

Chapter Six

'The Acme of Comfortable Travel': Picturing Customers as Passengers

We have seen that *Holiday Haunts*, or for that matter many other company publications, gave little emphasis to how passengers travelled to destinations, chiefly by steam locomotive and railway carriage. This information resided instead in specialist books which, despite their concentration on mechanical workings, sold well with the public at large.¹ For much of the first three decades of the twentieth century, railway advertising to the popular market generally was purposefully kept clear of immediate references to the technology, a feature in particular of poster designs.² This omission is regarded as significant from a marketing perspective;³ it indicated that railway companies wished people to overlook their assumptions or everyday experiences of rail travel when considering a journey. The GWR was no exception. However, in the 1930s it began to commission imagery which captured the technology and showed visions on board carriages. Photographs now showed how a passenger carriage should be 'consumed' by depicting, for example, passengers dining and relaxing in comfort. The passengers themselves approximated to the idealised types outlined throughout this thesis, appearing fashionable, young, and apparently wealthy. As such they helped to construct the railway carriage as an aspirational setting where friends could meet to chat, laugh, drink and dine in security and comfort. Such an abrupt change in the representation of the passenger experience raises several questions. What did the imagery

¹ These included books such as GWR, *Cheltenham Flyer*, (1st edn., 1934) GWR, *10.30 Limited*, (1st edn., 1923) as well as a range of postcards and jigsaw puzzles which depicted famous locomotives.

² Rachael Holland, 'LNER Posters 1923-47: Aspects of Iconography, Railway and Social History', (Unpublished MA thesis, University of York, 1999), p. 47.

³ Beverley Cole and Richard Durack, *Railway Posters, 1923-1947: From the Collection of the National Railway Museum, York, England*, (New York, 1992), p. 6; Holland, 'LNER Posters 1923-47', p. 47.

mean, and what was its significance in picturing the passenger as a customer? Why did these photographs depart from previous railway imagery which excluded peopled carriages?

This final chapter argues that the GWR used its understanding of targeted marketing and aspirational imagery to ensure that the middle-class holidaymaker travelled to their destination by rail. As discussed in Chapter One, by the 1930s consumers enjoyed a wide selection of places to go, and increasing choice in how to get there. Bus and long-distance coach companies had become viable and cheaper alternatives to rail. Additionally, private car ownership became within the reach of many middle, and even some working-class, households thanks to cheaper models and a growing second-hand market.⁴ In 1938 there were over 2 million private cars registered in Britain,⁵ and scholars argue that those who could afford to buy a car usually decided to use it to its fullest by taking it on holiday.⁶ Although it was not quite this straightforward - many finding cars inadequate accommodation for a family plus luggage and burdened by additional expenses like garaging charges⁷ - it is true that cars afforded owners a degree of independence which rival modes found difficult to match. This freedom and exclusivity dovetailed neatly with the values of middle-class society.⁸ It represented a significant challenge to the GWR's primary holiday market at the same time suggesting that rail was an outdated and unattractive transport option.

This chapter joins a growing scholarship which sees the design of railway technology as bound up in commercial considerations such as competition. Exterior styling has received the most attention. Streamlining, for example, is identified as evidence of corporate awareness that design, in the impression of speed remodelled to symbolise progress, could

⁴ Sean O'Connell, *The Car In British Society*, (Manchester, 1998), pp. 29-34.

⁵ O'Connell, *The Car in British Society*, p. 19.

⁶ Peter Lyth and Philip Bagwell, *Transport in Britain: From Canal Lock To Gridlock*, (London, 2002), p. 80.

⁷ O'Connell, *The Car In British Society*, p. 80.

⁸ O'Connell, *The Car In British Society*, p. 79.

increase ridership.⁹ Streamlined cladding was a favourite strategy employed by many American railroads and in Britain chiefly by the London and North Eastern (LNER) and London Midland and Scottish (LMS) companies.¹⁰ The Southern Railway (SR), by contrast, worked to electrify its services, promoting electricity as a cleaner, quicker and more ‘modern’ service.¹¹ The practice of naming locomotives extended these considerations.¹² Names which drew upon and reinforced assumptions about empire and civic pride helped to cement an image of railway travel as meaning something above its practical purpose.

August naming strategies and sleek, modern exteriors joined many other measures intended to convince potential consumers of rail’s ability to deliver speeds and levels of comfort surpassing its competitors.¹³ Several scholars assess the genesis of carriage construction and interiors from a technological perspective,¹⁴ although some now understand improved comfort as a commercial response to competition. Hiroki Shin, for example, considers changing corporate attitudes to passenger comfort requirements. He argues that alongside more established ploys such as speed and safety, convenience items such as reading lights and improvements in heating and soft furnishings were employed to grow the market.¹⁵ Chapter One demonstrated that the first large-scale experiments in carriage improvement were conducted in the 1870s when companies upgraded facilities to vie for patronage. As well as appealing to passengers as a whole, Divall argues that companies used design to re-

⁹ Peter Lyth, ‘Fast Forward: Speed, Streamlining and National Pride, 1912-1952’, in Ralf Roth and Karl Schloegel (eds.) *Neue Wege in ein neues Europa*, (New York, 2009), pp. 321-22; Holland, *LNER Posters 1923-47*, pp. 32-53; Gregory Votolato, *Transport Design: A Travel History*, (Trowbridge, 2007), pp. 46-48.

¹⁰ Tad Burness, *Classic Railroad Advertising: Riding the Rails Again*, (Iola, 2001), pp. 6-8; Votolato, *Transport Design*, p. 47; Allen Middleton, *Its Quicker By Rail!: The History Of LNER Advertising*, (Stroud, 2002), p. 46.

¹¹ Michael Bonavia, *The Four Great Railways*, (Newton Abbott, 1980), pp. 74-80.

¹² John Walton, ‘Power, Speed and Glamour: The Naming Of Express Steam Locomotives In Interwar Britain’, *Journal Of Transport History*, 3rd ser. 26:2 (2005), pp. 1-16.

¹³ Votolato, *Transport Design*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴ Joe Welsh, Bill Howes and Kevin Holland, *The Cars Of Pullman*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: 2010); Chris de Winter-Hebron, *Dining at Speed: A Celebration of 125 Years of Railway Catering* (Kettering, 2004); Neil Wooler, *Dinner In The Diner: A History Of Railway Catering*, (Newton Abbot, 1987); David Jenkinson, *British Railway Carriages of the 20th Century*, (Wellingborough, 1984).

¹⁵ Hiroki Shin, ‘Rapid Travel In Comfort: Quality of Passenger Experience In The History Of Britain’s Railways’, (Unpublished paper, European Social Science History Conference, Ghent, Belgium, 13-16th April 2010), p. 1.

engineer appeals to different passenger groups.¹⁶ Drawing upon Richter's analysis of the 'domestication' of the American railroad car's interior, Divall understands the development of British railway interiors largely as a response to the rapid spread of motoring from the early 1920s.¹⁷ There are also several histories of the salubrious 'Pullman' cars,¹⁸ but the fact that the GWR did not use these means they are not analysed at great length in this chapter. Finally, Votolato emphasises the recognition by railway companies that 'habitability', his term coined to describe how comfort and ergonomics affect the passenger experience, was a key motivator in repeated consumption of transport modes.¹⁹

Despite these explorations it remains largely unclear how far comfort was a deciding factor in railway marketing, how 'comfort' as a saleable concept was understood, and the reasons behind its implementation. This chapter argues that by examining the GWR's corporate gaze as represented in the company's photographic marketing, one can draw more detailed conclusions on how passenger requirements were understood and represented. Once again, the heightened, constructed photographic meaning is corroborated via a parallel discussion of rudimentary market research techniques. This chapter therefore argues that effectively selling the carriage interior was a process which first required researching rail's reputation amongst consumers before taking steps to alter this for the better and present the improvements in visually enticing ways. Predominantly assessing the interwar period, around which time road competition enhanced the need to sell rail travel directly, this chapter first analyses what the GWR knew about who was travelling and what they wanted. It finds that the company knew a lot: it was able to draw upon quantitative and qualitative research

¹⁶ Colin Divall, 'Civilising Velocity: Masculinity and the Marketing of Britain's Passenger trains, 1921-39', *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser. 32:2 (2011), p. 2; see also Lyth and Bagwell, *Transport in Britain*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁷ Amy Richter, 'At Home Aboard: The American Railroad and the Changing Ideal of Public Domesticity', in Lorraine Dowler (ed.), *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating the Moral Landscape*, (New York, 2005).

¹⁸ Pullman was not a railway company but rather a company which built and leased a large number of parlour and sleeping cars largely to American railroads but also some in Britain. See, Welsh, Howes and Holland, *The Cars Of Pullman*, p. 6.

¹⁹ Votolato, *Transport Design*, p. 47.

into passenger loadings and experiences as well as more commonly vocalised problems. Finally, this section examines the company's reaction to road transport, how significant a threat was it and how the company undertook to respond.

The second section argues that this understanding of passengers informed photographic direction. A qualitative assessment of the images reveals that the GWR targeted customers who it perceived to be in danger of being persuaded to travel by other means. Whilst the functional benefits of rail in terms of speed, safety and price were well known, the application of aspirational imagery to the railway carriage interior suggests the GWR wanted consumers to see railway travel differently, and to combat a widespread negative impression. The GWR argued that by choosing to travel by train, customers were saying something about themselves as individuals and their role as consumers. The GWR suggested that it could emulate, and indeed better, the service offered by rival modes. By extension its customers were similarly forward-thinking and discerning. In this case photographic marketing reveals a final facet to picturing the passenger as a customer. The GWR researched and engaged with a negative image of rail travel prevalent amongst consumers before using this information to inform its marketing. Well-conceived photography proved essential in presenting the case for the advantages of train travel, encouraging people to associate rail with more cutting-edge experiences, as well as anticipating and satisfying the passenger's travel requirements on their way to destinations

Section 1: Knowing the Passenger

As Chapter One argued, knowing who the passenger was and what they wanted beyond the basics of social class did not seriously enter into the mind of the railway manager until the late nineteenth century. Before this, since the earliest days of rail travel the

experience on board the train was influenced largely by an individual's personal wealth or at least their willingness to pay. Those who could afford to travel in some comfort in first class. Second class featured a pared-down level of luxury, whereas third, when eventually introduced, was spartan. This was intended to ensure that the right class of people travelled and that they paid the highest fare affordable.²⁰ Although government intervention in the form of Gladstone's famous Act arguably improved matters by stipulating basic standards,²¹ change only began in earnest during the 'comfort revolution' of the 1870s and 1880s.²² Even then however, improvements were not universal.²³ It took years, for example, for adequate heating to be offered beyond first class.²⁴ The *British Medical Journal* consistently targeted poor railway facilities as the cause of ill health amongst the general public well into the twentieth century.²⁵ By the 1910s carriages on the better long-distance services typically featured gas lighting, and corridor coaches allowed hot meals and lavatories to be accessed.²⁶ The best conditions were, however, still reserved for first class and prestige services. Despite adopting many of these innovations and experimenting with safer steel construction, a 'dull-complacency' is said to have characterised much of the GWR's interiors in the first part of the twentieth century.²⁷

It is debateable, given the basic nature of most carriages prior to the First World War, to what extent improvements were based upon a corporate understanding of passengers' needs beyond the idea that they demanded minimal standards. Statistics and loading

²⁰ Phillip Bagwell, *The Transport Revolution*, (London, 1988), p. 96; Charles Lee, *Passenger Class Distinctions*, (London, 1946), pp. 8-16.

