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Michael French

Making Commercial Travellers:

Marketing men in Britain, 1930s-1960s

Over the past thirty years the growing significance of consumption, brands and marketing for business success and economic growth has prompted greater interest in their historical ancestry.¹ Initially research focused on the emergence of department stores and explorations of the roles of retailing and consumerism.² The political and social significance of co-operatives attracted renewed interest as evidence of the differing visions and ideologies of consumerism that contended for mass popular support in many developed economies.³ This article explores the changing fortunes of a still under-researched role in selling that of the commercial traveller, travelling salesman or sales representatives in Britain from the 1930s to the early 1960s. The changing occupational label itself testifies not simply to their mobility but also to aspects of a contested processes involved in the <<modernisation>> of selling. The

¹ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's advance through twentieth century Europe*, Cambridge, Mass., 2005; Lizabeth Cohen, *A consumer's republic: the politics of mass consumption in post-war America*, New York, 2003.

² Bill Lancaster, *The department store*, London, 1995; John Benson et al(eds), *The evolution of retail systems, 1800-1914*, Leicester, 1992); Stanley Chapman, *Merchant enterprise in Britain: from the industrial revolution to World War I* Cambridge, 1992; TAB Corley, 'Consumer marketing in Britain, 1914-1960', *Business History*, 1987, 65-83; Geoffrey Jones et al (eds), *Adding value: brands and marketing in food and drink*, London, 1994; Richard Tedlow et al, (eds), *The rise and fall of mass marketing*, London, 1993; Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the marketing revolution, 1862-1969*, Cambridge, 1995; Geoffrey Crossick et al, (eds), *Cathedrals of consumption: the european department store, 1850-1939*, Aldershot, 1999; Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for pleasure: women in the making of London's west end*, Princeton, 2001; Frank Mort, *Cultures of consumption: masculinities and social space in late twentieth-century Britain*, London, 1996; Thomas Richards, *The commodity culture of Victorian England: advertising and spectacle, 1850-1914*, Stanford, 1990. Christopher Breward, *The hidden consumer: masculinities, fashion and city life, 1860-1914*, Manchester, 1999; Richard Coopey et al, (eds) *Mail order retailing in Britain: a business and social history*, Oxford, 2005.

³ Peter Gurney, *Co-operative culture and the politics of consumption in England, c1870-1930*, Manchester, 1996; Matthew Hilton and Martin Daunton, (eds), *The politics of consumption: citizenship and material culture in Europe and America*, Oxford, 2001; Matthew Hilton, 'The fable of the sheep; or private virtues, public vices: the consumer revolution of the twentieth century', *Past and Present*, 176, 2002, 222-256; Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in twentieth century Britain: the search for a historical movement*, Cambridge, 2003; Sean O'Connell, *Credit and community: working class debt in the UK since 1880*, Oxford, 2009.

article highlights continuing tensions between these forces of <<modernisation>> in sales practices and the individualistic approach that salesmen valued. It considers the ways in which economic depression, wartime rationing and post-war austerity impacted on the evolution of salesmanship in Britain from the 1930s to the early 1960s.

The occupation of commercial traveller emerged during the eighteenth century in the form of «bagmen», who rode on horseback to distribute goods to trade customers who were either retailers or manufacturers. As such they were distinct from peddlers who sold goods directly to the public at fairs.⁴ They displayed goods, samples or trade catalogues to customers; obtained orders; and collected and remitted payments on previous orders.⁵ Moreover commercial travellers were important sources of intelligence about the affairs of their customers, the activities of competitors and the general state of business.⁶ Their role in Britain attracted attention from pioneering individual studies by Jeffreys, Payne and Westerfield, but generally business historians treated them as largely invisible foot-soldiers, their qualities and effectiveness were assumed, in effect, to reflect general characteristics of firms, industries or economies⁷. Critical appraisals of British entrepreneurship compared British travellers unfavourably with multilingual and well-resourced German

⁴ Margot Finn, *The character of credit: personal debt in English culture, 1740-1914*, Cambridge, 2003; Mike French, 'On the road: travelling salesmen and experiences of mobility in Britain before 1939', *Journal of Transport History*, December 2010, 133-150.

⁵ S.R.H. Jones, 'The country trade and the marketing and distribution of Birmingham hardware, 1750-1810', *Business History*, Vol. 26, No. 1 1984, 24-42.

⁶ S Chapman, *Merchant enterprise in Britain: from the industrial revolution to World War 1*, Cambridge, 1992 especially chapter 6 on the home trade houses; Richard Davenport-Hines, *Markets and bagmen: studies in the history of marketing and British industrial performance, 1830-1939*, Aldershot, 1986; Terence Gourvish and Richard Wilson, *The British brewing industry, 1830-1980*, Cambridge, 1994, 152-156, 204.

⁷ JB Jeffreys, *Retail trading in Britain, 1850-1950*, Cambridge, 1954; Peter Payne, *Rubber and railways in the nineteenth century: a study of the Spencer papers* Liverpool, 1961; Ray Westerfield, *Middlemen in English business*, New Haven, 1915.

salesmen capturing British export markets, particularly in engineering.⁸ Equally the innovative marketing techniques of large-scale American corporations were taken as markers of British backwardness in some consumer goods trades. For Chandler or Friedman, small and medium-sized British companies lacked the capacity to develop their marketing capabilities and larger firms were too cautious to undertake the required combination of innovations in production, marketing and managerial hierarchies.⁹ From these perspectives British salesmen were either as poorly equipped in terms of education and expertise or deprived of the key tools of a modernising trade by conservative employers who took no interest in or actively rejected new practices.¹⁰

In these analyses the key issues were the organisational structures within which commercial travellers operated and the character of their sales practices. Structurally salesmen either worked for wholesalers or agencies, who distributed goods on behalf of many producers or they were employed directly by manufacturers. The use of wholesalers or agency houses was well-established by 1850 with some specialising on overseas trade. Chapman emphasised the key role of merchant houses, especially in London, for Britain's textile trade.¹¹ Where industries clustered in particular districts, such as the Sheffield cutlery, West Midland hardware or

⁸ Michael Dintenfass, *The decline of industrial Britain, 1870-1980*, London, 1992, chapter 5; Bernard Elbaum et al (eds), *The Decline of the British economy*, Oxford, 1986. For a summary of the overall debate see Tom Nicholas, 'Enterprise and Management' in Roderick Floud et al (eds), *The Cambridge economic history of modern Britain, volume II, economic maturity, 1860-1939*, 227-252, Cambridge, 2004.

