed women from all spending groups, "YOU MUST HAVE" a fur stroller, a good coat, a simple daytime dress, a smart "dressy" dress, a dramatic evening dress.⁸⁷ The advertisement appealed to women generally, by focusing on an aspirational model of womanhood and fashion.

Liverpool's department stores also used images of aspirational glamour to encourage a broad customer base in the late 1930s. Bon Marché promoted a fur sale in 1938 that offered a variety of furs and the advert emphasized glamour. From the 'Delightful Box Coat' and 'Elegant Cape', to the 'Dashing Swagger',

prices ranged from as little as seven guineas to as much as £400, with squirrel being the cheapest fur and accessible to many working-class women if they saved carefully. The advertisement indicates the store sought to cater for the budgets of all women and used fur as an iconic item of clothing to unite all women customers. Similarly, Lee's asked *Liverpolitan's* readers, 'Cruising this year?' The advert included depictions of glamorous women on a cruise ship, but the products listed aimed to encompass a range of spending abilities: 'Swim costumes are priced from 15/11 to 49/6 – Wraps from 7/11 to 49/.'⁸⁸ Cruising is a glamorous image, but not necessarily divisive or alienating to women with little spending power: the range of products allowed women with less spending power to access the aspirational images these advertisements promoted. By the late 1930s, department stores used aspirational glamour to attract women consumers from all spending groups because its appeal crossed class divisions.

Popular images of feminine identities in the 1930s closely related to the glamour of Hollywood and the centrality of the cinema to working-class leisure.⁸⁹ Department stores used the appeal of Hollywood and the popularity of the cinema to attract women shoppers and this strategy allowed managers to promote stores as places of glamour and amusement, which was particularly common in Liverpool from the early 1930s onwards.⁹⁰ In August 1932, echoing the successful publicity trick of the 1926 Civic Week that saw West End actress Gladys Cooper create a near-riot in a Liverpool department store, film star Gracie Fields became a shop assistant at Bon Marché as a publicity stunt.⁹¹ Gracie's appearance was incredibly popular and very large crowds of women competed for her service. All the local newspapers reported Gracie's visit and the *Post* described the spectacle: 'Hundreds of women were convulsed with laughter at the antics of Miss Gracie Fields who for an hour yesterday took on the job of shop assistant.'⁹² Gracie Fields (1898–1979) began her career as a music hall star in Rochdale and became one of Britain's greatest film stars in the 1930s. From 1936 to 1939, she was the top female star at the British cinema box office. Her most famous films included *Shipyard Sally*, *Sing As We Go* and *Looking on the Bright Side*, allowing Gracie Fields to play characters who were cheerful in the face of misfortune and 'recreated her own rise from mill girl to star, a "rags to riches" saga which demonstrated the continuing validity of the doctrine of self-help.'⁹³ Gracie was 'evidently something of a national treasure' during the 1930s and was a very different figure to that of Jessie Matthews, Britain's other leading female cinematic star in the 1930s, who was very glamorous and more sexual.⁹⁴ Film historian Andrew Higson describes Gracie Fields as 'the unglamorous star,

the ordinary person.⁹⁵ Perhaps it was not just Gracie's fame that drew crowds to Bon Marché. Shoppers with little spending money, who wished to participate in the more glamorous and exotic world of the department store, may have seen something of themselves in Gracie Fields because she offered an attainable image of cinematic femininity.

Gracie Fields was not the only movie star used by department stores used to draw in female shoppers. Bon Marché certainly wished to promote the store through the appeal of the cinema and a year later it held a fashion show for clothes imitated from the latest films. 'Just like Marlene's: Film star's coat in a fashion parade. Fans of Marlene Dietrich can now buy a coat exactly like the one the famous actress is to wear in her latest film', reported the *Echo*.⁹⁶ Department stores exploited women's desires to imitate their favourite film stars during the 1930s and turned the department store into a form of pleasure in itself, perhaps even as an extension of the cinema. Glamour remained an effective selling tactic into the later 1930s. An invitation placed in the *Echo*, for example, summoned its readers to watch a mannequin parade in Bon Marché. 'A Symphony of Fashion,' promised the advert: 'The lovely clothes, the clever grouping, and the graceful movement of the girls, combines to make this a really beautiful performance.'⁹⁷ These parades became very important because they offered women the opportunity to participate in the culture of the department store, without having to make a purchase. The emphasis was on fashion, described in this advert as 'a really beautiful performance'. Mannequin parades and similar events helped influence the link between shopping and leisure, and they also allowed women to appropriate fashionable identities through their participation.⁹⁸