²¹ Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway*, (London, 1991), p. 274.

²² Shin, 'Rapid Travel In Comfort', p. 3.

²³ de Winter-Hebron, *Dining at Speed*, p. 10-13; John Gloag, *Victorian Comfort: A Social History of Design from 1830-1900*, (Newton Abbott, 1973), pp. 160-61.

²⁴ Phillip Bagwell, *The Railway Clearing House In The British Economy 1842-1922*, (London, 1968), p. 58.

²⁵ See for example 'Railway Unpunctuality and Public Health', *The British Medical Journal*, 13th October 1883, p. 734; 'Warming Railway Carriages', *The British Medical Journal*, 24th January 1885, p. 189; 'Damp Railway Carriages', *The British Medical Journal*, 20th December 1884, p. 1256; 'Women's Lavatories at Railway Stations', *The British Medical Journal*, 29th January 1910, p. 294.

²⁶ Phillip Unwin, *By Train In The Edwardian Age*, (London, 1979), pp. 59-60.

²⁷ Jenkinson, *British Railway Carriages of the 20th Century*, p. 139.

information were readily available to the pre-First World War companies, and correspondence with passengers could have provided ideas for improvement. Yet it seemed, to many passengers, that companies simply did not care. For example, in the 1890s the GWR declined to offer foot-warmers to all passenger classes unless competitors agreed to do the same.²⁸ The provision of clean, safe and attractive places to wait for trains was even worse. Simmons cites correspondence, in 1894, between the Borough Council of Devonport and the GWR regarding station improvements. Devonport was a place of 60,000 people, and the GWR held no monopoly there. Nonetheless the company was slow to make improvements and even asked the local council to pay for them.²⁹ Simmons argues that the GWR's attitude, apparently perceiving no advantage in being the least bit accommodating to travellers even when trying to extract money from them, summed up the attitudes of railway companies in general.³⁰ Although, as we have seen, the GWR began to 'imagine' the passenger and how they might be persuaded to travel in the Edwardian years, it was the lure of the destination, not travel amenities, that was foremost in marketers' minds.

It was only at the beginning of the 1920s, as this section argues, the GWR began more detailed research into the passenger experience. A subsequent upsurge in comment on the passenger experience acknowledged that poor treatment of passengers of any class was bad for business. This concern was certainly heightened by the recognition of road transport as a serious threat, one which occupied more column inches in the company magazine during the 1920s. The war had given a great fillip to the development of the internal combustion engine,³¹ and there was greater speculation as to its potential impact on passengers. Some wondered, including a 'Mr Tee' who wrote extensively on this matter in the magazine,

²⁸ Bagwell, *The Railway Clearing House In The British Economy*, p. 19.

²⁹ Simmons, *The Victorian Railway*, pp. 260-61.

³⁰ Simmons, *The Victorian Railway*, p. 261.

³¹ O'Connell, *The Car in British Society*, pp. 19-21; Oswald Nock, *History of the Great Western Railway: Volume III 1923-1947*, (London, 1967), p. 15.

whether the charabanc or omnibus was a novelty that would die away.³² Tee argued that cars, however, were another matter. If cars became available to the masses then the railways were helpless against this competition.³³ In 1921, when Tee was writing, cars numbered some 242,500 and were largely still the preserve of the better off.³⁴ Yet as the costs associated with motoring declined and more took to the roads the GWR realised that competition for passengers would not go away. For this reason, the 1920s witnessed new attempts to understand passengers and their needs.

1.1: Knowing the Passenger: Quantitative Data

Chapter One included information on quantitative market research data, arguing that the railways had a broad idea about who they were marketing to based on service use. This section extends this argument to suggest when, why and how the GWR used these statistics to better understand the passenger experience. As seen in Chapter One, passenger statistics were by no means novel at the start of the twentieth century, but it is debateable how far these statistics treated passengers beyond an inhomogeneous mass. The GWR had amassed long-running quantitative data in the form of passenger loadings statistics and line patronage, collection of which had been a governmental requirement since 1840. As well as the Regulation of Railways Act, which required every company to deliver passenger and freight statistics to the Board of Trade,³⁵ from 1842 companies sent their tickets to a central body, the Railway Clearing House, which credited the companies involved with their share of the fare, in the case that a passenger's journey had crossed the lines of separate companies.³⁶

³² 'Road Transport in its Relation to Railways', GWRM, January 1922, p. 11.

³³ 'Road Transport in its Relation to Railways', GWRM, January 1922, p. 11.

³⁴ O'Connell, *The Car in British Society*, pp. 19-21; Christopher Savage, *An Economic History of Transport*, (London, 1966), p. 96.

³⁵ Bagwell, *The Railway Clearing House In The British Economy*, p. 19.

³⁶ Bagwell, *The Railway Clearing House In The British Economy*, p. 45.

The GWR itself joined these regulations in 1857.³⁷ How far such statistics were attended to as a means of improving services is less clear however. Divall, for instance, argues that companies had little sense of how successful their initiatives were beyond crude figures for the total number of journeys made, and that in any case surviving statistics do not readily allow for sophisticated analysis.³⁸ But the GWR had a good idea, based on statistical evidence, of which passenger groups to focus its energies on, seen for example in the greater focus on the third class passenger in its leisure marketing. In 1880 seventy-seven per-cent of GWR passengers travelled third class. In 1904, taking the figures for the half-year before the abolition of the second class on some branch lines, the percentage was up to eighty-nine.³⁹ This large increase made clear to the GWR that the public's use of travel was changing and it endeavoured to improve its third class accommodation as a result.⁴⁰ Declining use of second class also led to its eventual abolition in 1912.⁴¹

But by the 1920s quantitative statistical data was used in a more dedicated manner to better understand passengers as customers. Detailed reports on passenger loadings were reproduced monthly in the magazine and tabulated for analysis at periodic meetings of the Traffic Department.⁴² The data assisted the GWR's knowledge of what services to put on and where. It suggested when a drop in patronage occurred, but less the reasons for decline. The GWR used statistical information to calculate whether bus services or smaller trains would be better equipped to deal with demand in certain areas, or whether to more heavily exploit emerging revenue streams. In 1924 the General Manager, Felix Pole, inaugurated a new method of passenger travel analysis.⁴³ Inspectors were put on many trains to count the

³⁷ Bagwell, *The Railway Clearing House In The British Economy*, p. 125.

³⁸ Divall, 'Civilising Velocity', p. 4.

³⁹ 'A Brief Review of the Company's Hundred Years of Business: The Growth of Traffic Since the Railway Was Opened', GWRM, September 1935, pp. 495-501.

⁴⁰ GWRM, May 1905.

⁴¹ 'A Brief Review of the Company's Hundred Years of Business', GWRM, September 1935, pp. 495-501.

⁴² For examples see the GWR Magazine across the 1920s, and The National Archives (TNA), RAIL 258/425, Great Western Railway Traffic Department: Annual Report 1927, 1928, 1929.

⁴³ Nock, *History of the Great Western Railway: Volume III 1923-1947*, pp. 15-17.

number of passengers travelling, and where traffic was very light the trains concerned were withdrawn. The company used this information to remodel its timetable.⁴⁴ It proved economical, saving 4000 train miles per day, and increased the punctuality of the whole system. In this regard the GWR was better placed than some of its rivals. For example, Butterfield contrasts the passenger loadings census on the GWR to the LNER's lacklustre methods.⁴⁵ Although it is difficult to tell just how far similar schemes operated on other railways throughout the 1920s and 1930s, as seen in Chapter One there was an industry-wide thirst to know the passenger which probably meant that the GWR's advantage was short-lived.

This kind of data also proved useful when organising marketing and advertising responses to periodic fluctuations in traffic. Statistical information was, for example, instrumental in the company's decision to try to persuade people to take earlier holidays. This was as much about reducing operating costs, however, as generating new business. As we will see, at peak holiday times the company fought a constant battle in satisfying high demand with limited availability of rolling stock, some of which was expensively maintained just to provide for a few weeks' peak-season traffic. Frequently the company struggled as services operated close to breaking point.⁴⁶ At times when services did 'break', the company received public invective as individual holidaymakers did not sympathise with the intense collective pressure that the rail network largely withstood.⁴⁷ In the interwar decades, when the company was criticised for overcrowding it fell back on this statistical evidence in an

⁴⁴ Nock, *History of the Great Western Railway: Volume III 1923-1947*, pp. 15-17.

⁴⁵ Peter Butterfield, 'Grouping, Pooling and Competition: The Passenger Policy Of The London and North Eastern Railway, 1923-39, in Geoffrey Channon (ed.), *Railways: Volume Two*, (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 173-74.

⁴⁶ GWRM, January 1921, p. 6; September 1924;

⁴⁷ In his memoirs, Pole recorded an incident in which a member of the public, complaining about third class passengers in a first class compartment, finished his correspondence by personally insulting the general manager. Pole replied to the man 'I have your letter of the 27th instant...when I read the end of your letter and found you finished with personal abuse to a man whom you have never met, my sympathy towards your complaint was materially modified. If you care to delete the penultimate sentence of your letter I shall be pleased to go into the matter further'. The man did, and Pole refunded his ticket - Felix Pole, *Felix J. C. Pole: His Book*, (London, 1968), pp. 202-03.

attempt to convince passengers that there was a ‘science’ - interpreting statistics - behind providing the best passenger experience. The company claimed that issues such as overcrowding were the subject of ‘close supervision’ and that every reasonable anticipation of traffic beyond the normal was provided for.⁴⁸ Nevertheless passenger flows throughout the early-twentieth century were difficult to gauge as they were much more fluid when compared to freight which was subject to detailed monthly inquiries by district with patterns and drops discerned and responses sought.