⁹ Alfred Chandler, *Scale and scope: the dynamics of American capitalism*, Cambridge, Mass., 1990; Walter Friedman, *Birth of a salesman: the transformation of selling in America*, Cambridge, Mass., 2004.

¹⁰ For the classic critique of British entrepreneurship see Derek Aldcroft, 'The development of British industry and foreign competition, 1875-1914' *Economic History Review*, 42, 1964, 113-134. For a later and rather different perspective see the collection of industry studies in Derek Aldcroft (ed), *The development of British industry and foreign competition, 1875-1914: studies in industrial enterprise*, (London, 1968); for a social and cultural analysis see Martin Weiner, *English culture and the decline of the industrial spirit, 1850-1980*, Cambridge, 2004.

¹¹ Stanley Chapman, 'The Decline and Rise of Textile Merchanting, 1880-1990' in Mary B Rose(ed), *International competition and strategic response in the textile industries since 1870*, London, 1991, 171-190.

Birmingham jewellery trades, wholesalers were closely linked to the numerous small and medium-sized enterprises.¹² These industrial districts allowed small manufacturers to reap the advantages of specialisation in production and access to skilled labour and to draw on the services of the wholesalers to maximise the distribution of their products in an alternative paradigm to that of volume production and distribution within a single large firm. For manufacturers, selling via wholesalers reduced overhead costs plus the time and expense required to establish connections with large numbers of individual retailers. In the most direct defence of British sales methods, Nicholas argued that merchant houses were highly effective mechanisms for reducing risks in distributing generic products, that manufacturers deployed their own travellers or those of agencies in a sophisticated way and that extensive overseas branch networks were evidence of initiative and enterprise.¹³ More recently, Hannah emphasised that decentralised systems of production and distribution were well-adapted to serving the densely-clustered urban economy in Britain supported by sophisticated transport, financial and commercial infrastructures.¹⁴

Nonetheless by 1900 some manufacturers were directly hiring their own salesmen particularly in the grocery and branded consumer goods sectors, textiles and drapery, which were also among the first mover industries in North America and Europe.¹⁵ Where a manufacturer had a distinctive brand, establishing their own salesforce increased their capacity to influence the effort devoted to their selling own

¹² Stephen Jones, 'The country trade and the marketing and distribution of Birmingham hardware, 1750-1810', *Business History*, 26, 1984, 24-42; Andrew Popp, 'Building the market: John Shaw of Wolverhampton and commercial travelling in early nineteenth century England', *Business History*, 49, 2007, 321-347.

¹³ Donald McCloskey, *Enterprise and trade in Victorian Britain: essays in historical economics*, London, 1981; Stephen Nicholas, 'The overseas marketing performance of British industry, 1870-1914', *Economic History Review*, 1984, 489-506.

¹⁴ Leslie Hannah, 'Logistics, Market Size, and Giant Plants in the early twentieth century: a global view', *Journal of Economic History*, 68, 2008, 46-79.

¹⁵ BJ Avari, *British commercial travellers and their organisations, 1850-1914*, University of Manchester, MA thesis, 1987, 23-31, 34; Payne, *Rubber and railways in the nineteenth century: a study of the Spencer papers*, Liverpool, 1961.

goods compared with agents who represented several brands.¹⁶ Closer contact with customers offered greater scope to promote repeat business and to acquire information about market conditions. Not all industries were suited to direct marketing by manufacturers, particularly where products remained essentially generic, hence the persistence of wholesalers and agents. And not all firms possessed the scale, capital or initiative required to engage salesmen, so in many sectors direct selling by manufacturers co-existed with use of wholesalers and agents.

The entry of manufacturers into wholesaling via their own salesmen has also been associated with the modernisation of sales methods that, arguably, changed the appearance, style and behaviour of salesmen, a shift encapsulated in the shift from the commercial traveller to the sales representative. The literature on US business identifies a transition between 1880 and 1930 from «drummers» who aggressively promoting sales with little thought of future orders to more sophisticated salesmen concerned with building the long-term relationships with retailers that would generate repeat orders.¹⁷ Each salesman was supported by the framework of advertising, designed to draw in customers, and by offering advice, even scripted sales pitches, companies aimed to maximise the effectiveness of their salesmen. Such changes ran alongside the continuation of wholesalers and agencies as important distributors in certain sectors of American manufacturing.¹⁸

Roy Church's analysis of the emergence of «modern» practices in Britain from the 1870s questioned the applicability of interpretations derived from the

¹⁶ For an excellent example see Roman Rossfeld, 'Suchard and the emergence of traveling salesmen in Switzerland, 1860-1920', *Business History*, 82, 2008, 736–737.

¹⁷ Susan Strasser, 'The smile that pays: the culture of travelling salesmen' in James Gilbert et al, (eds), *The mythmaking frame of mind: social imagination and American culture*, Belmont, Ca., 1992; Timothy Spears, *100 years on the road: the travelling salesman in American culture*, New Haven, 1995; W Friedman, *Birth of a salesman: the transformation of selling in America*, Cambridge, Mass., 2004; Olivier Zunz, *Making America corporate, 1870-1920*, Chicago, 1990.

¹⁸ Philip Scranton, *Endless novelty: specialty production and American industrialization, 1865–1925*, Princeton, 1998; Howell Harris, 'Inventing the US stove industry, c.1815-1875: making and selling the first universal consumer durable', *Business History Review*, 82, 2008, 701-734.

evolution of US marketing.¹⁹ While acknowledging the transfer of American practices, he emphasised that the most innovative marketers in Britain were small and medium-sized firms, largely family-run, using technologies that were not mass production. These firms created specialist sales roles to promote their brands more actively to retailers and consumers and increased their advertising expenditures. Innovations in marketing and sales techniques were sources of competitive advantage that generated larger firms rather than being a product of prior corporate transformation. Church's analysis re-emphasised the effectiveness of diverse distribution systems in integration of Britain's internal market and its wider international trading system.²⁰ From this angle British sales practices developed internally rather than being dependent on adopting innovations from North America or elsewhere. Fitzgerald suggested that British and US businesses were fairly similar in their marketing practices and effectiveness in the early twentieth century, despite the differences in their domestic markets in terms of urbanisation and income distribution.²¹ Echoing Nicholas and Hannah, Fitzgerald concluded that the legacy of the 'early start' on industrialisation created distribution system that was efficient and durable enough to persist into the 1950s and 1960s, reducing the pressures for radical change.²² His list of leading British firms in the confectionery, soap, tobacco and pharmaceutical trades as innovative marketers corresponded to Church's analysis.

