Conclusion

This thesis began by identifying an absence: although much is known about the history of Britain's railways, few scholars have analysed railway marketing. This thesis argued that marketing, that is synchronising the aims of the business with the needs of the consumer, was a crucial element of the early-twentieth-century British railway company. Focussing on the case study of the Great Western Railway (GWR), it argued that this company shifted in perception of customers from that of captive, homogeneous masses to individuals with different desires and expectations which required satisfaction. It did so by engaging with customers in new ways, by attempting to understand their wants, researching their requirements, and dividing them into groups based on observed backgrounds and interests.

This thesis used unconventional sources to delve deeper into this developing marketing attitude. Chapter One analysed and periodised the GWR's growing commitment to considering passengers as customers through the company's internal lecture society and in-house magazine, both understudied yet important sources of information on how selling strategies, amongst others, were perceived, enacted and reflected upon. It found that even in the embryonic stages around 1900 the company's strategies were not sightless. The GWR's advertising department asked questions such as how to scientifically influence customer desires, how to manage its diverse advertising through campaigns, and what was the value of looking at consumers beyond incoherent masses? The company embraced a widely-held contemporary objective not just to portray travel as convenient, fast, reliable and safe, but to persuade people to make journeys it had not occurred to them to make.[1] There was a shift in

[1] See for example Douglas Knoop, *Outlines of Railway Economics*, (London, 1913), p. 235; Christian Barman, *The Man Who Built London Transport: A Biography of Frank Pick*, (Newton Abbot, 1979), pp. 29-30.

the quantity and quality of marketing as a result. Complementary analysis of photographic procurement and publication construction traced the new customer-centred approach into promotional activities. By the 1920s the interest had developed into 'publicity'; public relations and customer satisfaction, including improved attempts to research consumer demands through statistics and correspondence. Although Chapter One identified a lag between the GWR's marketing before and after the First World War, it also showed that the company was far from static and continued to develop its customer focus. This benefitted the company when, facing changing market conditions in the late 1920s, the GWR reconsidered its relevance to new and existing markets.

After 1930 the GWR shifted its publicity to embrace 'friendliness', aligning itself with wholesale change in the character of Britain's holiday market. The company pictured customers differently, translating what it knew about people's jobs, homes, dreams and aspirations into emotive depictions of contrived consumers and environments. This also influenced carriage design, services to satisfy niche demands, and all manner of supplementary goods. Re-imagining customers led the GWR to engage with existing ones (such as women) in new ways, and seek out emerging markets (such as the lower-middle and working class rambler). It recruited men like Dewar from the Empire Marketing Board, and continued to formalise its marketing theories in company publications and at lectures to the wider railway community. Chapter One therefore questioned Channon's conclusion; that traditional management practices limited the appreciation of marketing.[2] Rather, the GWR possessed a constantly developing attitude to customers and to promotion.

The body of this thesis used a previously unanalysed source, company photography, to examine, corroborate and elaborate upon these conclusions. Chapters Two to Six argued

[2] Geoffrey Channon, *Railways In Britain and The United States, 1830-1940: Studies In Economic and Business History*, (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 49-50.

that the GWR's photographs show further evidence of the company re-assessing its approach to customers. But the photographs expose more connected to this. Particularly, photographic marketing revealed the desire to partition the enormous holiday market into manageable segments. Within this process, what we today would call market segmentation, the company combined demographic concerns such as age and family size with what it knew about the dreams and aspirations of different holidaymakers. As each chapter confirmed, completely different symbolic visual content was selected for each group. Chapter Two showed how a romantic gaze utilised commonly held fears about a disappearing England and turned this into a propensity to travel amongst wealthy urbanites, predating and exceeding the motoring counterpart in the process.[3] Chapter Three examined families, an underrepresented segment in the current historiography of railway marketing, finding many ways in which the GWR translated emotions into sophisticated marketing appeals. The GWR's imagery was shown to rival others celebrated for their marketing aptitude such as Kodak.[4] Chapters Four and Five argued that customer consideration was rarely static. At the end of the 1920s the GWR renegotiated its attitude towards women, and simultaneously repositioned the outdoors leisure market.

A further conclusion based on these chapters is that the GWR's marketing was not a fixed relationship. Since the Edwardian years customers had opportunities to comment upon and help structure GWR publicity. We see this clearly in the examples of essay and photographic competitions as well as correspondence to the publicity department's staff. This not only underlines the GWR's customer focus but illuminates parallels to how marketers many years later generated 'hype' around campaigns. Additionally, it affords extra

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[3] David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, (London, 1998), pp. 64-66; D.C.H Watts, 'Evaluating British Railway Poster Advertising: The London and North Eastern Railway Between The Wars', *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser. 25:2 (2004), p. 33; Alan Bennett, 'The Great Western Railway and The Celebration of Englishness', (Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of York, 2000), pp. x-xi.