It is difficult to clarify the true value of statistical information to companies such as the GWR; data interpretation provided only the most rudimentary understanding of passengers as consumers as, for the most part, it treated them as a mass subject to aggregate trends. Statistics were nevertheless used to some extent by all companies to check performance and suggest improvements.⁴⁹ In shaping and marketing the passenger experience it was rather qualitative feedback, an element which received more attention from the 1920s onwards, which was more important to anticipating and seeking to satisfy passenger wants.

1.2: Knowing the Passenger: Qualitative Data

Despite the existence of two statutory bodies, the Railway and Canal Commission (1888) and the Railway Rates Tribunal (1921), the absence of any significant consumer group representing railway customers meant that the companies had to rely on their own qualitative understanding of passengers in the interwar decades.⁵⁰ The GWR was unusual in the degree to which it used qualitative data to inform its services and as a public relations role. As the Commercial Assistant George Orton recalled in 1936, the GWR had been the only railway of

⁴⁸ GWRM, April 1934, p. 182.

⁴⁹ Bagwell, *The Railway Clearing House In The British Economy*, pp. 282-88.

⁵⁰ Colin Divall, ‘The Modern Passenger: Constructing the Consumer on Britain’s Railways, 1919-1939’, in Magda Pinheiro (ed.), *Railway Modernization: An Historical Perspective, 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Lisbon, 2009), pp. 110-13.

the Big Four to have the publicity department deal with passenger correspondence.⁵¹

Qualitative data took various forms. As well as inviting aggrieved passengers to air their grievances about the railway,⁵² the company found that its mail bags were regularly laden with passenger correspondence.

From 1922 the GWR's company magazine included a selection of this correspondence in a section entitled, 'From People We Have Pleas'd'. Not surprisingly, given the magazine's readership, this section initially included evidence of when the company excelled itself, intended to encourage staff.⁵³ Some years later, in 1926, a section for negative comments was included entitled 'From People We Intend To Please'. The purpose of this page was to incentivise staff.⁵⁴ It was intended that lessons should be learnt; staff were asked to study customer comment and use it to inform their future conduct. The importance of keeping customers happy was made even clearer in the final section, 'People Whom We Intended to Please...And Have'.⁵⁵

Appearing between 1922 and 1929, the pages offer a useful sample of written comments the company received about conditions for passengers.⁵⁶ Practically all passengers were concerned by speed and safety. Whilst punctuality was essential, high speed as a means of inducing patronage had been debated in the 1910s. The railways were cautious however. The possibility of failing to deliver on promises of very fast services was deemed to be too akin to negative advertising.⁵⁷ However, in the 1920s, there was a renewed interest in speed

⁵¹ TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Railway Students' Association, Proceedings of Sessions 1934-1936, Meeting of 13th February 1936, pp. 32-37.

⁵² TNA, ZPER 38/13, Great Western Railway (London): Lecture and Debating Society Proceedings 1920-1921, Meeting of 31st March 1921, pp. 1-10; ZPER 38/26, Great Western Railway (London): Lecture and Debating Society Proceedings 1933-1934, Meeting 31st March 1934, pp. 1-10.

⁵³ GWRM, July 1922, p. 271.

⁵⁴ GWRM, December 1926, p. 395.

⁵⁵ First Introduced in 1927, GWRM, September 1927, p. 351.

⁵⁶ It is impossible to tell why the page disappeared in the 1930s; perhaps with the introduction of formal staff salesmanship courses this kind of instruction became further 'internalised'. Indeed, the magazine continued to tell interested readers from the general public what the GWR was doing to better their experience, but announcements of instances when the company had 'got this wrong' stopped altogether.

⁵⁷ 'High Speed as a Means of Advertising', *The Railway Gazette*, 22nd July 1910, p. 109.

competitions and mechanical excellence generally. The GWR and LNER, for example, ‘exchanged’ locomotives to test whose was more powerful. An idea emanating once more from the publicity conscious Felix Pole, the GWR’s victory attracted great public interest.⁵⁸ The popularity of streamlined locomotives during the mid-1930s similarly attests to the corporate belief in speed’s marketing potential. But the worries of the initial debates were still relevant. Deviation from the timetable could be met with scathing criticism. As one angry passenger wrote;

It is most interesting...to read that the GWR had achieved another record run, carrying the Australian cricket team through Birmingham a quarter of an hour under the 2 hours’ schedule...But your regular passengers sigh on reading these records and wish that they could arrive something less than 10 min late at their destination.⁵⁹

Punctuality made frequent appearances in the ‘People We Intent To Please Section’,⁶⁰ and the problem faced by the GWR was summed up by one individual who concluded, ‘many pounds are spent on advertising...[but] if the GWR could run these trains to time its patrons would do the advertising’.⁶¹

Safety was an undeniable concern amongst railway travellers. Its importance was recognised by the Big Four - the worst thing that can happen to a brand is for it to harm customers in any way - but puzzlingly, the interwar railways made little of it in their marketing. For example, the slogan ‘Its Quicker and Safer to Travel by Rail’ was mooted,

⁵⁸ Philip Unwin, *Travelling By Train in the ‘Twenties and ‘Thirties*, (London, 1981), pp. 25-26.

⁵⁹ GWRM, January 1927, p. 29.

⁶⁰ GWRM, April 1927, p. 148; February 1928, p. 75; July 1928, p. 293.

⁶¹ GWRM, January 1927, p. 29.

and recognised as truthful, but was not adopted for fear it would tempt fate.⁶² The GWR relied instead on the good relationship between its publicity department and press representatives to minimise the damage to its reputation when accidents did occur.⁶³ In the 1920s railway accidents hit the headlines in a sensational manner, their infrequency making the occasional calamity all the more newsworthy. The GWR's strategy to counteract these stories was thus to immediately release announcements, in newspapers and on the radio, allaying public fears,⁶⁴ the task of George Beer, formerly of *The Times*.⁶⁵

By far the most common of passenger comments concerned the on-board experience. This comprised many individual issues including cleanliness, comfort, politeness of staff and quality of food. We know that the GWR was slow, in comparison to other companies such as the Midland Railway, in improving its carriage facilities beyond first class. In a 1902 report to the Board of Directors, for example, the Traffic Department staff argued that if maintenance and cleaning expenditure remained low the company would fail to meet increasing passenger expectations. The Department appealed to the Directors through the growing importance of the passenger business and inter-firm competition; 'our carriages cannot compare favourably with theirs'.⁶⁶ This spurred a number of 'puff' articles in the magazine which highlighted certain advances including better lighting, upholstery, cleanliness as well as unseen safety features such as steel construction. However, these advances featured on only a small number of trains before the war, namely the enormous carriages known as 'Dreadnaughts' after the Royal Navy's battle ships.⁶⁷ In 1902 the company employed a new forward-thinking chief mechanical engineer, George Churchward,

⁶² TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, pp. 32-37.

⁶³ TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, pp. 32-37.

⁶⁴ TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, pp. 32-37.

⁶⁵ Pole, *His Book*, p. 84.

⁶⁶ TNA, RAIL 267/251, Report On Cleaning Of passenger Carriages By General Manager, 17th November 1902.

⁶⁷ Jenkinson, *British Railway Carriages of the 20th Century*, pp. 134-35.

who was tasked with modernising GWR locomotive and carriage design in a large rebuilding programme.⁶⁸

By the 1920s carriage comfort and cleanliness still drew the most public ire. One first class passenger wrote to the general manager;

Repeatedly I have complained locally of the wretched accommodation provided for first-class passengers...The compartments are often dirty and want refitting, while on many days lavatory essentials are altogether absent....unless your company wish to eliminate first class passengers altogether, at least ordinary travelling comforts must be provided or those now taking first class seasons will take thirds.⁶⁹

Another, this time in 1928, wrote;

This morning I went to see my wife and daughter off to Bournemouth (in wooden coaches) and I should like you to know that I have never seen, in this country, a train in a dirtier state. There was hardly a carriage fit for a lady to sit in, and I had to finish up by putting my wife and little girl into a smoking carriage which was passably clean...I do not wonder the railway companies are feeling the competition of motor coaches etc when they send long distance trains out in this filthy condition.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Michael Harris, *Great Western Coaches: 1890-1954*, (Newton Abbot, 1966), pp. 18-19; Jenkinson, *British Railway Carriages of the 20th Century*, pp. 134-35.

⁶⁹ GWRM, November 1927, p. 447.

⁷⁰ GWRM, January 1928, p. 31.

Another letter detailed the case when, after a man's vomit had escaped through a window, the same carriage continued to run all day sporting its new decoration.⁷¹ Automatic carriage washing facilities were unknown before the late-1930s, the laborious task being undertaken by men with pails of water and long-handled mops.⁷² Needless to say, any argument in favour of thrift was met unsympathetically by the majority of passengers.

Passengers complained about the use of aging rolling stock, a particular problem for holiday travellers. Between the late-1920s and 1930s holiday traffic on railways tripled with its greatest density concentrated in a three week period from July to August, most acute at weekends.⁷³ The age of some carriages, pressed into service due to the sheer numbers of passengers at holiday time, meant they lacked basic amenities, such as toilets, which were expected of all long-distance services by the interwar period.⁷⁴ Sometimes passengers had to relieve themselves from windows or in buckets meant for the seaside.⁷⁵ Holidaymakers were often infrequent users of the railways and were therefore more severe in their criticism, believing that unsatisfactory conditions found at peak times were the norm. Shepherding luggage and children, and negotiating connections, was not assisted when trains were late or uncomfortable. Overcrowding was a similarly recurring and connected issue. The greatest complaint was that paying for a seat did not necessarily guarantee one. This issue was constantly raised in the GWR's magazine; 'I travelled down from London...enduring a thoroughly uncomfortable journey. The accommodation was totally inadequate there were insufficient seats for third class passengers and I, like dozens of others spent the greater part of the journey standing'.⁷⁶ Similarly; 'My daughter left London for Bath with an ordinary

⁷¹ GWRM, March 1927, p. 447.

⁷² Unwin, *Travelling By Train In The Edwardian Age*, pp. 58-59.

⁷³ James Walvin, *Beside The Seaside: A Social History Of The Popular Seaside Holiday*, (London, 1978), p. 116.

⁷⁴ Bonavia, *The Four Great Railways*, pp. 102-07.

⁷⁵ Rosa Matheson, *Trip: The Annual Holiday of GWR's Swindon Works*, (Stroud, 2006), pp. 23-26; Unwin, *Travelling By Train in the 'Twenties and 'Thirties*, pp. 36-37.

⁷⁶ GWRM, October 1928, p. 401.

weekend ticket...the train arrived at Bristol packed with people standing in the corridors...my daughter had to stand all the way to Paddington'.⁷⁷ A light-hearted look at overcrowding revealed itself in the butt of many jokes, as well as cartoons produced by the company and sent in by passengers. But amongst some at least a 'grin-and-bear-it' approach must have seemed little consolation.