¹⁹ Roy Church, 'New perspectives on the history of products, firms, marketing and consumers in Britain and the United States since the mid-nineteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 52, 1999, 405-435; Roy Church, 'Salesmen and the transformation of selling in Britain and the US in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', *Economic History Review*, 61, 2008, 695-725.

²⁰ Leslie Hannah, 'Logistics, market Size, and giant plants in the early twentieth century: a global view', *Journal of Economic History*, 68, 2008, 46-79

²¹ Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the marketing revolution, 1862-1969*, Cambridge 1995; Robert Fitzgerald, 'Marketing and distribution' in Geoffrey Jones et al (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of business history*, Oxford, 2007, 396-419.

²² Robert Fitzgerald, 'Marketing and distribution' in Geoffrey Jones et al (eds), *The Oxford handbook of business history*, Oxford, 2007, 410-411.

The current literature on commercial travellers overstates the connections between organisational change, specifically vertical integration by manufacturers into wholesaling, and changes in sales practice. French and Popp have shown that key attributes associated with <<modern>> salesmanship were present in Britain earlier than is usually assumed.²³ From the early nineteenth century manufacturers and wholesalers were interested in building customer relations and repeat orders through their salesmen's engagement with retailers. Often this strategy was expressed through emphasising the importance of the salesman's character, personal connections with customers and accumulated knowledge of a particular trade. Positive images of commercial travellers consistently emphasised honesty, respectable behaviour and a sober appearance, exactly the personal qualities identified with <<modern>> salesmanship. Such attributes plus established trade connections and experience featured in job adverts from firms, in 'position wanted' adverts from salesmen and in an extensive self-improvement literature aimed at current or prospective salesmen. And these characteristics were fostered by the extensive associational culture among travelling salesmen.²⁴ Certainly the <<drummer>> or disreputable salesman remained a presence in actual sales practice as well as a stock character in popular culture. The modernising tendencies were only one facet of British commercial travelling and did not prevent salesmen from resisting or resenting corporate efforts to shape their working practices. There were recurring negative comments about sales managers or in-appropriate American methods that reflected a resistance to <<modernisation>>. But these were disputes about control and autonomy and how best to engage with

²³ Michael French and Andrew Popp, 'Ambassadors of commerce: the commercial traveller in British culture, 1800-1939', *Business History Review*, 82(4) 2008, 789-814.

²⁴ Christopher P Hosgood, "'The "knights of the road": commercial travellers and the culture of the commercial room in late-Victorian and Edwardian England", *Victorian Studies*, 37, 4 (Summer 1994): 519-529 and Christopher P Hosgood, 'The "language of business": shopkeepers and the business community in Victorian England', *Victorian Review*, 17 (1991), 35-50.

customers rather than about the value of establishing good customer relationships in order to promote long-run sales.

The commercial rooms, reserved for salesmen, emphasised their distinctiveness and the hierarchy within the fraternity of salesmen provided status, rituals around eating and drinking and gossip that was a form of regulation of behaviour. Expense accounts and time on the road allowed space for salesmen to be consumers which located them in the structured, but sexualised, world of being served. In this respect travelling salesmen were part of the shifting relationships and imagery of the barmaid or the actress in the Victorian era. For Peter Bailey such sexualised glamour aided selling of drink or entertainment with boundaries structured by the bar, theatre or other premises, but open to transgression.²⁵ Newspaper reports of salesmen involved in adultery, drunkenness and sexual assaults testify to the crossing of boundaries. Salesmen interacted with chambermaids and waitresses in hotels and with male servants, notably the men known as the «Boots» who carried luggage, cleaned footwear and provided general assistance. Overall the salesman's commercial role provided additional status reflected in access to service to assist his own service role.

Looking forward into another <<new era>>: continuity and change in the development of <<modern>> marketing in Britain.

The co-existence of wholesale houses and direct selling by manufacturers indicates the absence of any sudden dramatic transformation in the corporate organisation and working practices of British commercial travellers. There were new developments but

²⁵ Peter Bailey, 'Parasexuality and glamour: the Victorian barmaid as cultural prototype', *Gender and History*, 2 June 1990, 148-172.

also significant dislocations between the 1930s and early 1960s. In this respect the confectionery trade provides a valuable case as it was one of the sectors in which leading firms gradually developed their use of brands and advertising. The reminiscences of a group of 25 Rowntree travellers, who retired between 1927 and 1947 having started on the road between 1897 and 1922, provide a rare insight into salesmen's opinions about selling practices and <<modernisation>> in the early twentieth century, which highlight the piecemeal nature of changes in their activities.²⁶ Rowntree's management was cautious about advertising and marketing in the 1890s. Nonetheless the firm moved steadily into direct selling: its salesforce expanded from 8 in 1883 to around 30 in the 1890s before expanding rapidly to 100 in 1907 and to 152 by 1938.²⁷ Travellers who began in the early 1900s recalled sales methods as highly individual. There was some central direction from either Joseph Rowntree, who was cautious about advertising, or J Bromilow, who oversaw sales from 1892, might meet with a traveller occasionally.²⁸ A basic salary plus commission was used in order to create an incentive to increase sales, but advertising was limited, except for cocoa, and there was little direction of the actual work of selling. One salesman recalled that <<you were your own master and left to work the ground to the best of your ability>> and another noted that <<I was left to paddle my own canoe>>. Even a traveller who began in 1920 stated that there were <<not any specific selling methods>> just a week's training with another salesman before being sent out with a <<sample bag, a list of customers and good wishes>>.

²⁶ The material was collected by the firm as material for a history of the sales force in the late 1940s. R/DD/S/17, Letters and completed questionnaires from retired sales representatives, c1947-1948, Rowntree & Co. archives, Borthwick Institute, University of York.

²⁷ For 1890s see R/HIR/9/5 travellers records; for 1907 see the letter from FW Clark, Rowntree & Co R/DD/S/17; for 1938 see R/DH/CS/16/20 Travellers Register, 1938 all in the Rowntree & Co archives, Borthwick Institute, University of York.

²⁸ Although Bromilow was sales manager according to the firm's company history, FW Clark recalled him as Chief Ledger Clerk and noted 'JB was never known as Sales Manager', letter from FW Clark, Rowntree & Co R/DD/S/17 in the Rowntree & Co archives, Borthwick Institute, University of York. Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the marketing revolution, 1862-1969*, Cambridge, 1995, 67.

