

Consuming Passions: A taste for luxury, 1700-1820

The shopping culture, practices and systems that we are so familiar with today all had their roots in the eighteenth century. The Georgian period, which saw the rapid expansion of the economy, improvements in trade, technology and transport, and growing prosperity, gave birth to a burgeoning consumer culture and an inexhaustible demand for luxury. The activities of shopping, browsing and making purchases became fashionable and pleasurable, cultural pursuits in their own right. Shopping offered a new avenue for the expression of refined taste, gentility and politeness.

This insatiable thirst to consume was readily answered by shopkeepers, craftsmen and luxury retailers offering unlimited choice and temptation, and a dazzling array of goods on which polite society could spend their disposable income. Mass consumption had arrived.

Though London might be the centre of fashion and focus for conspicuous consumption, around the country thriving regional centres where polite society foregathered, such as Bath and indeed York, boasted a spread of luxury-driven shops offering plenty of scope for being *à la mode*. As the well-heeled resident gentry and wealthy upper classes moved into York to inhabit their elegant townhouses during the winter season, so too poured by road and river the large quantities of commodities, both British and imported, required to meet their needs. Shopkeepers, warehouse owners and tradesmen with a contingent of assistants, apprentices and employees stood ready to supply them with the most recherché of goods required for gracious living – and prepared to make their fortunes.

The centre of York, then as now, resembled a ‘commercial showcase’ with haberdashers, wallpaper sellers, goldsmiths, book sellers, tea-men, comb-makers, drapers, mantua-makers, mercers, hosiers, toy-men, grocers, milliners, wig-dressers, apothecaries, and gold-lace makers all plying their trades within York’s walls. Shopping activity at the high-end of the market was concentrated around Stonegate, Pavement, High Ousegate and St. Helen’s Square, and here Lord Fairfax and his daughter Anne would have made their purchases. Bills and receipts amassed over years, and now preserved in the Fairfax archives, reveal that the Fairfaxes were no strangers to the world of luxury shopping, and like their contemporaries and peers, indulged their *consuming passions* to the full.

Touching Luxury: The Pleasure of Shopping

Shopping in the eighteenth century required a considerable amount of social skill and economic nous on the part of the consumer. Shopping could be done in person, by proxy, for pleasure or necessity. For those in the metropolis, as well as provincial towns, it became an enjoyable feature of the day, invariably untaken in the morning after breakfast.

The popularity of shopping, particularly amongst women, was satirically reported by *The Spectator* magazine in 1712. It was noted that Hackney-coachmen referred to women 'who ramble twice or thrice a Week from Shop to Shop, to turn over all the Goods in Town without buying anything' as 'Silk-Worms' because of their preference for haberdasher's and milliner's shops. This type of browsing was essential for retailers, exposing their stock to customers, spreading the word about new products and forging good relationships with clients. However, it could also clearly be frustrating. Writing to the *Plain Dealer* in 1727 a Mercer complained bitterly about the women who 'tumble over my goods and deafen me with questions', he continued 'they swim into my shop by shoals, not with the least intention to buy, but only to hear my silks rustle, and fill up their own leisure time by putting me into full employment'.

Whilst browsing was undoubtedly a highly pleasurable experience, if sometimes frustrating for retailers, it was also a crucial factor in the selection of goods. In an era without quality control the opportunity to handle, touch, smell even taste purchases was essential in gauging first-hand the quality of the products on offer. The fact that prices were not displayed alongside the products reinforced the necessity to scrutinise and handle the objects, for only then could bargaining begin. For those that failed to fully assess the quality of the goods they purchased, there was inevitable disappointment. Jane Austen, normally a shrewd shopper, wrote to her sister Cassandra in 1799 to complain that she had spent half a guinea on a muslin veil which turned out, when she got home, to be 'thick, dirty and ragged'.

China Warehouses: Realms of Luxury

With the burgeoning success of English china in the 1740s and 1750s the market for imports dwindled. Manufacturers such as Derby, Spode and Wedgwood were quick to take advantage of pre-existing sales networks. As well as selling to china warehouses, they capitalised upon the commercial successes of the East India Company's import auctions. Indeed, manufacturers increasingly sought to glamorise such events, turning their auctions into 'exhibitions' in a bid to lure a higher class of consumer.

From the 1760s manufacturers began to realise the potential of opening their own showrooms. Derby's factory rooms in Bedford Street, Covent Garden, included a large suite of elegant rooms, suitable for entertaining the nobility and gentry. Josiah Wedgwood was also shrewd when it came to designing his showrooms, noting in 1767 the financial benefits 'when business & amusement can be made to go hand in hand'. With an eye for profit Wedgwood spelt out his marketing strategies in a letter to his partner Thomas Bentley. In addition to displaying 'various table and desert services completely set out' he recommended having 'a much greater variety of sets of vases' to decorate the walls. In his London showroom Wedgwood lined his glass cabinets with green baize and yellow paper to effectively set off his Black Basalt vases. Conscious of the value of repeat customers Wedgwood emphasised the importance of changing the displays regularly, so as to 'render a whole new scene, even to the same company, every time they shall bring their friends to visit us'. Never one to miss an opportunity, Wedgwood's showrooms included 'pattern books' for customers to peruse, publications which provided 'pretty amusements for the ladies' and, more importantly, the opportunity to generate further commissions.

To reach beyond the capital, manufacturers employed 'riders' or commercial travellers. Commercial travellers carried hand annotated catalogues and price lists, along with 'half samples' and decorative border designs to show prospective customers. They would sell to wholesalers, retail dealers and the public, a system which gave English china a world-wide market.