Thankful of the numbers, the GWR nevertheless reminded the public of the heavy demands on railways, and asked passengers to consider holidays outside of peak times.⁷⁸ This proved little deterrent as people questioned why, when very busy, the railways did not just put on extra services.⁷⁹ The GWR's response was rational from an operational and financial perspective, although quite what customers made of the arguments is unclear. The principal trunk routes carried as many trains as could be efficiently operated. Moreover, the company argued, the construction of a large quantity of additional passenger rolling stock, as well as taking up extra siding accommodation, would be expensive as carriages would only be required at weekends during a very limited period of the year, a very poor return on their construction cost.⁸⁰ However, in some cases passenger criticisms led to direct improvements; one complaint in the magazine was followed by the editor's comment that 'in view of the heavy loading...arrangements have been made for the 3.40 ex Weston-Super-Mare to be strengthened with extra coaches'.⁸¹ In this case the situation was remedied, but this seems to have been one happy resolution among many disappointments. The resulting impression was a poor - and yet perhaps undeserved - impression of the railways and their facilities. Such conditions probably impacted on how the middle-class consumer in particular wished to travel in subsequent years.

⁷⁷ GWRM, July 1929, p. 287.

⁷⁸ GWRM, May 1919, p. 77.

⁷⁹ GWRM, August, 1927, p. 335.

⁸⁰ GWRM, June 1927, p. 218.

⁸¹ GWRM, August, 1927, p. 335.

The helpfulness of staff was a regular feature of public correspondence. Passengers described angry and surly ticket inspectors who chased or manhandled those they believed had the wrong ticket or none at all.⁸² Some employees were merely unhelpful, but others were rude. The magazine described the experience of a lady who took her children for a day by the seaside. Having booked first class excursion tickets the party were about to board the train home when a porter called after them “Hey! That’s a first class compartment”. When the tickets were produced and the matter resolved the porter said “I’m very sorry madam but there are so many of the riff raff getting into first class compartments these days that I have to be careful”.⁸³ For these reasons the ‘People We Intend To Please’ pages were for staff to study and make sure they did not make the same mistakes. The GWR realised how even the slightest discourtesy could result in a lost passenger and therefore encouraged employees to acknowledge their role as ambassadors for the company.⁸⁴

Finally, behaviour of other passengers was frequently highlighted and seen as the GWR’s duty to police. Comments concerning passenger habits in the 1920s and 1930s built on the much longer experience of the unique environment of the railway carriage. Schivelbusch, for instance, details how the nineteenth-century railway carriage ‘killed’ conversation as people feared the forced interaction with one-another.⁸⁵ Changing the nature of conversation, though perhaps overstated by Schivelbusch, was just one part of the revolution in social interaction wrought by the railways for it not only suspended one’s self-reliance, putting faith in completely unknown men and machines, it also extended the travel experience. Social classes were forced to mix at stations and, although segregated in class-defined carriages, many first class passengers said they could hear the neighbouring working-

⁸² GWRM, January 1927, p. 29.

⁸³ GWRM, April 1929, p. 163.

⁸⁴ TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, pp. 32-37.

⁸⁵ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization Of Time and Space In The Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley, 1986), p. 74.

classes whooping and hollering some way down the train.⁸⁶ Discussed prominently with regard to female passengers, the railway carriage was popularised in the press and fiction as a place where theft and assault was common, something which was rarely borne out in reality.⁸⁷ It is thus unsurprising that this kind of comment persisted into the twentieth century; what is perhaps unusual is how the GWR responded to it in its marketing.

The company magazine devoted many pages to the ‘foibles’ of other passengers, the ill way in which otherwise normally behaved people conducted themselves when travelling by railway. Annoying habits, coughing, smoking, loud voices, opening windows, uncontrollable children and whistling all drew angry comment.⁸⁸ ‘Staking-out’ (reserving) seats was cited as the most common nuisance.⁸⁹ In 1918 the company wrote:

‘the ethics of railway travelling embrace an unwritten law...whereby the courteous traveller respects the act of another in reserving a seat for a friend...but the feelings of the courteous traveller are apt to be outraged if he finds innocent conventions abused and in these days of restricted services and crowded trains it is to be feared that this is often the case’.⁹⁰

Passengers did not play fair, and the company reiterated the legal position that a passenger’s ticket entitled them to one seat only.⁹¹ Yet they continued to bend the rules in their favour. Even after nearly one hundred years of passenger travel the public had developed little sense

⁸⁶ Julian Treuherz, ‘The Human Drama of The Railway’, in Ian Kennedy and Julian Treuherz, *The Railway: Art In The Age of Steam: Europe, America and the Railway 1830-1960*, (Liverpool, 2008), pp. 83-118.

⁸⁷ Ralph Harrington, ‘The Railway Journey and The Neuroses Of Modernity’, in Richard Wrigley and George Revill (eds.), *Pathologies of Travel*, (Amsterdam, 2000), pp. 236-39; Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity*, (Manchester, 2001), pp. 202-04.

⁸⁸ See for example; GWRM, February 1939, pp. 67-68; March 1939, p. 125;

⁸⁹ *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, January 1914.

⁹⁰ GWRM, August 1918, p. 117.

⁹¹ GWRM, August 1918, p. 117.

of how they could ease their fellow passengers' journeys and looked to the GWR to administer a resolution.

The company encouraged all travellers to be good citizens and respect each other's needs. When this failed it took a firm line, prohibiting spitting in carriages by erecting notices and in 1914 introducing fines and court proceedings.⁹² Although the GWR ultimately had little control over a journey spoiled by the actions of other passengers, and indeed believed that it was little to do with the company, it was well aware of the need to subvert the negative connotations which mass travel afforded. As we will see presently, marketing based on idealised construction of passengers, well-behaved and socially aspirational, was a feature which the company believed spoke more to potential consumers than any emphasis on mechanical matters such as locomotive aesthetics.

1.3: Knowing the Passenger: The Company asks the Customer

For more detailed appraisals, the GWR invited public comment on how it could improve. Interested to hear what the man in the street thought, in 1921 the company's debating society allowed an ordinary passenger to vent their criticisms of the railways.⁹³ Mr Salis described where improvements could be made to timetables and price of tickets, but also the carelessness of staff and the 'smells' in railway carriages.⁹⁴ The study was repeated in 1934 and this time a Mr Mount identified several areas for improvement which generally reflected the correspondence from the 'intend to please' pages. His chief complaint was the cleanliness and comfort of carriages. Mount argued that interiors 'should be an aesthetic delight, with warmth, light, brightness, freshness, and spotless cleanliness the

⁹² GWRM, May 1914, p. 123.

⁹³ TNA, ZPER 38/13, Meeting of 31st March 1921, pp. 1-10.

⁹⁴ TNA, ZPER 38/13, Meeting of 31st March 1921, p. 4.

characteristics'.⁹⁵ He also spoke negatively of restaurant cars, and the often substandard 'quality, freshness, and variety of food'. Mount was especially uncomplimentary of the traditional railway ham sandwich. But it was not merely the food as the way it was presented which caught Mount's eye. He argued that waiters should wear white jackets, changed daily, to improve the tone of the service. The criticisms were 'comprehensively answered' and it was made clear that most did not in fact relate solely to the GWR's services, moreover where the railways as a whole could improve. As will be seen however, the GWR acted upon Mount's advice implementing it in the company's visual publicity.

It would be useful to know more about the GWR's handling of complaints, although the evidence is sparse. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1920s the GWR had a much better idea about the level of service passengers expected. Its defence was largely that the company was not responsible for the major cause of grievances, the behaviour of other passengers. It merely encouraged the latter to display a little more courtesy to one-another. However the middle-classes, whose values focussed on privacy and distance from social inferiors, were beginning to tolerate less the negative experiences on the train.⁹⁶ The private automobile's exclusivity was seen to better reflect the values of middle-class society.⁹⁷ This fact was not ignored by the motor industry, and automobile groups together with manufacturers emphasised the sense of serfdom that public transport inflicted on the 'free' Briton.⁹⁸ The final analysis in this section concerns the GWR's conclusion that passengers were leaving the company in favour of the roads.

⁹⁵ TNA, ZPER 38/26, Meeting 22nd March 1934, pp. 1-10.

⁹⁶ O'Connell, *The Car In British Society*, p. 78.

⁹⁷ O'Connell, *The Car In British Society*, p. 79

⁹⁸ O'Connell, *The Car In British Society*, p. 79

1.4: The Challenge from the Roads

Earlier, this chapter recounted the words of the GWR's 'Mr Tee' who speculated in 1922 on the challenge from the roads.⁹⁹ By the late-1920s road transport was fully recognised as a persistent threat to rail. Between 1924 and 1932 the number of passenger journeys taken by GWR alone declined by roughly half a million and third class by more than thirty million.¹⁰⁰ Although a proportion of this was due to economic depression, the increasing popularity of coaches and cars undoubtedly played a role. The yearly traffic reports displayed increasing alarm at this looming spectre. The Traffic Department report of 1927 recorded the setting up of rival bus companies which had removed rail revenue.¹⁰¹ A year later, 1928's report summed up the problem more explicitly; 'the decline in passenger train travel is attributable to the continued depression in trade, road motor competition and the increased user [sic] of privately owned motor cars'.¹⁰² For shorter journeys the GWR realised that rail would never be a viable competitor as it could not take passengers door to door. Yet in the long distance market rail remained competitive providing more space and speed. Thus the holiday market, and long-distance discretionary travel in general, was the battleground over which the GWR, by all means possible, sought to combat the challenge from the roads.

The GWR's competitors possessed their own ideas as to how this battle should be fought. As they reached out to a mass audience in the late-1920s, car manufacturers began to target the railways using competitive advertising. We saw in Chapter One the Jowett Motor Company's untruthful claim to beat the Royal Scot train to York,¹⁰³ and the problem of

⁹⁹ 'Road Transport in its Relation to Railways', GWRM, January 1922, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ 'A Brief Review of the Company's Hundred Years of Business', GWRM, September 1935, p. 496.

¹⁰¹ TNA, RAIL 258/425, Great Western Railway Traffic Department: Annual Report 1927.

¹⁰² TNA, RAIL 258/425 Great Western Railway Traffic Department: Annual Report 1928.

¹⁰³ *Advertiser's Weekly*, 11th April 1930.

losing out in this way was highlighted by advertising commentators.¹⁰⁴ The GWR responded by employing a diverse marketing strategy alongside reducing fares and improving services.¹⁰⁵ On this point scholars recognise that after amalgamation in 1923 there was a general levelling up of standards, but no major advances in comfort.¹⁰⁶ There were of course prestige services which companies promoted heavily. In the GWR's case, a small number of 'super-saloons', built in the early-1930s, ran on a prestige service to the West Country. They sported luxurious features such as French walnut veneer panelling, and carried an additional charge of ten shillings.¹⁰⁷ One could reasonably assume that a more cost-effective solution to enticing potential consumers would have been advertising, although as we will see, specifically promoting the railway carriage did not a feature until the early-1930s. The GWR did however use its magazine for competitive measures.