All of the Rowntree travellers, however, identified the period after World War I as an era of change or <<modernisation>> which they defined in terms of the appointment of sales executives in head office and the development of regional sales manager posts. Additionally a new hierarchy was created from senior travellers with supervisory duties to auxiliary staff that assisted travellers and female branch office assistants based in the firm's key showrooms. Company circulars provided greater central control over information flows and sales conferences were used to educate travellers on the firm's products as well as to draw on their knowledge of market conditions. There was an increasing focus on direct contacts with retailers. By the late 1920s advertising was used more extensively and the firm began to reduce its number of lines in order to concentrate on the best-selling brands. For Rowntree's travellers these changes were accompanied by reductions in the size of their individual territories, more intensive working within these grounds and a greater emphasis on salaries with reduced scope to earn bonuses. While organisational systems and marketing strategies altered first, changes in travellers' ways of working on the road were far more gradual. Many of the Rowntree salesmen continued to emphasise the value of individual autonomy between the wars. One salesman, however, identified 1936 as a point when District Sales Managers began teaching travellers new methods including the use of specific sales pitches for new lines, transferring salesmen between territories and expanding the use of office machinery in sales offices.

The Rowntree case points to <<modernisation>> gradually and with its main focus being organisational changes to supervise an expanded workforce. Cadbury and Fry too expanded their direct selling in the 1920s, but the shift from wholesalers to direct dealing with retailers was not decisive. According to a Macintosh executive, Nestle's success in relying on wholesalers 'eventually converted Messrs Cadbury and

Fry back to ‘the wholesaler and the five week journey’, in other words combining sales via wholesalers to smaller accounts with less frequent direct visits by the firms’ own travellers to larger retailers.²⁹ Macintosh, like Rowntree, sought to reduce its product range so that its best salesmen concentrated on pushing the most popular lines. Smaller confectionery firms continued to rely on the wholesale houses to distribute their products. The confectionery wholesalers felt that the weight of contemporary economic and management thought regarded middlemen as obsolete, but defended their commercial place and value.³⁰ Their rhetoric reflected the reality that wholesalers and agencies remained competitive. A sign of the diversity of distribution sources was the inability of the leading confectionery firms to prevent price-cutting, even on their own lines, despite intensive efforts in the early 1930s. Efforts to deny supplies of popular brands to price-cutting retailers were thwarted by their access to wholesale houses willing to discount especially in the London market.³¹

The pattern of producers integrating forward into distribution occurred in the interwar textile trades. Manufacturers, including Hollins or Lyle and Scott, expanded their direct links with retailers at the expense of wholesalers, but the ‘old style textile merchants’, particularly the London houses, still accounted for half or more of total sales.³² Both manufacturers and merchants hired extra salesmen, on a commission-only and temporary basis, to work in the spring and autumn sales seasons that were so important in the fashion trades. Articles in the main trade journal complained about a loss of the ‘bond of brotherhood’ between commercial travellers and the directors of

²⁹ For comments at the Macintosh sales conference, 1932 see M/S/ELF/8, Rowntree & Co archives, Borthwick Institute, University of York.

³⁰ See a speech by president of the British Federation of Wholesale Confectioners reported in *Confectionery Journal*, 31 August 1933, 1-4.

³¹ On price-cutting see Resale Price Maintenance file in R/DD/S/3, Rowntree & Co archives, Borthwick Institute, University of York.

³² Stanley Chapman, ‘The decline and rise of textile merchanting, 1880-1990’ in Mary B Rose(ed), *International competition and strategic response in the textile industries since 1870*, London, 1991, 181-182.

wholesale houses as well as less security of earnings. Such changes, intensified by the depressed state of trade, were regarded as a loss of personal connection and status.³³

One letter, critical of the increased use of commission-only contracts, claimed that ‘Apparently the only necessary qualifications are a car, a decent suit of clothes and a certain knowledge of the English language’.³⁴ In other sectors the increasing specialisation of sales roles was apparent in the growth in the number of door-to-door salesman, principally for consumer goods such as vacuum cleaners, encyclopaedias, brushes and cheap household items. As Peter Scott has shown, such direct marketing was critical to the diffusion of new consumer goods, but the considerable effort in cold-calling and demonstrating products yielded low earnings. Consequently door-to-door salesmen only worked for short periods which, along with their reliance on ‘one-off’ sales, meant that there was no incentive to build customers relations.³⁵

Commercial travellers regarded themselves as superior to, and separate from, door-to-door salesmen in terms of status and professionalism. This attitude reflects genuine differences in income and status, but the growing differentiation among salesmen, plus the depression of the 1930s, accentuated uncertainties about <<modernisation>>, however gradual. The frequent comments about the greater morality of ‘legitimate’ commercial travellers point to a recurring anxiety that reflected the risks of downward occupational and social mobility, especially during trade recessions. Even sales to trade customers could be intensely competitive, resulting in low or uncertain incomes, notably in the fashion-driven textile and clothing sectors.³⁶

³³ *The Drapers Record*, 8 October 1930, 107, 3 January 1931, 23, and 30 May 1931.

³⁴ *The Drapers Record*, 19 August 1934, 14.

³⁵ For the different branches of selling see Peter Scott, ‘Managing door-to-door sales of vacuum cleaners in interwar Britain’, *Business History Review*, 82, 2008, 761-762.

³⁶ Michael French and Andrew Popp, ‘Ambassadors of commerce: the commercial traveller in British culture, 1800-1939’, *Business History Review*, 82, 2008, 801-802, 810-811.

In the event interwar processes of <<modernisation>> in marketing were checked by World War II and the austerity that followed, particularly in the innovative consumer trades.³⁷ Wartime controls on raw materials, production and distribution, including the rationing of food, clothing and other consumer goods, progressively reduced the scope for salesmen to influence orders, whether employed by manufacturers or wholesalers.³⁸ The confectionery trade was subject to rationing of sugar, its main raw material, as well as to limits on civilian purchasing. Petrol rationing restricted the operations of travelling salesmen and delivery drivers. The creation of regional distribution zones for most goods, in order to reduce transport distances and fuel use, blocked canvassing for orders nationally. Wartime controls also brought an end to price-cutting and other competitive pressures, further altering the role of salesmen.

