

## Conclusion

This thesis has adopted the methodologies of material culture studies as a fresh way of thinking about commodity branding processes and the intangible messages that are communicated through a good's packaging. Far from using objects as 'mute (but often good-looking) "hooks" on which to hang explanation', it has been the detailed study of archaeological and museological collections and the production processes that these goods underwent which has driven the wider historical analysis into which these objects have been situated.<sup>1</sup> In so doing, the thesis has drawn attention to marks that have previously been overlooked in earlier discussions of branded objects. This close analysis of the production and distribution of mundane household products has examined the ways in which a large proportion of the population encountered commodity marking, and has revealed branding to be a richer, more complex process than previous historical studies of consumption have implied.

The thesis' focus upon the material record, in particular upon archaeologically recovered finds, has resulted in the close study of packaging for commodities such as medicines, liquid blacking and tobacco. As the thesis outlined, all three products have been subject to detailed historical analysis. These studies have, however, been drawn predominantly from textual source material. As a result they have focused upon the relationship between the producers of these products and their consumers. Yet as the thesis has highlighted, the packaging was a product in its own right, and subject to a commercial transaction itself between its maker – a potter, glassblower or pipemaker

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Pennell, 'Mundane materiality, or, should small things still be forgotten?', in Karen Harvey (Ed.), *History and Material Culture. A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London, 2009) p.175.

– and the person who filled it. It is the thesis’ study of packaging as an object worthy of attention, as well as the emphasis upon the production and packaging stages in the life cycle of medicines, liquid blacking and tobacco, as well as their marketing and consumption, that has made these transactions more explicit.

This focus has also revealed the multi-faceted nature of commodity marking practices. Branding was performed in many ways and represented multiple users, broadly divided into proprietary and official entities. As the thesis has shown, the level and extent of both types of branding varied between industries, and was subject to change over the period studied.

### **1. Proprietary marking**

Of the three types of industries analysed in the thesis, medicine packaging carried the largest variety of marking practices, possibly due to the spectrum of packaging used by medicine vendors. These techniques included the embossing, painting or labeling of bottles, as well as the use of unique bottle shapes and colours, and were used as early as the seventeenth century. It was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, that technological developments made mass-produced branding of bottles or labels a possibility. Simultaneous developments in marketing and advertising in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries resulted in a sharp rise in the quantity of proprietary medical advertisements. As a result, the amount of branded medicines available rapidly increased, giving credence to the assumption that branding was ‘invented’ in the nineteenth century. Yet through a focus on the material evidence, the thesis has supported John Styles’ assertion that it was the *amount* of branding and

marketing that increased in the period. Commodity marking was a well-established practice before this time.<sup>2</sup> This approach has also extended our definition of ‘branding’ to encompass the proprietary marks not only of medicine producers, but retailers as well as endorsers.

Study of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century stone bottles revealed both complementary and different proprietary marking practices. Medicine bottles, boxes or pots rarely, if ever, carried the mark of *their* maker – the potter, glassblower or box maker. Yet stone bottles often bore the mark – usually a stamp – of their producer, although the size of these marks diminished over the nineteenth century, as the branding of the producer of the good contained *inside* the bottle increased in prominence. The use of a stamp to place marks on stone bottles was a further difference to between these objects and medical containers. In other ways, however, stone bottles, used for various drinks, liquid blacking and paint, shared similar marking processes to medicine containers. While stone bottles were not embossed or moulded, from the early nineteenth century, marks were sometimes placed using the transfer print technique, creased in a similar fashion to those on medical ointment pots, or labeled, as with most types of medical containers.

The study of clay tobacco pipes reveals continuity in marking technique and traditions to those of stone bottles. They, too, often carried their producer’s mark. While potters were inclined to integrate their name into their mark, whereas earlier pipemakers’

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<sup>2</sup> John Styles, ‘Product innovation in early modern London’, *Past & Present* 168 (2000), p.148.

marks tended to comprise abstract symbols, such as suns, stars or hearts, although sometimes their initials were present. As such, previous assessments of these marks have categorised them as decorative in purpose, rather than as deliberate acts of branding. Marks containing more lengthy textual details became increasingly popular in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries – at the same time as potters were marking their products with their names – perhaps reflecting a general change in the use of names in maker’s marks across multiple industries. As with medicine containers and stoneware, there was more than one technique used to mark pipes, which could be stamped or moulded. Details could be either incise or incuse, depending on preference and production method, and was found upon the bowl, heel and stem of the pipe. The proprietary marks on pipes also suggested that not all branding was necessarily commercial in nature, with some maker’s marks reflecting personal rites of passage or representing personal identities, being placed in locations that a consumer would be less likely to see.

The materiality of these marks, and the way in which they were placed upon packaging, was also addressed in the thesis. Embossed and stamped marks were not only more convenient, they also suggested a reassuring permanence and as a result may have appeared more trustworthy: in their advertising, medicine vendors and liquid blacking manufacturers sometimes presented these types of marks as the ultimate proof of their product’s authenticity. Yet crucially, these marks were not physically made by Dicey and Co, or Robert Warren, but were outsourced with the production of the container itself. Instead, potters, pipemakers and glassblowers all marked objects with *their* customer’s name, challenging any temptation to assume

that marks were the straightforward product of the identity they represented.

This has significant consequences for discussions of branding. Virtually all studies of commodity marking portray these symbols as a representation of authenticity and a security device. As the thesis has demonstrated, this was indeed one of the chief functions of branding across a range of industries. However, the thesis' focus upon the production of commodity packaging has also shown how easily these symbols of authenticity could be undermined.