The GWR's magazine published articles, poems and cartoons as propaganda for the railways.¹⁰⁸ All were intended to encourage customers to 'regard the railways as possessing an unassailable advantage over any competitive method of travel'.¹⁰⁹ One aspect heavily favoured was the dining car, deemed a significant advantage over what cars or buses could offer. The magazine also reported first rides on motor coaches, the point being to emphasise rail's superiority, and its refined character was championed in the face of caddish and insensitive motorists. A cartoon in the September 1933 edition of the magazine depicted wealthy passengers on the Cornish Riviera Express enjoying glasses of wine whilst those travelling by motor-bus suffered in the rain. In the accompanying article the author praised the comfort of the railway and the 'unwritten contract' with the public that, in contrast to the

¹⁰⁴ Percy Bradshaw, *Art in Advertising*, (1925), pp. 258-274.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, RAIL 258/425, Great Western Railway Traffic Department: Annual Reports 1924-1930.

¹⁰⁶ Bonavia, *The Four Great Railways*, pp. 102-04.

¹⁰⁷ GWRM, November 1931, p. 458.

¹⁰⁸ See for example, GWRM, September 1922; October 1924; October 1927.

¹⁰⁹ GWRM, October 1927, pp. 407-08.

bus, rail services would always run no matter how full – or empty - they were.¹¹⁰ The experience of dining whilst moving was seen as a key lead over road competition which, as we shall see, the GWR tried hard to promote in the 1930s.

Despite these attempts it was recognised at the end of the 1920s that the company magazine was an insufficient medium for emphasising rail's advantages against newer modes. The likely readers of the magazine, chiefly staff, were presumably already convinced of rail's superiority, if only to preserve their livelihood. The developments in the magazine at the end of the 1920s should thus be seen as the first steps in the idea of a campaign to target consumers who might be persuaded to forgo rail in favour of newer modes. They provided a background to new kinds of imagery which recommended the opinions of the company to a wider public, but were not the whole response.

This section has demonstrated first that throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s the GWR had a better idea of what customers wanted in terms of cleanliness, comfort, civility of staff and travelling companions as well as basics such as speed and safety. The company had researched this using passenger correspondence and interviews. This section established that the company realised it was in danger of losing these passengers, and that the holiday market could potentially be won back from motors. Examples of wider marketing initiatives, found in the magazine, show that rather than adopting a blasé attitude to such difficulties, the GWR's publicity machine was already gathering momentum in the face of such challenges. How to communicate these messages succinctly, effectively and to a wider audience was another matter. The following section argues that an explosion in photographic imagery depicting the passenger experience in *Holiday Haunts* was one response. The passenger concerns outlined above were integrated into carefully constructed and selected photography. *Holiday Haunts'* task in the 1930s therefore expanded from selling destinations to marketing

¹¹⁰ GWRM, January 1922, p. 11.

travel there and back too. Whereas previously editors shunned any mention, visual or textual, of railway technology, it was now emphasised so that; ‘A perusal of the introductory pages of the Guide will enable you to answer [the question on how to travel] – travel by rail!’¹¹¹

Section 2: Picturing Passengers in the 1930s

Although this section argues that developments in understanding the passenger only began to influence the marketing of carriage interiors on a significant level during the 1930s, it acknowledges that using speed and comfort to market travel was not entirely neglected before this. It is thus important briefly to appraise the efforts prior to the 1930s to contextualise the developments afterwards. Indeed, this confirms that advertising the passenger experience had not advanced at anything like the pace of attempts to understand the passenger, meaning that by the end of the 1920s there was a discrepancy between what the passenger was told by the company, via the magazine and in specialised literature, and what they saw in visual marketing.

At the outset of the twentieth century advertising carriage conditions in the wider media was conditioned by which images the railways wanted to release, further hampered by the quality of reproductive technologies. Shin and Divall argue that the railways had used images of locomotives to market travel until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but afterwards these were no longer deemed appropriate.¹¹² Instead, what was preferred, at least until the interwar years, was the scenery of destinations accompanied by a somewhat subdued image of speed, comfort, and luxury.¹¹³ Press advertising relied largely on announcing services and reminding consumers to book their holiday early. Attempts were made to

¹¹¹ GWR, *Holiday Haunts*, (1939).

¹¹² Colin Divall and Hiroki Shin, ‘Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity: Representations of Speed in Britain’s Railway Marketing’, in Benjamin Fraser and Steven Spalding (eds.), *Trains, Culture, and Mobility: Riding the Rails: Volume 2*, (Lanham, 2012), p. 12.

¹¹³ Divall and Shin, ‘Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity’, pp. 12-14.

integrate visual images, but for the most part only simple line drawings were used. As an advert in *The Times* in 1913 shows (Figure 6.1), carriage conditions, although important, were ambiguously included alongside lengthier descriptions of destinations. Whilst the viewer could probably imagine the ‘superlative loveliness’ of the Cornish Riviera, and had a picture to help them, what did a ‘perfectly-appointed’ carriage look like? Hence the GWR’s claim that it was the ‘acme of comfortable travel’ received little support. Any kind of technical detail, either of locomotives or carriage interiors, was omitted. The same was true of Britain’s other railways which employed similar devices; around 1914 The Great Central Railway proclaimed ‘Rapid Travel in Luxury’ and the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway sought to attract ‘those who desire comfort with speed’ to their line.¹¹⁴ Although similar slogans such as ‘Line de Luxe’ helped to associate the GWR with luxury in the customer’s mind it is difficult to determine what impact these slogans had on the popular image of rail travel. However, inter-company rather than inter-modal competition prior to the 1920s ensured much more attention was given to destinations.

¹¹⁴ Divall and Shin, ‘Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity’, p. 12.

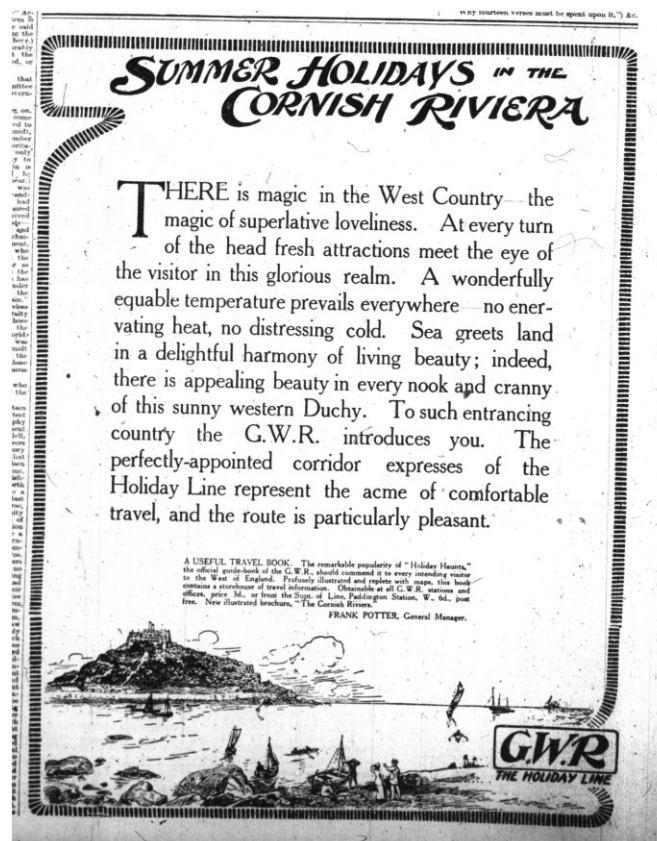


Figure 6.1: 'Summer Holidays in the Cornish Riviera', 1913¹¹⁵

Photography, however, could give such claims a true-to-life manner. The initial value of photography to the GWR, like many other railway companies, was rooted in providing a visual record of industrial output, new locomotives and rolling stock primarily.¹¹⁶ These visual conventions were simply emulated in the first images used for publicity purposes within *Holiday Haunts*. Photographers were tasked with capturing this in the best detail possible, evident in Figures 6.2 and 6.3 below. Aside from the apparently opulent surroundings, the carved mahogany seats and crisp white linen, the photographs appeared without artistry. In this respect photography possessed some advantages and some disadvantages over posters and press advertisements. Nevertheless only a handful of carriage interiors appeared in the Edwardian publications. Those which did appear were apparently

¹¹⁵ *The Times*, 17th July 1913.

¹¹⁶ Ed Bartholomew and Michael Blakemore, *Railways In Focus: Photographs From The National Railway Museum Collections*, (Penryn, 1998), pp. 12-15.

chosen to emphasise the luxury of first class, specifically its availability on the crack express trains. These images might, as Butterfield and others argue with regard to later vehicles, have been chosen to speak for the rest of the services,¹¹⁷ but it is also likely that they showed wealthy consumers what their additional outlay could afford. None appeared in the 1920s however, a curious fact given the concern elsewhere with the impact of intermodal competition, and this may have reflected the company's dissatisfaction with the kind of photographic imagery it was able to produce.

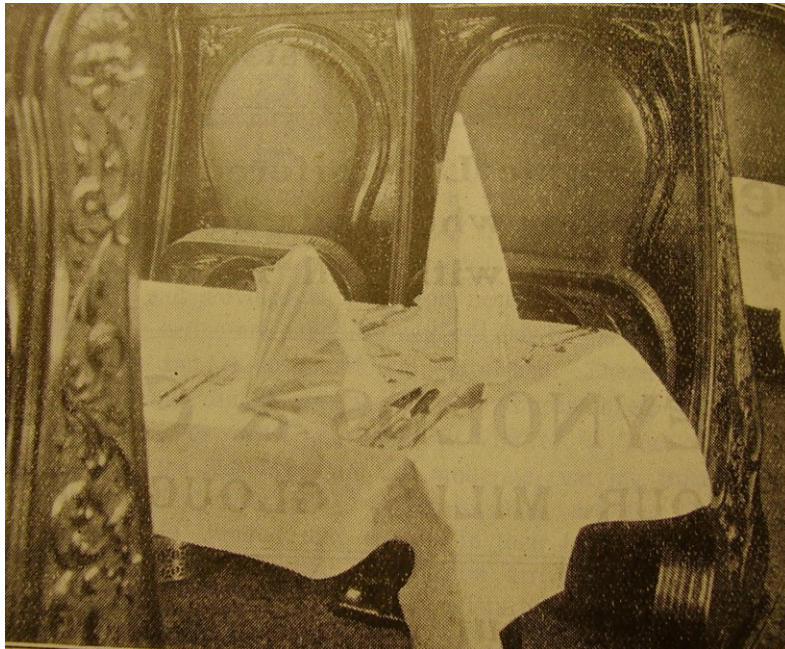


Figure 6.2: 'In the dining car', 1908

¹¹⁷ Butterfield, 'Grouping, Pooling and Competition', pp. 173-74.