[4] John Taylor, 'Kodak and the 'English' Market Between the Wars', *Journal of Design History*, 7:1 (1994), p. 29; John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, (3rd edn., London, 2011), pp. 172-73.

insight into how integral the railway companies were to holiday fashions. In having to keep up with customer tastes, railways helped broadcast ideas about clothing, seaside decorum, body styles and fashionable activities, factors we would not normally associate with a railway company. Ultimately we cannot reveal how this imagery was interpreted by customers. Yet the fact that the publications sold well, competitions continued to draw applicants, and that the GWR remained a competitive railway strongly suggests that customers understood the underlying messages.

Key to success was how the company wielded photographs in ever more complex ways. This thesis demonstrated the company's understanding that photography could offer 'truth' as well as scope for manipulation. Numerous techniques, the use of light to illuminate certain areas of the image; photographic aspect, perspective and relative height; framing devices allowing the exclusion of undesirable scenes; the use of models and agencies; all point to a nuanced understanding of how to align visual representation with customer expectations. Published variants were selected from several possible views, sometimes being altered mechanically. Unlike posters, photographs encouraged viewers to remain unconscious of any intervening, manipulative creator,[5] and customers were encouraged to place themselves in scenes, or attempt to seek-out and replicate views with their own cameras. Taken together, this level of authorship confirms the photographs as artefacts laden with corporate messages. By no means did the GWR produce technically groundbreaking photography akin to luminaries such as Steichen in the United States.[6] However, the GWR's output was never unattractive or technically weak. It moved with the times, and GWR efforts approximated to good practice on both side of the Atlantic.[7]

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[5] Roland Marchand, *Advertising The American Dream: Making Way For Modernity, 1920-1940*, (Berkeley, 1986), p. 153.
[6] Patricia Johnson, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography*, (London, 1998), pp. 2-12.
[7] See Elspeth Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884–1929*, (Baltimore, 2005), pp. 162-208; John Hewitt and Helen Wilkinson, *Selling The Image: The*

Working with sources with unique sets of advantages and potential problems discussed in the introduction, this thesis forwarded an enhanced methodology for analysing visual sources. In part a semiotic approach was utilised; it was clear from the start that the company produced photographic marketing loaded with signs which guided viewers to a particular interpretation. To avoid a superficial reading this thesis argued that that photographs should be rigorously contextualised. By placing them into their corporate production context, outlined in Chapter One, this thesis made clearer how far photographic content was intended or researched by the publicity department. This thesis also showed how aware the GWR was of its wider cultural background; the GWR periodically looked outwards to wider commodity culture, to established visual tropes and fashions, to inform marketing. The photographs were also therefore embedded as far as possible in their cultural context. The GWR's corporate photography was shown to reflect the ideas, concerns and ambitions of society, specifically middle-class society, between 1906 and 1939. Visual sources are especially 'noisy', layered with intended meaning which risks being misinterpreted. This thesis attempted to 'tune' this noise to the correct level – the intended reading by GWR publicists rather than the historian's own predilections. Whilst searching for 'signs' in the photographs remains an important way of dissecting them for their corporate messages, by embedding them into their corporate context, contemporary culture, and against rival strategies, one achieves a more rounded vision of how the interwar marketer operated.

Establishing the GWR's significance within the wider history of marketing, on the railways and beyond, is difficult not least because of the imbalanced focus on products over services. There is some basis for comparison however. So far, despite recent research the overall impression of railways remains that they were largely unknowing and conservative in

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Work of Photographic Advertising Limited, (Bradford, 1996); Helen Wilkinson, '"The New Heraldry": Stock Photography, Visual Literacy, and Advertising in 1930s Britain', *Journal of Design History*, 10:1 (1997), pp. 23-38.

their attempts to understand passengers. This inflexibility hindered the response to motor competition in the 1920s and 1930s. We now have a clearer picture of GWR marketing which rejects the common narrative of conservatism.[8] Chapter One showed that the GWR's marketing theory approximated to that of the LMS and LNER, commonly taken as the best interwar railway marketers.[9] GWR men like Fraser and Orton proved not just capable, but vocal and innovative. Furthermore, this thesis argued that focussing on posters misrepresents the role of companies which used other mediums more prominently. Photography pictured consumers in different ways and in different groupings and 'artistry' was not confined to posters. Other railways, such as the LMS and LNER, were slow to release all-line photographic publications.[10] More research is needed, but a pertinent question would be to ask whether the GWR's competitors lost out because they were slower to utilise photographic marketing?