In this climate firms re-trenched: in 1941 *Confectionery News* reported that most commercial travellers were on commission only with meagre supplies available.³⁹ Travellers were called into military service. Of 209 travelling staff listed in Rowntree's register in 1944, 128, representing 64 percent, were on military service. The firm's active travelling staff declined from 152 in 1938 to 41 by 1944, with additional reductions in the number of auxiliary and branch office employees.⁴⁰ Older travellers stayed on past conventional retirement, but operated in a more restricted role, distributing scarce goods within government defined regions. The Newcastle branch of the leading travellers association saw its membership decline from 485 to 402 between 1938 and 1944, indicating greater resilience across the broad range of

³⁷ Roman Rossfeld, 'Au service de mercure', *Enterprises et histoire*, 66(1), 2012, 194-211.

³⁸ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: rationing, controls and consumption, 1939-1955*, Oxford, 2001, chapter 4.

³⁹ *Confectionery News*, 74, 3 January 1941, 28.

⁴⁰ R/DH/CS/16/20 Travellers' Register, 1938 and R/DH/CS/16/26 Travellers' Register, 1944 in Rowntree & Co archives, Borthwick Institute, University of York.

firms and sectors represented. During the war 117 of the branch's members went into military service during the war, in line with the rate for adult men under fifty years old.⁴¹ Conscription, physical damage to offices and supply shortages undermined many wholesale houses, particular the London textile and publishing houses. The impact of controls was apparent in a series of advertisements by a Leeds drapery firm in 1944 which highlighted the goods which they were not able to supply. Under the title of 'Reflections of a Restricted Rep', Mr Jimmy James, an genuine salesman, featured as a cartoon character detailing the shortages of gloves, corsets, curtains, elastics and a variety of materials.⁴² Retailers, traders and delivery drivers not travellers operated the widespread black markets.⁴³ Arguably even the negative images associated with salesmen carried less weight. The ageing cohort of wartime commercial travellers were more respectable than criminal black marketers, symbolised by the image of the 'spiv', and was less mobile, less socially valued and perhaps less disreputable than men on military service.⁴⁴

After 1945 governments restrained domestic consumption in favour of promoting exports that would earn foreign exchange. There were campaigns to revive pre-war export trades, especially in the old imperial and commonwealth countries, and to build new markets in the United States for luxury items, such as motor cars and whisky, in order to increase dollar earnings. Firms restored or initiated overseas agency networks and dispatched executives and salesmen abroad more readily. The

⁴¹ AS/CTI/3/10 for 1889-1939 *Jubilee Handbook of the Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch of the United Commercial Travellers Association*, 1 and AS/CTI/1/9 for Minutes, 1942-1947, Tyne and Wear Archive Service, Newcastle; Juliet Gardner, *Wartime: Britain, 1939-1945*, London, 2004, 82.

⁴² *The Drapers Record*, 25 March 1944, 24, 22 April 1944, 35.

⁴³ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: rationing, controls and consumption, 1939-1955*, Oxford, 2001, 153, 157-159; Edward Smithies, *Crime in wartime: a social history of crime in world war II*, London, 1982, 4, 56-59;

⁴⁴ On the spiv see David Hughes, 'The spivs' in Michael Sissons and Phillip French(eds), *Age of austerity*, London, 1963, 69-88; Steve Chibnall, 'Pulp versus penguins: paperbacks go to war' in Pat Kirkham and David Thom(eds), *War culture: social change and changing experience in world war II*, London, 1995, 131-149; Mark Roodhouse, *Black market Britain: 1939-1955*, Oxford, 2013.

desire for a quick expansion of exports encouraged some producers to rely more on overseas agencies, with better knowledge of local conditions, rather than dispatching their own salesmen or risking expensive investments in their own branch networks. More work is needed on this new generation of travelling salesmen in the late 1940s and early 1950s since, like their Victorian and Edwardian predecessors, their activities have been assumed to reflect higher level political and industrial diplomacy relating to post-war reconstruction. Even potentially exotic overseas travel involved mundane elements. Advice for overseas sales representatives in 1950 recommended packing a portable typewriter, all brown clothes (for ease of use), an attaché case, chocolate, biscuits, torch, code book, spare keys, overcoat with removable lining, and spare passport style photographs in case needed for completing official documents at borders.⁴⁵

At home the processes of restoring civilian demand and pre-war sales systems were challenging. As zoning ended in 1946 manufacturers planned for the resumption of nationwide distribution, advertising the return of their brands to regions from which they had been excluded since 1939. The new prospects were reflected in the revival of the membership of the Newcastle branch of the commercial travellers association. From 402 in 1944, membership increased to 574 in 1945, 697 in 1947 and reached 733 by 1950.⁴⁶ Where, as in confectionery, rationing remained in place to 1954, employment rose more slowly. The pressures were apparent when the board of Macintosh, a small firm that manufactured chocolates and toffees, proposed to reduce its sales staff in 1947.⁴⁷ The firm had 84 travelling salesmen compared to the 112 that it had employed immediately before the outbreak of war. Faced by this internal threat,

⁴⁵ Oscar Phillips, *International bagman*, London, 1950, 10-16.

⁴⁶ AS/CTI/1/9 Minutes, 1942-1947 and AS/CTI/1/10, Minutes, 1947-1953, Tyne and Wear Archive Service, Newcastle.

⁴⁷ M/S/5/11 Report on sales conference, 1950, Rowntree Archive, Borthwick Institute, University of York.

the firm's sales director defended his staff and resources, arguing that travellers were essential to build business and goodwill. With a curious logic, he argued that «in these non-competitive days I can assure the Board that the traveller has to carry out his normal duties, except of course, that he does not sell.» Salesmen's visits to retailers were presented as an essential defence of reputation and goodwill that were investments in preparation for the eventual return of normal market conditions. In effect his case was that selling was less important than building relationships that would lead to future sales.

Even in 1950 scarcity limited diminished the value or purpose of selling: Macintosh's firm's premium line, Quality Street chocolates, were reportedly 'under the counter items' that retailers held back for special customers.⁴⁸ The sales manager acknowledged that supplies for the home were determined by the production and planning departments after export sales had been prioritised. The war's dislocating effects on trading were reflected in the reports of a salesman from one of Dundee's jute manufacturers during 1948. Pre-war customers ordered less than before, had switched suppliers, or now used different materials as a result of wartime shortages. One client reportedly «confessed they had entirely forgotten about Baxter Brothers, not having seen anyone for such a long time».⁴⁹ In Bradford the salesman managed fewer calls than anticipated through being «detained at some of the places explaining away 10 years absence».⁵⁰ Readjustments after the war also involved bargaining between individual salesmen and their employers. For instance, a brewery traveller agreed to give up selling to free houses, but requested that he retain part of the

⁴⁸ M/S/ELF/47 Memo JR Crawford to the Directors, 14 March 1947, Rowntree Archive, Borthwick Institute, University of York.