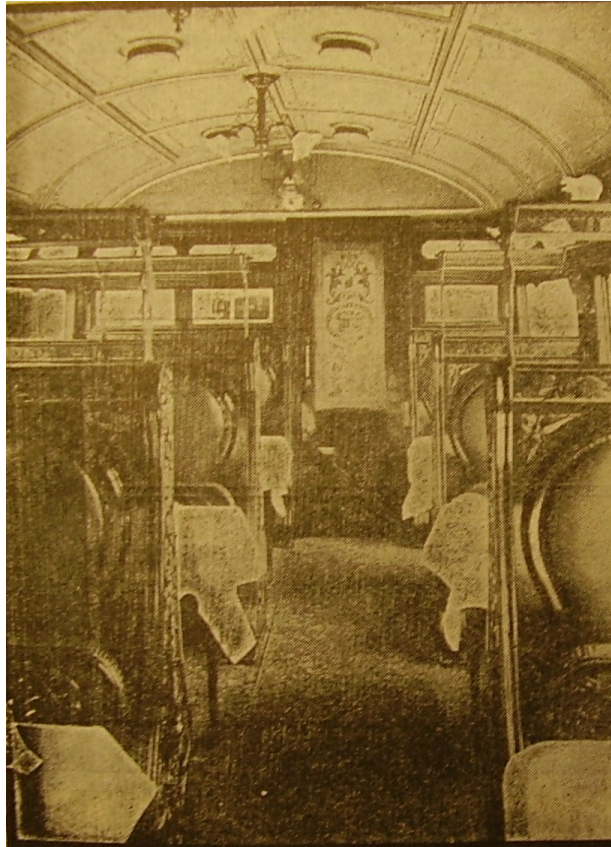


Figure 6.3: ‘In the dining car’, 1909

In posters too, depictions of railway technology were few and far between. When they did appear this usually took the form of a man or woman readying to board or disembark a carriage.¹¹⁸ In Britain, the sparse use of imagery probably stemmed, as suggested, from the fact that by the 1860s most people knew what a train looked like, were familiar with its operation and what being a passenger entailed.¹¹⁹ One authority on commercial advertising observed in 1924:

Our grandfathers, when they wanted to advertise railway-travel, used the picture of a locomotive. This, to modern eyes, does not seem a very effective way to

¹¹⁸ Diane Drummond, ‘“For the Ladies?” Railway Company Advertising and the Woman Train Passenger in the UK and USA, 1890-1965’, (Unpublished paper, T2M Conference York, 6-9th October 2005), p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Michael Freeman, *Railways and The Victorian Imagination*, (London, 1999), p. 217.

arouse in the bosom of an observer the desire to be conveyed... the real subject of every advertisement is not the product but the service that it gives.¹²⁰

Although images of moving trains had once attracted customers, by the early-twentieth century they were out of favour.¹²¹ How to market the service, and attractively capture what passengers wanted from their experiences, was still being worked out.

Change came later in the 1920s. In this decade the railway press congratulated the GWR on ‘an entirely new departure in rail publicity work’,¹²² when it released, in 1923, the book *10.30 Limited*. Priced at one shilling and aimed at ‘boy of all ages’,¹²³ rather than descriptions of scenery or the charms of seaside resorts *10.30 Limited* gave comprehensive but simple information on modern railway practice. The book proved popular, but whilst making one section of the public more aware of the tasks facing a modern railway, it hardly fit the prestige publicity the company sought, and was probably insufficient to grow railway use.

10.30 Limited, for example, included no photographic images. However, a number of new photographic compositions, which for the first time included passengers, appeared in the company magazine during the 1920s. These represented a move to showing how the carriage could be consumed, although this was in all probability meant to demonstrate new innovations to staff rather than advertise the overall carriage experience. The photographs pictured passengers listening to the wireless or asleep in specially designed compartments.¹²⁴ In a similar promotion, in August 1934 the company pictured and described its new streamlined diesel railcar (Figure 6.4).¹²⁵ It is included here in part to suggest the marked

¹²⁰ ‘Picturing the Product’, *Advertising World*, September 1924, p. 550.

¹²¹ Divall and Shin, ‘Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity’, pp. 12-14.

¹²² *The Railway Gazette*, 3rd August 1923, p. 151.

¹²³ GWR, *The 10.30 Limited*, (1923).

¹²⁴ GWRM, April 1926, p. 143; October 1928, p. 378.

¹²⁵ GWRM, August 1934, p. 347.

departure between these and later, stylised images. The photograph illustrates the difficulty in taking a 'live' photograph in a carriage interior. Despite not being overly crowded it is difficult to see all of the passengers and much of the carriage's detail. The photographer's position means that the viewer's eye is drawn to the rear of the carriage where the individuals are partially obscured and harder to define. Windows also presented a problem, reflecting glare from the sunlight outside. This would later be remedied by blocking the windows with landscape imagery, the kind of scenes used in guidebooks, but no such innovation is present here. Finally the individuals, though not appearing overly bored or uncomfortable, do little to convince the viewer that this particular journey is worth taking. It is a point which is made consistently in theory on advertising, that the facial expression and demeanour of people in advertisements suggest more about their opinion or experience of the product than a long descriptive paragraph could.¹²⁶ Unsurprisingly this view of the streamlined railcar did not make it into the brochure advertising the same,¹²⁷ which comprised mainly exterior shots of the railcar speeding through the countryside. Tellingly, the company still did not feel that it could show other people consuming the train, possibly an extension of the anxieties outlined above. It does however demonstrate the burgeoning experimentation with integration of passengers into photographic marketing. This perhaps gave confidence for, as we will see, around this time the company perceived that more could be achieved by using model agencies rather than ordinary passengers.

¹²⁶ Anthony Cortese, *Provocateur: Images of Women and Minorities in Advertising*, (Oxford, 2004), p. 28.

¹²⁷ GWR, *The Streamline Way*, (1934).



Figure 6.4: ‘The Interior of The Great Western Railway Company’s New Stream-Lined Rail Car’, 1934

The GWR believed less in the marketing benefit of streamlining than the other railways, the stream-lined Rail-car being the company’s only venture into this area beyond experimental designs. The company was nonetheless convinced that its carriage interiors would benefit from some of the kudos which streamlining afforded. From the end of the 1920s, information on this began to be included in dedicated publications about particular services. They described the modern materials employed, those which ranged from wide, sliding glass-panelled doors adjoining carriages to concealed electric ceiling lights.¹²⁸ Special emphasis was given to the large observation windows fitted to carriages which the company was particularly proud of.¹²⁹ The *Hotels and Catering* publicity continued this theme, as did one-off brochures commemorating famous services, the Silver Anniversary of

¹²⁸ GWRM, November 1931, p. 258; April 1936, pp. 159-61.

¹²⁹ The National Railway Museum (NRM), Great Western Railway B-Series, Negative 12120B.

the Cornish Riviera being one.¹³⁰ The photography used to illustrate these retained a realistic dimension, increasingly at odds to the glamorous peopled imagery used elsewhere in the company's marketing. Figure 6.5, for example, presented the carriage as apparently comfortable, again making use of light-coloured furnishings and windows. The composition focussed on where the passenger would be seated, but a long sweep down the aisle encouraged an impression of space and airiness. In this case it was an improvement over the Edwardian imagery, but one wonders whether, at a time when the vogue was to display customers consuming travel as in automobile and ocean liner advertising, the lack of people constituted the best appeal. We know why the GWR was reluctant to show people in its carriage marketing; it knew that one of the most hated aspects of rail travel was the presence of other, inurbane individuals. Although showing more artistry in how the viewer's gaze could be directed, unlike elsewhere in the company's publicity these images did little to recommend the scene.

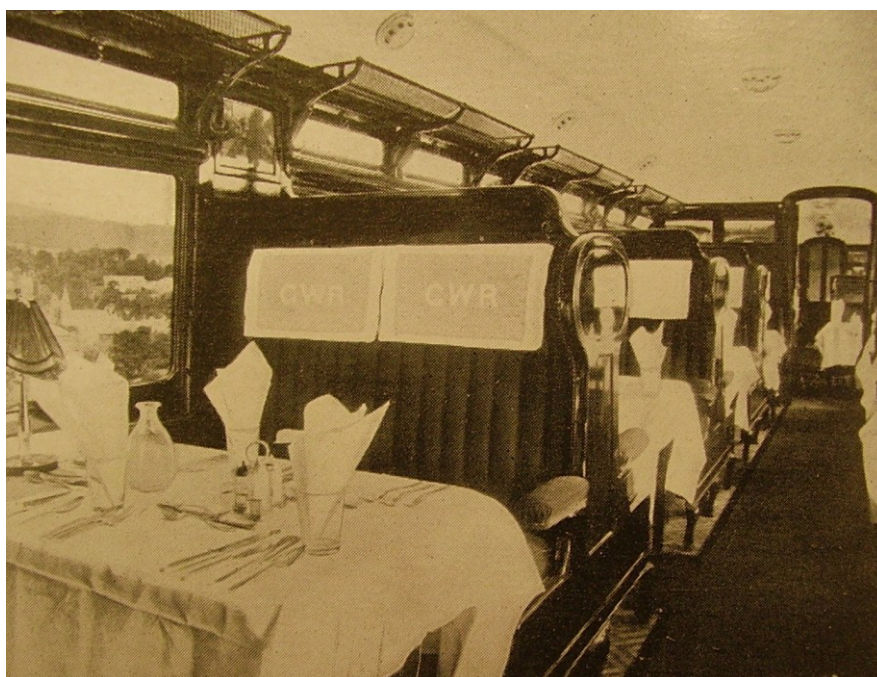


Figure 6.5: 'GWR Restaurant Car', *GWR Hotels and Catering 1932*

¹³⁰ GWR, *A Silver Anniversary: The Cornish Riviera Express: 1904-1929*, (1929).

Whilst Figures 6.4 and 6.5 represented a slight departure from Edwardian imagery in a stylistic sense, they were still far underrepresented in terms of total imagery. No images which depicted the carriage interior made it into *Holiday Haunts* in these years, instead illustrating the pages of specialist guides or the magazine. This imagery may have appeared, to contemporary eyes, as outdated; visual confirmation of the GWR's imagined conservatism against other railways which used avant-garde poster designs.