More scholars now suggest that a range of companies became 'marketing-oriented' in the first four decades of the twentieth century. These companies progressively recognised that for each business decision there should be recognition of the need to serve customer requirements.[11] Tedlow suggests that market segmentation based on factors other than age, gender and class occurred variously from the 1920s onwards in the United States.[12] Some argue that marketing developed to help insulate companies from competition.[13] In reshaping

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[8] Michael Bonavia, *The Four Great Railways*, (Newton Abbott, 1980), pp. 39-45; Beverley Cole and Richard Durack, *Railway Posters, 1923-1947: From the Collection of the National Railway Museum, York, England*, (New York, 1992), p. 8.
[9] John Hewitt, 'East Coast Joys: Tom Purvis and The LNER', *Journal Of Design History*, 8 (1995), pp. 291-311; Allen Middleton, *It's Quicker By Rail!: The History Of LNER Advertising*, (Stroud, 2002), pp. 40-46; Cole and Durack, *Railway Posters*, pp. 6-27; Rachael Holland, 'LNER Posters 1923-47: Aspects of Iconography, Railway and Social History', (Unpublished MA thesis, University of York, 1999), pp. 2-9.
[10] Roger Wilson, *Go Great Western: A History Of GWR Publicity*, (Newton Abbott, 1987), p. 83; Middleton, *It's Quicker By Rail!*, pp. 41-43.
[11] Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and The Marketing Revolution, 1862-1969*, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 6; Roy Church, 'New Perspectives on the History of Products, Firms, Marketing, and Consumers in Britain and the United States since the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *The Economic History Review*, 52:3 (1999), pp. 405-35.
[12] Richard Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America*, (2nd edn., Princeton, 1996), p. xxvi.
[13] Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and The Marketing Revolution, 1862-1969*, p. 24.

their advertising, companies were driven by knowledge that rational appeals based on text or data were now less effective in reaching customers; and appeal to emotion was now required.[14] On this basis, the GWR at least kept pace with the kinds of marketing techniques that many other businesses developed. For example, it was shown that Shell Oil was not the only company to share its concerns about the spoliation of the countryside with its customers, nor necessarily the best.[15] The Kodak company created a contrived image of family bliss to sell its product in an emotionally satisfying way,[16] but the GWR recognised this technique much earlier. Each chapter in this thesis, and Chapter Five in particular, showed that the GWR constantly asked whether its marketing was relevant to contemporary market conditions. One area where the GWR possibly fell short was the trend towards qualitative market research in the 1930s. Unlike companies such as Rowntree and Lever, the GWR did not use marketing specialists.[17] As a result the GWR had to develop its own quantitative and qualitative understanding of consumers which nevertheless indicated who to target and how they might be influenced. In short, and bearing in mind the limitations noted before, rather than a conservative or complacent company the GWR's marketing capabilities compared favourably with other British companies.

It could also be said that the GWR participated in what some scholars term the 'marketing revolution'. The concept captures a shift in business outlook, from production orientation to customer orientation.[18] Rowntree is said to have been a leader in the marketing

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[14] Richard W. Pollay, 'The Subsiding Sizzle: A Descriptive History of Print Advertising, 1900-1980', *The Journal of Marketing*, 49:3 (1985), p. 25; Peter Scott and James Walker, 'Advertising, promotion, and the competitive advantage of interwar British department stores', *Economic History Review*, 63:4 (2010), pp. 1105–1128; Peter Scott, 'Marketing Mass Home Ownership and the Creation of the Modern Working-class Consumer in Interwar Britain', *Business History*, 50:1 (2008), pp. 4-25.
[15] Michael Heller, 'Corporate Brand Building: Shell-Mex Ltd. In The Interwar Period', Teresa Da Silva Lopes and Paul Duguid (eds.), *Trademark, Branding and Competitiveness*, (New York, 2010), p. 209.
[16] Urry, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, p. 172; Taylor, 'Kodak and the 'English' Market Between the Wars', p. 29.
[17] Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and The Marketing Revolution, 1862-1969*, p. 295; Schwarzkopf, 'Discovering The Consumer', pp. 8-11.
[18] Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and The Marketing Revolution, 1862-1969*, pp. 6-7.

revolution which had its roots in the interwar period.[19] I have no doubt that amongst some firms at least there was a marketing revolution, and that the GWR participated in a culture which became progressively more attuned to customer needs. I would question how 'revolutionary' change was however. This thesis argued that the GWR developed its long-term strategies, but there was no abrupt revolution or quick answers for success. Certainly there were pivotal moments, but on the whole marketing *evolution* characterized the GWR, not revolution. The GWR's example shows that if some companies did experience revolutionary change then this was certainly not the rule. We should be cautious about portraying revolutionary change around the interwar period when ideas had arguably been in genesis long before this.