The thesis has shown that contemporaries were well aware of this paradox, and that in the medicine and liquid blacking industries, the layering of branding upon the packaging after they left the potter or glass blower was a means of addressing this issue. All three objects reveal a spectrum of proprietary interests represented on one object, be it through labels, wrappers or seals. This layering was an attempt to illustrate the security of the supply and distribution path of the product contained within. The thesis' integration of multiple forms of branding, then, has highlighted that there were far more 'branders' than previous historiographies have acknowledged.

## **2. Marks of officialdom**

In addition to this rich variety of proprietary interests found upon these objects, the thesis' broad interpretation of 'branding' also revealed that all three bore marks of

officialdom. Ignored by previous analyses of branding, these emblems of statehood, national and civic identity were a small but not insignificant part of a wider movement that marked an array of public and private surfaces with these symbols of power that increased in number from the late eighteenth century.

The stamp duty label, required to be wrapped around each medicine package, bottle or box, featured a crown as a central element of its design. As outlined in the thesis, medicines were just one product among many that bore similar stamp duty labels. These marks reflected not only Britain's growing fiscal strength from the late eighteenth century onwards, but were part of an increase in state emblems elsewhere: they contributed towards the repetition and reinforcement of imagery used to construct a specific state identity. Amendments to the stamp duty legislation meant that the number of liable medicines, and thus the amount of products bearing these state marks, increased over the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Their requirement upon each medicine also fundamentally shaped the way in which medicines were packaged and displayed to customers, and even changed their expectations of 'trustworthy' medicine packaging to one that included a revenue stamp. The inspection of medicines for sale and the resulting punishments for failing to display labels, or for forging them, reflected the intensive level of state involvement in the retail and consumption of medicines.

The excise marks found on stone bottles also reflected the growing strength of the state. The requirement to place these marks and the resulting depth of surveillance of production processes revealed a high degree of state involvement in numerous

excisable industries. As with medicine stamp duty, the need to inspect these goods altered the way in which consumers received items: bottles were to be of a designated size and shape. Such monitoring created jobs for both excise officers and industrial workers and had an effect upon the conduct, behaviour and relationships of these individuals, particularly excise officers. On a wider level, then, much like stamp duty labels, these marks can be understood as a control mechanism, a technology of fiscality, as well as underscore the importance of the excise in the formation of the modern British state over the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries. The repeal of the legislation in the 1830s, and thus the end of this state marking practice, reflected a growing preoccupation with the *laissez-faire* principles that marked mid-nineteenth-century government economic and fiscal policy.

Clay tobacco pipes, too, carried marks of officialdom, though the highly localised nature of their sale and consumption reflected provincial, civic and national interests of pipemakers and their clients. For their maker's mark, some pipemakers adopted symbols that referred to their location or played upon their own name, but marks such as the Prince of Wales feathers or crossed keys were recognisable emblems of national and civic identity. These most likely represented a pipemaker's customer – a publican or tavern owner – but the tradition of naming drinking establishments in itself contributed towards a context in which national and civic symbols were found upon a variety of public and private surfaces. Marking the clay pipes that were sold in these locations in such a fashion therefore brought together both proprietary and state interests. Marks of officialdom, then, whether they represented the maker or their customer, were a recurring theme on pipes throughout the period 1650 to 1900.

### 3. Conclusion

The adoption of primary sources, techniques and methodologies from other disciplines has enriched our historical understanding of branding. It has allowed us to unpick the multiple identities and audiences that were involved in the marking of goods, and the intangible messages they communicated. It has similarly helped us to re-think discussions of production, retail and consumption, as well as narratives of power, nationhood, civic culture and state formation. In so doing, the thesis has complemented the work of the multi-disciplinary contributors to Andrew Bevan and David Wengrow's edited volume, *Cultures of Commodity Branding*, in eschewing the traditional chronology so often repeated by marketing experts. The present-day existence of a relatively young industry dedicated to the marking and marketing of commodities implies that branding is a new invention. By contrast, this thesis asserts that the value of branding, deemed 'a commodity of good names' in the late sixteenth century, was a recognised and firmly established practice well before the nineteenth century, for both proprietors and the state.<sup>3</sup>

Study of three different commodities has compared the subtle nuances and differences in the branding practices across different product industries and laid a foundation for further, similar work, which would help to build a picture of the many people involved in the branding of objects. Such future work might also examine the later part of an object's life cycle, considering its consumption and discard: John Kilby's mark of ownership on his wine bottles, pictured in Figure I in the introduction, presents an ideal starting point.

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<sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV, Part 1. 3rd Series*, Edited by David Scott Kastan (London, 2003), I, 2, 79-80.



Furthermore, while the technologies may have developed, the thesis has revealed a strong continuity in the identities that brand objects today, and the purposes for which they do it. The seemingly relentless marketing and display of has become second nature in today's society, and only becomes conspicuous when attention is deliberately drawn to it. Yet in the main, the branding of institutional, state and commercial interests upon virtually all public (and private) surfaces continues, unremarked upon.

The thesis' final contribution, then, is not only to highlight the extent to which early modern society was 'branded'. It encourages its readers to look again at the objects around them, to notice the extent to which we are saturated with branding from proprietary and state interests, and the ways in which this shapes our behaviour. Ultimately, it aims to make visible that which has become 'invisible', not only to the historian, but also to the observer of present-day society.