⁴⁹ Dundee University archives, Baxters, MS11/8/9, representatives report, 30 April 1948.

⁵⁰ Dundee University archives, Baxters, MS11/8/9, representatives report, 27 April 1948.

commission from business that he had developed over the previous thirteen years.⁵¹ The brewer was content to add another salesman to the business, but proposed a major reduction in the existing traveller's salary on the grounds that post-war sales growth had been in exceptionally favourable conditions, essentially contesting the salesman's individual contribution. Cultivating contacts, allocating scarce products and assessing competition featured more than making sales in many trades in the late 1940s, limiting <<modernisation>> of sales methods. Generally austerity in the post-war home market accentuated pre-war strategies of reducing the range of products sold, but gave little incentive to innovate in marketing.

After World War 1 there had been a flood of ex-servicemen into sales careers, which travellers' associations had seen as an over-supply of labour that depressed earnings generally. With older salesmen retiring once the war ended, there were job openings. And the new generation were more likely to begin as salesmen rather than serving time in clerical or warehouse posts. In 1945 UCTA and the Incorporated Sales Managers' Association (ISMA) agreed on the need for standards of practice to regulate the employment of salesmen.⁵² Both organisations feared that too many men would enter selling after the war, depressing earnings. Sales managers tried to deter new entrants to sales work, fearing that repetition of the post-1918 inflow of ex-servicemen and the unemployed would depress the quality of staff.⁵³ One response was a UCTA/ISMA initiative establishing local panels to interview ex-servicemen to decide if they were suitable for a career in sales.⁵⁴ In this context UCTA published its own guides to *Standards of Practice* and *Entry to Salesmanship* designed to educate

⁵¹ GUAS Brewing Archive, Maclay and Co M8/2/3 letters AB Wright to Geo Reed, 27/8/1944 and Geo Reid to AB Wright, 22/4/1947.

⁵² *The Drapers Record*, 6 October 1945, 11.

⁵³ National Archives, London, LAB 8/1130.

⁵⁴ AS/CTI/1/9 Minutes, 1942-1947 and AS/CTI/1/10, Minutes, 1947-1953, Tyne and Wear Archive Service, Newcastle.

new entrants. By 1949 it had established an education scheme with diploma examinations in association with local schools and colleges.⁵⁵ General texts on sales practice appeared as aids for salesmen studying for examinations and proclaiming an era of 'planned' salesmanship involving market research, advertising, and a systematic approach.⁵⁶ Company training schemes remained more basic, usually pairing a newcomer with an established salesman before giving them their own area. When rationing of confectionery ended in 1953 the Manufacturing Confectioners' Commercial Travellers Association (MCCTA) estimated that 50 percent of salesmen had «no experience of selling in a competitive market» after fourteen years of controls.⁵⁷ In response MCCTA developed its own educational campaign, including a two day sales conference, aimed at equipping recent entrants to operate in less regulated conditions. Speakers re-stated the long-established ideal type of the knowledgeable, restrained and positive commercial traveller and the importance of not being too pushy or too talkative. Such schemes point to systematic efforts to shape working practice of a new generation of salesmen after 1945, but much of the education reiterated nineteenth century images of the <<model>> traveller for a new era.

The situation reflected a broader and continuing debate over the extent, nature and merits of modernisation in marketing and indeed in all aspects of business. During the 1940s and 1950s policy makers made considerable efforts to disseminate information about American manufacturing and marketing practices in Europe with the intention of raising productivity, modernising business methods and underpinning

⁵⁵ AS/CTI/1/9 Minutes, 1942-1947 and AS/CTI/1/10, Minutes, 1947-1953, Tyne and Wear Archive Service, Newcastle.

⁵⁶ CF Edwards, *Commercial travelling*, London, 1952.

⁵⁷ *Confectionery News*, 5 June 1953, p.17, 31-33; 19 June 1953, pp.30-31; 28 August 1953, 24. For coverage of the selling convention see *Confectionery News*, 23 October 1953, 22-26, 31.

economic growth.⁵⁸ Even with such powerful advocacy of change, there was widespread questioning within business about whether US methods were applicable to British markets. Such scepticism was echoed in the attitudes of salesmen who reiterated their long-standing argument that personal qualities and autonomy were the key components of effective selling. This focus on individual expertise and effort rather than corporate direction was reflected in tensions between salesmen and sales managers. An anecdote portrayed a «quick and intelligent» gundog called salesman which was re-named sales manager: «[...] now all he does is sit around and yap, yap, yap all day long.»⁵⁹

Salesman, and even some sales managers and corporate executives, identified American sales methods as too brash, standardised or rigid to appeal to the particular tastes and cultural expectations of British customers. The resistance to change was recognised in the trade press, especially those publications that aimed to disseminate and popularise the ever expanding literature on American marketing practices among British executives and salesmen. This self-improvement literature and evangelistic tone was captured a new journal, «The British Salesman» that was launched in London in 1956. Its first edition set out its mission as to «act as a clearing house for the most stimulating ideas developed on both sides of the Atlantic». Yet its editorial tone was moderate, stating that «Not all American sales methods may be applicable in their original conception» and advocating a blend with British practices.⁶⁰ In practice the journal reprinted examples of American business practice uncritically along with short stories to illustrate of how individual salesmen had transformed their

⁵⁸ Charles Maier, *In search of stability: explorations in historical political economy*, New York, 1987; Nick Tiratsoo et al, 'Exporting the gospel of productivity: US technical assistance and British industry, 1945-1960', *Business History Review*, 71, 1997, 41-81; Jonathan Zeitlin et al, *Americanisation and its limits: re-working US technology and management in post-war Europe and Japan*, Oxford, 2004.

⁵⁹ *Confectionery News*, 14 January 1955, 43.