The GWR's case study also has wider implications for our understanding of modern British society in general. On the character of consumer society, this thesis supports the argument that long before the 1950s consumption shifted from traditional staples to new fashionable items.[20] The GWR's success, for example, came in discerning and making the most of this shift by employing emotional as opposed to strictly rational appeals to consumers. Although this thesis commented less on individual consumer perspectives, their thoughts and views expressed in company correspondence and in competitions extend this conclusion that the apparently rational calculus of the market was embedded cultural processes such as publicly displaying one's desire for a better life.[21] To take this further, this thesis also discussed how far issues of class influenced consumption and marketing and vice versa. Each chapter showed that, although the GWR went beyond a strict class division in appealing to sets of consumers, class considerations frequently informed how photographs

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[19] Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and The Marketing Revolution, 1862-1969*, p. 6.
[20] John Benson, *The Rise Of Consumer Society In Britain, 1880-1980*, (London, 1994), pp. 12-21; Sue Bowden, 'Consumption and Consumer Behaviour', in Chris Wrigley (ed.), *A Companion To Early Twentieth-Century Britain,* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 354-61.
[21] Peter Jackson, 'Introduction: Transcending Dualisms', in Peter Jackson et al., *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces*, (Oxford, 2000), p. 1.

were composed and probably how they were read. This suggests that the consumption opportunities offered by the 1930s had not fully defused class tensions; rather they encouraged greater awareness of one's station in life.[22] This is evident in the fact that whilst the GWR may have sought variously to create a class-less appeal to ensure more custom, it never truly escaped issues of class appropriateness. Being a 'good' rambler for some meant shunning noise and litter for appropriate countryside consumption which the GWR enforced, and whilst all might enjoy a crowded beach scene there was still a difference in who the truly *mass* gaze would attract. Furthermore, first and third class passengers were pictured in different attire even when the same models were used. Despite the broadening of the middle classes, as in society in general this did not mean that aspirations became sufficiently uniform to negate the subtle differences offered by marketing.

The debate surrounding Americanisation of British society was also engaged. This thesis argued that American strategies probably impacted upon marketing techniques but were by no means dominant. This extends to the Americanisation of culture too. This thesis showed that whilst a particular American film aesthetic proved popular and was utilised by the GWR, this was only deemed appropriate for certain consumers. Even then it had to be appropriately 'Anglicised'. Indeed, elsewhere ideas of Englishness were paramount in discussing the future of both towns and countryside. We also saw this issue in discussions on 'modernity'. This thesis supports Rieger's conclusion that whilst many were fascinated by modernity and the future, they were also anxious about it.[23] Modernity had to be shown 'within limits' and the GWR's marketing exhibited examples of how this was achieved. Although this thesis has focussed on marketing, it has also demonstrated that railways were deeply embedded in British culture, and how this has the potential to offer fresh perspectives

[22] For more on this debate generally see Benson, *The Rise Of Consumer Society In Britain,* pp. 204-26.
[23] Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and The Culture Of Modernity In Britain and Germany, 1890-1945*, (Cambridge, 2004), p. 2.

into debates concerning, amongst others, modernity, Englishness, Americanisation and consumer society.

There are several prospects for future research. Evidently, comparative study into how railways[24] and other companies used photography would help to contextualise this thesis' conclusions. Comparison could also extend to posters. Photographs were not simply subsidiaries to the colourful, whimsical posters, but there were substantial differences based on the limits of the two technologies, as well as some similarities in the overall thrust of visual messages. Unless attention is paid to both, we risk completely misinterpreting the marketing aims of railway companies. Furthermore, in the course of researching this thesis, the author conducted a sample study of contemporary advertising journals *Advertiser's Weekly* and *Advertising World* to clarify the railways' impact on the wider advertising industry. Railway representatives appeared in these journals and were viewed as competitive and innovative. This corroborates the overall conclusion of railway marketing as sophisticated, but that wider information on this has been neglected by historians. Research into how transport companies presented themselves in these journals would offer a useful way of contextualising and corroborating the conclusions on railway marketing offered here.

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The picturing process as it happened on the GWR was complex. Picturing passengers meant first imagining them, their preferences, and how these differed between market segments. The company used photographic capabilities to the fullest extent to spread these messages: the sheer range of photographs demonstrates the company's commitment to

[24] Both in Britain and the United States: the US is variously argued for as the birthplace of modern marketing, and although some have tentatively compared trans-Atlantic railway marketing, it would be useful to know more about the intercontinental discourse which Chapter One suggested was underway.

treating passengers not as a homogeneous mass, but as individuals with particular wants and desires. In conclusion, railway marketing, at least on the GWR but probably elsewhere too, was far more sophisticated than a consideration of pictorial posters alone reveals. The GWR possessed increasingly adept strategies for growing the holiday market, dealing with competition and encouraging the right customer to select the right service.