Cultures of glamour contributed to wider changes in retailing. Briggs argues 'a new retailing came into existence' between 1922 and 1939, and highlights Lewis's innovative policy of giving store managers the independence to run their own publicity campaigns after 1922.⁹⁹ Department stores in Liverpool and Manchester were certainly innovative, as they pursued energetic promotional campaigns that drew people into the city centre for leisure and pleasure. Bon Marché and George Henry Lee's benefited from ownership by Selfridges after 1918, and Harrods bought Kendal Milne in 1919, providing invaluable cash injections to the stores' marketing campaigns. All the stores were ambitious and their in-store events were very imaginative and inventive. 'Many changes were made' in George Henry Lee's, 'special events were run, which were opened by famous actors or actresses. Even bands were brought into the store to attract customers, and mannequin parades were another great attraction.'¹⁰⁰ Department store attractions aimed to

bring customers through the shop doors. ‘There is a lot of free entertainment to be had in the big shops,’ wrote a *Liverpool* journalist in 1935, ‘demonstrations of this and that, a new way to make your hair curl ... an ingenious gadget for mending your stockings or your china.’¹⁰¹ These descriptions suggest the stores were exciting and became places of amusement and pleasure in their own right without any explicit pressure to make purchases.

G. H. Lee’s was notable for its extravagant in-store activities, which is perhaps unsurprising considering it was under Selfridge’s ownership between the two world wars.¹⁰² One former employee recalled, ‘Advertising was carried out on a large scale, and considerable areas would be given over to the Advertising Department to present attractions of all kinds’, including a bread-wrapping machine installed by a local bakery when free loaves were given away.¹⁰³ One Easter saw a menagerie of animals installed in the store, bringing chaos and amusement, as one of the penguins got lost in the store and because ‘two lion clubs were frequently taken for walks around the store.’¹⁰⁴ Illusionists and magicians were also a regular feature in Lee’s and another publicity event saw one hundred monkeys in a ‘Monkey Village’ set up in the store, ‘Here the inhabitants played about on swings, and all the usual apparatus, to the delight of thousands of visitors and probably the customers.’¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, the promotional activities offered fun and pleasure but did not necessarily pressurize people into making purchases. Although the zoo did not promote the sale of clothes, it attracted people into the store and it seems department stores became popular sites of leisure interwar and the stores became something to consume in their own right, almost like a trip to the cinema. In their desire to draw large numbers of people into the stores, department store managers focused on attention-seeking, rather than product-selling, events and attractions. Interestingly, they chose attractions that appealed to the masses, rather than the wealthier classes. Marquis claimed that, at the same time, department stores moved towards protecting the interests of the working classes and one of his innovations was to introduce the Lewis’s Bank in their stores. Motivated both by wanting to protect cash-carrying customers from pickpockets and by his dislike of hire-purchase, Marquis ‘created a system of hire-purchase in reverse’, which would offer customers far better value than any hire-purchase firm: ‘I created a Bank and urged people to use it to save money and to gain interest on their savings, both of which they could, if they wished, use for purchases in the store.’ Lewis’s pioneered the use of female bank clerks and ‘grew beyond my (Marquis) dreams and proved much value to our customers and gave a good profit to our firm.’¹⁰⁶ These innovations may also have been a strategy to counter the growth of the

co-operative movement, which focused its appeal on working-class shoppers and aimed to provide a comprehensive service to its customers, including consumer protection and financial assistance.¹⁰⁷

Although Marquis led the innovations in Liverpool, department stores in Manchester also used special promotional events in an attempt to draw in customers from a range of spending groups. During Civic Week, Kendal's department store hosted a mannequin parade that included the 'interesting innovation' of inexpensive items of clothing,