⁶⁰ *The British Salesman*, November-December 1956, 2, 4-5 and January-February 1957, 30-31.

effectiveness by adopting such modern methods. It highlighted how sales managers could learn new approaches. More established British trade journals were even more cautious in their praise for American methods, but tended to argue that lessons from US practice were applicable in Britain if adapted to take account of British sensibilities. One sales director accepted that travellers were the key link between the manufacturer and wholesaler or retailer. But his ideal type was «a decent chap with a pleasant personality», which gave no sense of radical change.⁶¹

Wider developments provided new momentum for changes in the organisation of selling and in working practices from the mid-1950s. As austerity eased, firms directed greater attention to the home market. The establishment of a commercial broadcasting company introduced television advertising from the mid-1950s, which gave leading manufacturers new opportunities to stimulate demand for their brands, accentuating the emphasis on a few key products. Greater competitiveness developed as firms competed for market share. Price competition was given additional impetus by the growth of multiple stores whose direct contacts with manufacturers exerted pressure on wholesalers. In the early 1960s Unilever, Heinz, Nabisco and Lyons reduced their sales staff, reflecting a diminishing interest in supplying small shopkeepers.⁶² Generally head offices more often dealt directly with major customers. A series of government investigations and legislative measures eroded the extensive systems of resale price maintenance, established between the wars, and promoted greater price competition by the early 1960s.⁶³ With renewed momentum for direct connections between leading manufacturers and major retailers exerted pressure on the wholesale and merchant houses and on smaller manufacturers and wholesalers.

⁶¹ *Confectionery News*, 14 December 1956, 35.

⁶² Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the marketing revolution, 1862-1969*, Cambridge, 1995, 488.

⁶³ Helen Mercer, *Constructing a competitive order: the hidden history of British antitrust policies*, Cambridge, 2009.

Tensions were evident as early as 1955 in the confectionery trade. In a protest about profit margins, wholesalers refused to take slower selling lines from the leading manufacturers or to use their window-displays.⁶⁴ Greater competition led to a series of mergers in the wholesale sector, reinforcing anxieties among commercial travellers about their immediate earnings and longer-term prospects.

Advocates of modernisation stated a case for change. In 1959 Tom Sumner, a Mars sales director, urged an audience of British wholesalers to use the term sales representatives rather than commercial travellers. His logic was that salesmen were paid to «sell goods-not to travel» and that «Calling them commercial merely makes them a butt for music-hall comedians».⁶⁵ As an executive with an American firm, Sumner aimed to transfer new marketing practices to Britain and in the process to promote a new image of salesmen. He recommended sending staff to specialist training schools to learn new techniques and providing pre-scripted sales pitches that incorporated a scientific approach. From his perspective, the term «commercial traveller» embodied an old-fashioned individualistic, even idiosyncratic, set of practices. In a company magazine, Sumner reiterated the importance of selecting the «right kind of salesman» and providing a thorough training. He contrasted this systematic approach with the period after World War I when «Many ex-officers, thrown untrained on the labour market, drifted into selling» and were left to «sink or swim».⁶⁶ Sumner's evangelical tone implied that his ideal of modern salesmanship was far from fully accepted, let alone implemented, in Britain in 1959. To some degree his rhetoric reflected a pioneer's need to emphasise the limitations of current practice, especially to an audience of wholesalers were smaller firms operating in

⁶⁴ R/DD/S/4 Distributors' margins, 1954-1955, Rowntree Archive, Borthwick Institute, University of York.

⁶⁵ *Confectionery News*, 21 August 1959, 8.

⁶⁶ *Confectionery News*, 5 August 1960, 3.

competition with major international companies such as Mars, Cadbury or Rowntree. Moreover selling has always been a prime area for advocating the new and improved, but others were making the same case.⁶⁷ Nestle's managing director also endorsed training, describing the «really worthwhile representative» as the one who could sell «quality, ideas and faith».⁶⁸ By 1963 Nestle had established its own school for salesmen, providing beginners' courses and <<refresher training>> that would inculcate <<the art of negotiating>> flexibly rather than set sales tactics, in order to create intelligent salesmen rather than the <<ability to back-slap and tell funny stories>>.⁶⁹

Negotiating <<modernisation>>: responses of salesmen

The renewed competitive pressures in the 1950s and the resurgence of a <<modernising>> rhetoric, exemplified by Sumner, generated extensive debate among commercial travellers. Salesmen often associated modern methods with forms of regimentation or corporate control over their behaviour which ran counter to their own images of self-reliance, individualism and freedom from corporate oversight. In response they re-asserted the importance of autonomy, arguing that a successful salesman «must be a free, independent personality without undue domestic worries».⁷⁰ Time to cultivate friendships with retailers was prized over meeting pre-set corporate schedules of visits per day.⁷¹ It was argued that commercial travellers understood public taste and kept manufacturers up to date on marketing and

⁶⁷ Richard S. Tedlow, *New and improved: the story of mass marketing in America*, Boston, 1996.

⁶⁸ *Confectionery and Tobacco News*, 26 May 1961, 4.

⁶⁹ 8 *Confectionery News* November 1963, 15.

⁷⁰ *Confectionery News*, 27 May 1960, 4-5.

⁷¹ *Confectionery News*, 31 October 1958, 35.

advertising.⁷² In 1961 travellers' association official reiterated the case made by the Macintosh sales manager 14 years earlier that salesmen were «friends and advisers» to retailers who visited «regularly as clockwork» to maintain good will. The importance of personal contacts, it was argued, made commercial travellers far more than order takers implementing sales derived primarily through advertising.⁷³ Such debate reflected the salesman's task of clinching each individual sale and contending views about how far that role depended on innate talent, individual expertise or could be learned from advice manuals and through training.

Salesmen often felt underpaid and undervalued and their professional associations regularly featured debates about incomes and payment methods. There were complaints in 1958 that a television programme had portrayed salesmen as being frivolous and as taking advantage of the public, both long-running components of the «drummer» image.⁷⁴ The pre-war heritage of commercial travellers' associations provided diverse networks of national representative bodies rooted in local branches that generated lobbying and campaigns as well as providing social activities, advice, sometimes occupational insurance, and a sense of community. There was a fundamental struggle over identity within the various associations. On the one hand, salesmen saw themselves as enterprising and professional. Often they aspired to a close relationship with, and recognition from, management, especially in the wholesale and merchant house sector, to reflect their own sense of status and commercial value. Equally there was a sense that they were treated simply as employees and undervalued by their individual employers or at risk from economic trends such as mergers, corporate bureaucracy and the growth of government. The UK Commercial Travellers Association (UKCTA), founded in 1883, was the most

⁷² *Confectionery News*, 21 October 1955, 22-23.

⁷³ *Confectionery News*, 15 September 1961 10-11; *Confectionery and Tobacco News*, 5 July 1963, 5..

⁷⁴ *The British Salesman*, July-August 1958, 4-6.

influential body, though cautious about regulation or adopting a union-like strategy. Its leadership emphasised professional values and status as the distinctive attributes of salesmen, but its collective force was more effective in providing insurance and other benefits than in building a collective political identity. The radical National Union of Commercial Travellers' demanded a minimum wage enforced via a Wages Council Act.⁷⁵ Its membership, always small, declined after 1947.