The reasons for change around this time have already been outlined. Competition from cars made the GWR receptive to change and Orton singled out photography as a primary means for conveying new messages. He termed it 'Prestige advertising', 'by which I mean advertising the undertaking of railway travel in general, including speed and comfort...which is used to attract the public to rail in preference to other forms of transport'.¹³¹ This demarcation is important because it suggests foremost that by the mid 1930s it was recognised that promoting the carriage interior was an important consideration *alongside* holiday advertising. Secondly, of the imagery appearing from 1935 onwards we can discern many features from the customer research outlined above begin to feature more prominently. To add vigour to its marketing the GWR enlisted the help of the Fox Films model agency, the resultant productions *selling* the service and showing how it could be consumed rather than simply recording it. Finally, these images appeared, for the first time in over twenty years, in *Holiday Haunts*. The GWR wanted the journey to be seen as an integral part of the holiday experience, not something to be endured before the real fun could begin.¹³² The published photographs, as well as a number of unpublished variants, suggest that carriage interior imagery was now carefully crafted. This final section analyses the

¹³¹ TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, pp. 32-37.

¹³² GWRM, September 1935, p. 505.

1930s photography in the context of the information gleaned about consumers, namely their desire for well-behaved passengers, clean and comfortable environments, and attentive staff.

2.1: 'My Friends and Fiends':¹³³ Picturing the Fellow Traveller

Outwardly, the inclusion of passengers in its marketing might appear at odds with the GWR's aspiration to rival 'private' cars. However, the GWR's clever publicity department issued imagery which allowed the company to disassociate the ill-manners and foibles of other passengers from rail travel. Photographic marketing established an image of the ideal passenger, a prototypical consumer who was well-mannered and fashionable; an aspirational type intended to improve the image of the service. All of the photographs below were included in a place of prominence at the front of GWR guides. The importance that the GWR assigned this marketing, as well as how it hoped potential passengers would interpret it, is clear from this positioning. The company wanted the journey to be seen as an integral part of the holiday experience, a level of quality that was unique to the GWR, rather than something to be dreaded. The 'passengers' were therefore heavily idealised and approximated to the archetypes included in destination photography, but showed additional wealth in their ability to dine on board the train instead of taking food with them. The women conformed to the contemporary standards of ideal femininity and were young and beautiful. Their male companions were similarly dashing and well-dressed in pristine suits. Again, the context of consumption was privileged and the simple conventions of good looking passengers were intended to connect the idea that beauty and success were part of the service. Potential customers were expected to absorb the inference that the right kind of person travelled by

¹³³ *The Railway and Travel Monthly*, January 1914, p. 60.

train, and that one could achieve an approximation of happiness presented in the photographs by consuming rail travel.

Attempting to dispel the common fears associated with boring, rude or inconsiderate passengers, the new photographs emphasised the conviviality of the journey and the carriage as a place of friendship. The passengers laughed; an important visual indicator of satisfaction, fun, and comfort. They talked; an attempt to dispel the belief, popular since the nineteenth century, that rail travel had killed conversation and sociability.¹³⁴ In 1939's 'The Joy of the Journey' (Figure 6.6) the viewer was entreated to an entirely different perspective on the carriage scene, looking in from the outside. Windows are an important advertising symbol, directing the viewer's gaze and adding special emphasis to the object seen through the glass.¹³⁵ In this case, the fact that the passengers were being served, as well as their obvious enjoyment, was geared to making the viewer want to make the move from being outside to inside. This was supported by the warm colouring, the glare of light on skin and white clothing contributing to an impression of 'favour from above' explored, in connection to the lighting of models, in previous chapters. The ordinary carriage window thus became a window onto a carefully crafted vision of consumption, not this time looking out onto glorious landscapes, but in on a deliberately staged human vision of rail travel.

¹³⁴ Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, p. 74.

¹³⁵ Roland Marchand, *Advertising The American Dream: Making Way For Modernity, 1920-1940*, (Berkeley, 1986), pp. 238-54.



Figure 6.6: ‘The Joy of the Journey’, 1939

The GWR had good reason to employ these techniques. A recurring element of motorcar advertising situated the car in a context of consumption.¹³⁶ Cars were regularly shown at sporting events or outside the theatre in an attempt to connect ideas about wealth, culture and privilege to the vehicles.¹³⁷ In a similar way, the GWR began to place amongst its passengers various items which hinted at an anticipated experience. In essence the conventions employed in the photography at destinations were carried over into the carriages. Relationships, body language, clothes and consumer goods were all presented to ascribe the mode of travel more cachet. Sporting goods were a particularly effective symbol. Sport, in the form of racquets or golf clubs, connoted wealth in that one would have required money

¹³⁶ Wolfgang Sachs, *For Love Of The Automobile, Looking Back Into The History Of Our Desire*, (Berkeley, 1992), p. 36.

¹³⁷ Alexander Medcalf, ‘The Romance of the Road: The Motor Car, Advertising and Gender Relations in Britain 1918-1939’, (unpublished MA dissertation, University of York, 2008), pp. 32-37; see for further examples British Motor Industry Heritage Trust (BMIHT), Gaydon, TB-BL-WOL-2, Wolseley Brochures model range 1919-1929; BMIHT, TB-BL-WOL-3, Wolseley Brochures model range 1930-1938.

wealth to join a club and buy the accessories, but also that passengers had sufficient leisure time to pursue genteel sport.¹³⁸ Evident in the images below, ‘GWR by First and Third class’ (Figures 6.7 and 6.8) and unpublished negative B 12125 (Figure 6.9), the presence of sporting equipment was intended to add depth to the visual narrative. In addition these photographs demonstrate the GWR’s high production values. Not least because of the fact that published images were carefully chosen from a range of potentials, this is also evident in Figures 6.7 and 6.8 where one shot appears with an artificial window view and one without. Presumably the window in Figure 6.7 was left clear because the outside image, that of a station or siding, probably represented an authentic beginning to holiday travel.



Figures 6.7& 6.8: ‘GWR by first and third class’, 1939

¹³⁸ John Benson, *The Rise Of Consumer Society In Britain, 1880-1980*, (London, 1994), pp. 129-30.



Figure 6.9: GWR B Series Negative 12125

Unsurprisingly, given the focus of much passenger correspondence analysed above, the photographs also engaged the popular ideas surrounding different levels of decorum between first and third class. A difference in photographic content reveals that, even when publicising travel to the masses, the company was still very aware of presumptions associated with class. In the case of ‘By GWR Third Class’ (Figure 6.10), although some of the models were the same as those in other photographs, effort was made to imply difference, not just in the different levels of luxury in the carriage (the different seats, cornicing and general decoration) but also in the passengers’ clothing. Yet as well as having the right passenger travel in the right carriage, it was apparently imperative to make sure that the passengers all communicated an impression of being well behaved and personable. This was in stark contrast to the sort of correspondence the GWR received, not least, as well, in terms of

overcrowding which was shown not to be an issue. However the subtle differences between the photographs suggests that in marketing terms, portraying this difference mattered.

Despite this however, as Divall notes, it is arguable, though near impossible to prove, that advertising first-class travel also appealed to other social groups who aspired to something ‘better’.¹³⁹



Figure 6.10: ‘By GWR Third Class’, 1938

Finally, Chapter Four suggested how in the 1930s the GWR began to ‘feminise’ the carriage interior in response to its recognition of the female market. As seen already in this section, the women of the carriages were not presented as shy, awkward consumers of rail travel, but confident and relaxed in this setting. Although in these cases they were depicted with male companions, the fact that the “girls” outweigh the “boys” creates the impression of female dominance of the situation. In examples such as Figures 6.7 and 6.8, the mirrored male and female poses suggest equal enjoyment of the journey. Rather than a place of

¹³⁹ Divall, ‘Civilising Velocity’, p. 6.

boredom, or where one might meet passengers with irritating habits, the GWR presented the compartment more as the parlour where one could relax and drink in the company of friends. This confirms what we know about the GWR's treatment of feminine ideals generally; although not a particularly 'enlightened' perspective, the carriage marketing was probably an extension of the glamorised settings analysed in Chapter Four. Just as automobile marketing appealed to women through 'luxury', 'modernity' and 'sleekness', the GWR ensured to give these values prominence in its marketing.

However, unlike the majority of photographs in *Holiday Haunts*, in the carriages people were commonly paired into heterosexual groupings. Facilitated by the seating arrangements, this lent an air of intimacy to the photographs. Although the photographs carefully avoided any kind of crowded compartments commonly associated with peak holiday travel, no-one was left unattended. Everybody received a seat, plenty of space around them and empty luggage racks. Above all, by making sure that the carriages were bright and airy, the right sort of people were in the right kind of carriage, and all looked happy and content, the GWR sought to assuage the negative comment with positive visual reinforcement. As at the destination, rather than simply selling the idea of travel by rail, the aspirationalised actors were intended to make deeper appeals to the subconscious, equating the services with more beautiful and alluring depictions of life.

2.2: 'From Ordeal to Luxury':¹⁴⁰ Comfort and Cleanliness

The highly structured and posed images communicated a level of sanitised cleanliness which probably fell far short of the reality of peak holiday services. The carriages depicted were not from ageing Edwardian stock but sported modern design features and the latest

¹⁴⁰ GWRM, September 1935, p. 505.

comfort refinements. The arm rests, curtains and carpets made carriages look more like sitting rooms, and the relaxed, conversational poses of the passengers further emphasised this. Well-cared-for soft furnishings in compartments uncluttered by litter were presented as the norm in ordinary carriages, but the GWR arguably put the greatest effort into its dining cars. Combining elements of comfort, cleanliness, passenger and staff civility, by championing dining on the train the GWR emphasised an element which distinguished rail travel as a dignified experience. It also helped discourage ideas about being rushed around, supposedly unsanitary conditions and the general dank ambiance on the train. As seen above, in the company magazine the GWR had identified the idea that finishing the day with a meal in comfortable surroundings was a ploy unique to rail travel. The company believed that offering a range of freshly produced quality foods was a significant weapon in the competition with cars and coaches.