To the woman of good taste but shallow purse a mannequin parade is often tantalising. She may delight in the frocks shown, but knows she cannot buy them. For once her needs were met. Some very charming day and evening frocks, neat costumes, and winter coats were shown which, if they did not rank as equals with the models, did not at any rate look like their poor relations.¹⁰⁸

Later, in 1938, Kendal's staged a 'North Country Home' exhibition in their 'furnishing galleries' department. The event recreated a home within the store to advertise the store's collection of furnishings, including a 'wonderful exhibition of Modern Floral Decoration'.¹⁰⁹ Significantly, no advert appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* for the event and it seems the exhibition aimed its appeal at those from the lower spending groups. The event may have particularly targeted those who moved into the new municipal suburbs, like Wythenshawe, because it encouraged customers from lower spending groups to buy home furnishings. Kendal's marketing of the 'North Country Home' exhibition also drew on the image of the *Daily Mail's* Ideal Home Exhibition in the 1930s. Deborah Ryan argues the popularity of the Ideal Home Exhibition was born out of the aspirations of an emerging lower middle class, and reflected an age when 'class divisions were eroding, shifting and re-formulating'.¹¹⁰ The new suburban dwellers helped shape a new mass customer market within Manchester by the later 1930s.

Conclusion

Kendal's 'North Country Home' event was typical of the new strategies employed by department stores in interwar Liverpool and Manchester. Their department stores increasingly presented themselves as cross-class sites of leisure and consumer culture through their shift in marketing strategies, which were a response to economic depression and urban transformation. For instance,

an advertisement for Lewis's in 1932 claimed the store's appeal crossed social boundaries: 'LEWIS'S began by taking care of the needs of the working-classes – LEWIS'S is now a great popular Shopping Centre for all classes of the community', proclaimed the advert.¹¹¹ Similarly, Reece's guidebook to Manchester, published in 1939, also told all shoppers to go to Lewis's:

A mecca to shoppers all over the country, is the city's most complete example of the modern store; for a generation the builders have never been long of the doorstep and the result is seen in a host of pioneer 'gadgets' and ideas, from moving staircases to cafeterias.¹¹²

Department store managers, particularly due to the pioneering work of Marquis at Lewis's and Selfridge as owner of Lee's and Bon Marché, pursued a deliberately populist marketing strategy by the late 1930s and sought to attract a broad customer base. By the late 1930s, shoppers from the highest spending groups no longer dominated the department stores in England's urban north and reflected a broader shift towards mass consumer culture.

The emergence of a populist culture of shopping was partly an implication of the investments made by municipal leaders in slum clearance, suburbanization, public transport, architecture and in disseminating new urban images. This investment provided the infrastructure for consumer culture to dominate the city centre and ensured more shoppers could travel easily into the city centre. Department store advertisements, their use of light and technology, fantastical and overcrowded shop windows all nurtured a consumer urban fantasy around the city centres. By the later 1930s, the city centres were closely associated with shopping and perceived as a place to consume and consume within, becoming important sites of leisure. Shops could not survive outside of the city centre due to the redevelopment of Liverpool and Manchester and, at the same time, department store managers need to broaden their customer base because of challenging economic conditions of the period. These developments contributed to the emergence of a modern shopping 'high street' that came to dominate Britain's retail culture for nearly a century.

The change in attitudes by department store managers towards potential customers also mirrored the shift in attitudes by municipal leaders to their electorate. Charles McGovern argues mass suffrage shaped consumer culture in America. 'If advertisers portrayed themselves as politicians then they saw consumers as citizens', argues McGovern, 'advertisers equated the consumer's dollars with the franchised citizens' vote. Purchasing was like voting, an expression of free and individual choice, a form of social and (usually) political

activity.¹¹³ There are parallels with McGovern's analysis and the material offered here: just as local and national politicians sought to appeal to their new mass electorate, store managers also sought to attract customers in ways that transcended spending barriers.¹¹⁴ As we shall see, Chapter 4 develops these themes and illustrates the impact of the new urban consumer culture for women, for whom the city became a site for the public performance of status and fashionable identities.