The tensions and varying responses of travellers' representatives can be illustrated through, the Manufacturing Confectioners Commercial Travellers Association(MCCTA). Its membership was strongest in London, Birmingham, Manchester and York, the key centres of production and distribution, and it claimed to represent 75 percent of confectionery travellers. MCCTA was traditionally conservative in its philosophy and external engagements, reflecting its membership base in small confectionery firms and wholesalers. Its leadership was highly critical of trusts and mergers, fearing for the employment and working conditions of salesmen. Its pro-small business attitude and emphasis on individualism was reflected in opposition to allowing sales managers to join MCCTA. The belief in the importance of the personal connection between the «first-class representative» and his employer also contributed in the stifling of conference motions on low pay in 1953, 1958 and 1959, due to anxiety about antagonising employers.⁷⁶ The association's president argued against complaining in 1958 on the grounds that returns were improving, most travellers now had motor cars and competition was less intensive than between the wars.⁷⁷ But underlying pressures generated a change of direction. In 1960 MCCTA conference carried a motion calling for a minimum income of £1000 per annum for

⁷⁵ *The Drapers Record*, 23 June 1944, 13.

⁷⁶ *Confectionery News*, 24 January 1958, 16.

⁷⁷ *Confectionery News*, 24 January 1958, 28.

salesmen.⁷⁸ And in 1961 MCCTA agreed to affiliate to United Commercial Travellers Association and was complaining about competition for sales jobs from «grocers, drapers and even lorry drivers».⁷⁹ There remained the general view that the successful salesman was «a free, independent personality without undue domestic worries». In 1961 *Confectionery News* published a letter claiming salesmen were no longer necessary. In response MCCTA's public relations officer argued that, while some might be «smooth tongued and over hearty», salesmen were, in the main, «friends and advisers» to retailers who visited «regularly as clockwork» to maintain good will. The existence of a public relations officer highlighted the association's concerns about their image. His arguments re-emphasised the importance of personal contacts as meaning that commercial travellers were more than order takers implementing sales derived primarily through advertising.⁸⁰ More broadly the discussions in the MCCTA illustrated persistent tensions existed between the salesman's status as an employee and his self-images of autonomy and closeness to management.⁸¹

Conclusion

Recent studies of travelling salesmen have opened up an important aspect of commercial culture and business practice, revealing much about their numbers, work and social lives at different times, in several countries and related their role in selling to important processes of corporate change. Generally the theoretical underpinning has been transaction cost theory, with its assumptions about the working of principal-agent relationships. However Church's important contributions extended the conceptual range of the literature to encompass marketing theories, drawing the focus

⁷⁸ *Confectionery News*, 10 June 1960, 2-5.

⁷⁹ *Confectionery News*, 20 January 1961, 2-3.

⁸⁰ *Confectionery News*, 15 September 1961, 10-11.

⁸¹ *Confectionery News*, 27 May 1960, 4-5.

away from Chandlerian and US interpretations of late nineteenth and early twentieth century capitalism. The polarisation of British and US practice may have overstated their differences. Other studies have highlighted the diverse origins of the occupation and the continuities in salesmen's concerns, attitudes and working practices, which suggest that the activity of selling was associated with certain recurring attributes. These are nostalgia for a less competitive past, anxiety over status compared to either less well-paid salesmen, performing similar duties, or in the context of uncertainty about sales, and an individualistic resistance to corporate direction.

Much of the literature relates to developments in the US and UK from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. A growing number of studies of salesmen in Europe provide a valuable test of how far the US and UK cases are representative examples or divergent in terms of firm size, strategies and markets. But as a whole the literature on salesmen has searched for the origins of «modern» salesmen. In effect the salesmen, sales techniques and rhetoric about selling of the 1950s to 1980s have been assumed to constitute the modern. This article has argued that there were distinct, but still gradual, changes in sales organisation and practices in Britain between the wars. Advertising was used more widely and, as the sales forces increased in size, firms created their managerial hierarchies. Travellers recognised such changes as «modernisation», but it had limited impact on their day-to-day working practices. Such changes had little impact on the work of the wholesale and merchant houses. Even the organisational changes were halted in the 1940s as wartime controls limited sales and there were reductions in the employment of travelling salesmen. The austerity of the 1940s and early 1950s extended this phase of retrenchment and limited innovation. Thereafter there were sustained efforts to

educate new generations of salesmen which revived debate over sales practices the nature of the job, its status, income and character.

There were new modernising voices, though even these were often cautious. This reflected various factors. There was an immediate post-war concern about the possible over-expansion of the workforce. There was the long-established accepted view among salesmen that their work was essentially individualistic and could not be taught. In addition even the <<modernisers>> often presented their ideas cautiously as American techniques that might well have to be adapted to suit British attitudes or market conditions. Such hesitancy was in line with more general uncertainty within British business about the relevance or applicability of American methods. Steadily, however, a momentum of change developed from the late 1950s through as price competition, advertising and mergers. The representatives of commercial travellers were anxious about the implications of this changing landscape. There were signs that the older culture of the commercial traveller was declining by the 1960s. Certainly the membership of the main professional associations was falling, reflected in the closure of many local branches. Perhaps the salesman's individualism had begun to undermine their own collective organisations and sense of identity. Photographs in trade journals of association meetings or more generally of sales conferences showed groups of predominantly middle-aged or elderly men in business suits. While this reflected the type of seniority commonly related to leadership of associations, it may well have signalled difficulties in drawing in new recruits.

The primary effect of greater competition and new business ideas was to widen income and status differentials between the established travellers employed by leading firms and new entrants, those working for smaller firms or wholesalers, and commission-only salesmen. Among confectionery travellers it was accepted that the

most affluent salesmen were those for leading manufacturers or wholesalers who had large sales territories while other men, especially newcomers with small sales grounds, had low incomes.⁸² In 1963 a commentator in the leading confectionery and tobacco trade journal asserted that salesmen for national companies with resale price maintenance and TV advertising were <<on easy street. They regard themselves as culturally superior to their counterparts working for little firms>>.⁸³ He identified a second category of reps as those for small manufacturers, selling unbranded goods at low prices. His third, and lowest ranking, group were wholesalers travellers who were always unhappy and poorly rewarded. Increasing competition and the sub-division of sales territories were, therefore, threats to status, earnings and future prospects, particularly for new entrants.

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⁸² *Confectionery News*, 29 April 1960, 14-15.

⁸³ *Confectionery and Tobacco News*, 2 August 1963, 4.