Once again, in time with the concerns outlined in section one, the carriages in Figures 6.11 and 6.12 were presented as immaculately clean, especially where food was being served. Obviously proud of its latest innovations, corporate photography picked out the new materials involved in carriage construction. The bright woods and reflective metals looked good in the photographs, and the company's branding was kept in full focus. One will notice immediately a great deal of bright white materials, from the headrests to napkins, plates to tablecloths. Aside from the appearance of bread these were not sullied by food, potentially an attempt at a catch-all appeal even down to the degree of culinary taste. Again, although the dining cars were populated one could not describe them as crowded, therefore adding to the perceptions of space, cleanliness and good manners. Eating is difficult to advertise as it possesses several negative connotations, greed, gluttony and potential incivility, which must be overcome.¹⁴¹ In the GWR's photographs young, svelte, attractive passengers emulate the

¹⁴¹ Marchand, *Advertising The American Dream*, pp. 162-63.

sanitised surroundings in their dainty grasp of the available foodstuffs. It may be taking the reading too far, however, to suggest that the preponderance of blonde women in these carriages was meant to corroborate the whiteness in suggesting freshness and purity, but given the GWR's careful selection of people and locations we cannot rule it out.



Figure 6.11: 'In The Dining Car', 1938



Figure 6.12: 'A GWR Buffet Car, 1939

All photographs were composed to encourage the viewer to adopt a privileged viewpoint, looking down upon the carriage. The technique not only allowed seating obstructions to be overcome, an improvement on the photograph depicting the streamlined railcar, but, in terms of relative height, placed the viewer as 'master' of the situation,¹⁴² reflecting the 'upscale' nature of the imagery in terms of the smartly-dressed, apparently wealthy passengers within. This sense of aspiration was also connoted by depicting the meal actually being consumed. Whilst not all would have been able to afford the expense of dining in transit - £3 for a basic meal was not far off the average weekly wage in 1938 - the

¹⁴² Marchand, *Advertising The American Dream*, pp. 238-54.

inclusion of such aspirational settings was designed to create the impression that those who travelled by GWR dined on the train too. The idea that one could consume these things, that the experience was available, was as important in selling the context of the carriages as the images of motor-launches and fashionable seaside attire were elsewhere in holiday marketing. The scenes on the dining and buffet cars lent an air of the fantastical to the journey and emphasised it as an experience that could only be had if one chose to travel by train.

Furthermore, a sense of modernity received pride of place, especially regarding the company's buffet car. In this special carriage, the chromium-plated bar's surface and unobtrusive light fittings reflected American styles whilst the GWR's use of large plate glass and simple, woven textiles are evident in the above images.¹⁴³ Both the 'Buffet Car' of 1939 (Figure 6.12) and the image below (6.13) portray a further innovation, the curved and sweeping ceilings which eliminated angular junctions and thus created a more airy and more spacious environment.¹⁴⁴ These simple, restrained and functional designs contrasted heavily with the dark, bulky, oak-veneered designs of the Edwardian period. Figure 6.13, a composition similar to much of the Fox Films collection, was included in a July edition of the *Daily Mirror*.¹⁴⁵ This, and several other images which made appearances in the press,¹⁴⁶ was intended to foster associations between the fashionable new London bars and eateries and the GWR's own efforts. Moreover, it represents the GWR's attempt to take its message of civilised mobility to a wider audience and ask infrequent travellers to rethink their preconceptions about rail travel. In this case the image reproduced here does not do the original composition justice, but one can imagine that this photograph, when viewed in 1934 by an occasional passenger, would have raised a surprise. It authentically portrayed

¹⁴³ See Votolato, *Transport Design*, (pp. 48-49) for an in-depth description of American advances in carriage design.

¹⁴⁴ Votolato, *Transport Design*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁵ *The Daily Mirror*, 11th July 1934.

¹⁴⁶ *The Times*, 31st August 1935.

substantial change. Such a move is a clear indication that the GWR pursued a young and fashionable set who might be persuaded to travel by other means. As seen in Chapter Four, the conventions of the buffet cars were carried over into the station cafeterias and snack bars. As the stations were essentially the shop windows of the railway, having the right kind of services and the right kind of people assisted in the reworking of rail as a fashionable enjoyable experience that could compete with the modernity on offer elsewhere. Despite the recognition that the press was, from a photographic point of view, insufficient in terms of quality for displaying photogravures, these instances illustrate the perceived advertising value of taking corporate imagery to an even wider audience.



Passengers being served with quick lunches at the long bar which extends the whole length of the new buffet cars introduced by the Great Western Railway with the summer service.

Figure 6.13: *The Daily Mirror*, 11th July 1934

2.3: *'To Uphold the Traditions of the GWR':¹⁴⁷ Picturing the Staff*

As seen above, discourteous or surly GWR employees regularly inspired negative comments from passengers, and the company's magazine stressed to the workforce that a 'slammed plate could be the loss of a journey'.¹⁴⁸ As addressed in Mr Mount's comments, much more emphasis was put on the staff's ability to influence the journey. Each time staff appeared in the company's marketing they were immaculately turned out, posed in deference to the passengers (Figure 6.14). Their clothes too, now the white jackets favoured by Mount, connoted cleanliness and exactitude. For the first time in GWR photographs the staff were emphasised as part of the passenger experience and, as denoted in the unpublished negative complete with tape for cropping (Figure 6.15), they were an element to be emphasised. Elsewhere, other companies turned their staff from surly goblins into effective sales pitches. The SR's 'Sunny South Sam', a jolly conductor, even released a holiday themed record.¹⁴⁹ The GWR did not go in for such antics, but rather attempted to include the staff within the ideas of prestige which was now a defining feature of this marketing.

¹⁴⁷ GWRM, December 1926, p. 395.

¹⁴⁸ 'It is true to say that the majority of the complaints received by any Railway Company are concerned with matters arising between the staff and the public – discourtesy, carelessness, indifference, thoughtlessness, and so on- not always directly, because many of these failing lead to the creation of a situation the man himself could hardly be expected to visualise: when for example he throws a parcel on to the platform he probably has not troubled to notice beforehand that it is fragile, but a claim results just the same. Similarly the Shunter who allows rough shunting to continue does not give the question of damage a thought. The Restaurant Car Attendant who serves up a meal in a "take it or leave it" attitude does not realise that because the passenger suffers in silence he has lost the Company a customer', TNA, RAIL 1107/9, Meeting of 13th February 1936, pp. 32-37.

¹⁴⁹ Tony Hillman and Beverley Cole, *South for Sunshine: Southern Railway Publicity and Posters, 1923 to 1947*, (Harrow Weald, 1999), p. 50.



Figure 6.14: 'Interior of the buffet car', 1938



Figure 6.15: GWR B Series Negative 13254

Each photograph was intended to propose the GWR's advantage in comfort and prestige over cars and long-distance coaches. Consumers were expected to react favourably to the idea that this was what travel by rail was like. Whilst frequent travellers, or those who remembered less than satisfactory experiences, might not have been impressed, such images represented the company's considered and best efforts to encourage customers to look upon rail travel as offering something new and better. Not only this, the photographs built upon and included much information about passengers researched by the GWR's publicity department. Situated prominently at the front of publications, the photographs contributed to the air of departure which asked viewers to consider travel as an eagerly anticipated part of the holiday. The images included in this chapter are but some of a host of published and unpublished variants, confirming that the GWR took its carriage imagery seriously by the 1930s. Dozens of photographs were taken of passengers in different arrangements or at different stages of the journey.¹⁵⁰ The Second World War ultimately restricted how much of this would be seen by the public however.

Section 3: Conclusions

Photographic marketing played a key role in the fight to retain customers against road competition, and shows the extent to which the GWR considered passengers differently by 1939. Photographs helped corroborate the company's claims that rail could be an aspirational form of travel. Cleanliness, modern styling and attentive staff were essential components of the GWR's idealised carriage environment. Moreover, idealised consumers provided a context of consumption that sought to alter the popular view of rail travel as an uncomfortable and unglamorous experience. The key point in this chapter is that this

¹⁵⁰ NRM, GWR B Series: Negatives 13486-12492 depict a new buffet car; 14553-14569 show a restaurant car; 12114-12119 portray passengers about to embark a train and so on.

photographic marketing was not guesswork, but was rather based on detailed views of passenger wants. The marketing was based on the efforts of a capable publicity department in studying customer feedback. Therefore the marketing output, considered alongside attempts to listen to the passenger, suggests that the GWR used passenger data to target and persuade the middle-class consumer that rail was the best way to holiday. Images of a lifestyle connected to consumption in the carriage complemented broader attempts to design modernity into rail travel but presents a more nuanced appreciation of the passenger as a consumer whose requirements needed to be anticipated and satisfied if railway was to compete with the road-borne challenge. Photographic evidence, as well as that from the company magazine and departmental minutes, suggests the GWR did not give up on those tempted by an Austin or Vauxhall but targeted them more rigorously.

This chapter therefore goes beyond the claims that ‘comfort’ was an important introduction to passenger railway travel by showing how interlinked with and dependent upon passengers it actually was. The GWR did not introduce comfort indiscriminately; the relationship between passenger correspondence analysis and the photographic marketing suggests that individual elements were picked out and acted upon. Not only does it show that railways distinguished between and identified what passengers found most desirable or off-putting, this is the first sustained evidence of research on consumers by a railway company which confirms that the passenger experience was being looked into seriously.

Furthermore, a familiar interpretation of the competition between road and rail claims that as soon as they could consumers opted for cars and that the railways were largely powerless against this.¹⁵¹ This chapter has argued differently; companies such as the GWR responded to growing competition aggressively. In the case it joins the recent scholarship

¹⁵¹ Lyth and Bagwell, *Transport in Britain*, p. 80; O’Connell, *The Car In British Society*, p. 79.

which examines rail's response to motor competition through design.¹⁵² Whilst others highlight the good results from exterior design, naming strategies, and comfort innovation, this chapter argues that these improvements also depended on effective photographic strategies to market them. By utilising photography to display the travel experience from the customer perspective, the GWR showed how it could beat the car. Over technical performance and exterior styling, the GWR emphasised its advantages in terms that the consumer could understand, comfort and lifestyle. As well as the traditional triad of speed, safety and comfort,¹⁵³ photographic marketing assisted the GWR in dispelling the common fears about other passengers and the demeanour of travel more generally. In this case photographs also presented a remarkable advantage over pen-and-brush poster illustrations by combining allusions of reality with desires for the fantastical, and the resultant imagery, carefully contextualised, affords a much deeper insight into the corporate perception of passengers.

We will probably never know how these images were interpreted by passengers. Possibly the photographs would have incited negative, cynical responses as realistically the company could not bring all services up to the standards depicted. But that is not the concern. It is evident that, as for several of its target groups, the GWR created a contrived, idealised view consumption and the ideal passengers who did it. The level of consideration which went into this world-view, and the fact there were tailored examples for different market segments, is very revealing. Photographic publicity was important in encouraging passengers to think differently as well as showing passengers that the GWR was thinking of them.

¹⁵² Votolato, *Transport Design*, p. 47; Shin, 'Rapid Travel In Comfort', p. 3; Divall and Shin, 'Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity', pp. 12-14.

¹⁵³ Divall and Shin, 'Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity', pp. 14-15.