The Glory of Gold: Gold and Silversmiths

Gold and silversmiths presented eighteenth century shoppers with the ultimate in luxury. From small exquisite personalised snuff boxes through to large elaborate table decorations, they were able to present a spectacular range of objects to the wealthy discerning shopper.

With such variety, gold and silversmiths learned to maximise the impact of the display of their goods. Floor to ceiling glass fronted cupboards, known as presses, were employed to dramatically showcase the range and scope of products available, whilst nests of drawers, show boards and oak drawers lined with velvet were used to present smaller items in the best possible light. The interiors of the shops were often lavishly decorated, mimicking the grand architectural details found in the homes of wealthy customers. The expensive nature of the fixtures and fittings ensured shops attracted the right class of customer, whilst also subtly pointing to the financial standing of the shopkeeper and of the quality of his goods.

Eighteenth century tourist Sophie de la Roche recorded her experience of visiting a silversmiths in London, whose 'stock must be worth millions'. Sophie described her pleasure at seeing the shop 'full of sparkling gold and silver moulds and vessels' and at the profusion of designs which enabled her to compare 'the work of previous generations with up-to-date modern creations' and enjoy 'inventiveness and craftsmanship almost past imagination'.

Whilst the gold or silversmith's shop provided an appropriately lavish setting for the display of goods, wealthy customers who were in a position to commission bespoke one off pieces, could do so from the comfort of their own homes. Charles, 9th Viscount Fairfax ordered a 'large silver waiter' from the London silversmith Frederick Kandler which cost the considerable sum of £100. The Viscount possibly felt a certain loyalty to Kandler on account of their shared catholic faith and he clearly preferred the prestige of a London goldsmith over and above any of the many York based retailers. However, this long-standing relationship did not stop the Viscount from withholding payment in an attempt to secure a discount, something Kandler emphatically refused.

Perfect Gilded Theatres: Drapers, Haberdashers & Milliners

Aware of the visual and tactile appeal of their wares drapers became adept at showcasing their stock. Floor to ceiling open presses were employed to display bolts of cloth whilst long lengths of fabrics were hung from hooks near the ceiling. Lacemen, milliners and haberdashers also used 'show boards' to display their wares, whilst the smaller items, such as ribbons and threads were presented in 'nests of drawers' or elaborately decorated boxes. For one period commentator this emphasis on display gave drapers' shops the appearance of 'perfect gilded theatres'.

The open display of items, which actively encouraged customers to feel the rich textures and experience the delicacy of the weaves, was complemented by the use of artificial lighting. Tourist and commentator Andre Rouquet noted in 1755 how the lamps, candlesticks and sconces used in drapers' shops created a 'theatrical effect, of a most agreeable vista'. To make customers feel more comfortable whilst browsing, and to make them stay longer, many drapers also provided comfortable and attractive upholstered chairs. One contributor to *The Female Tatler* claimed it was possible to 'pass away three or four hours' in this 'agreeable amusement'.

Whilst the draper's shop offered a vibrant and sociable environment for shoppers, many retailers also capitalised on the versatility of their media to reach even boarder audiences. For their wealthiest clients it was common to send samples of fabrics for perusal at home, with personal recommendations and 'special' deals. Swatch books were also employed, providing a condensed summary of the range of items for sale. However, perhaps the most sophisticated approach, and the one most akin to modern marketing practices, was facilitated by the stationer and publisher Rudolph Ackermann who enabled drapers to disseminate samples of their fabrics via his popular monthly publication 'The Repository of Arts'.

Masking stench and enhancing beauty': Perfumes, Pastes and Pomades

The desire to look good and smell good became increasingly linked with the idea of refinement. In particular, the elimination of obnoxious personal odours was considered to be a polite and sociable characteristic. Moreover, certain 'luxury' smells could help to identify the wealth of the wearer. The more exotic and rare the ingredients used the more expensive and exclusive the product. Musk from civets was especially valued, Thomas Tryon claiming in 1700 that 'it was the dearest of Stinks: and if Hog's Dung was as scarce, it is probable it might be as much in esteem'.

Perfumers in the eighteenth century sold a range of fashionable 'hygiene' products. In addition to scented waters, customers could also purchase soap (newly formulated in 1789 by Andrew Pears), combs, powders and pomades for the hair, as well as tongue scrapers, toothbrushes and toothpaste, reflecting the new obsessions with oral hygiene.

Perfumers in the period also offered grooming services. Packwood of Gracechurch Street, London, was at pains to stress that he was 'not lesser a Perfumer than a Hair-Dresser'. The fashion, especially from the 1770s, for ladies hairstyles to be raised into substantial headdresses and for men to wear powdered wigs, provided a ready market for the 'handsome braids of hair', 'ringlets', 'puffs and rollers, pins and slides' sold by perfumers such as Packwood. The experience of having one's hair coiffured was humorously described by Fanny Burney in her novel 'Evelina' (1778),

'I have just had my hair dressed. You can't think how oddly my head feels; full of powder and black pins, and a great cushion on the top of it. I believe you would hardly know me, for my face looks quite different to what it did before my hair was dressed. When I shall be able to make use of a comb for myself I cannot tell; for my hair is so much entangled, *frizzled* they call it, that I fear it will be very difficult.'

The World of Toys: Novelties, Knick-knacks & Curiosities

A visit to a Georgian toyshop, or ‘fancy goods supplier’, could often result in an expensive and frivolous purchase. Under one roof consumers could buy decorative household items such as china ornaments and enamelled candlesticks, articles of personal finery like watches, snuff boxes and scent bottles, as well as small portable items such as etuis. Labelled as ‘trinkets’, ‘knick-knacks’ and ‘curiosities’, these toys were not intended for children but served as expensive novelties for adults.

The diversity of items available to purchase in toyshops, coupled with their display on elegantly arranged shelves in richly decorated interiors, points to their extraordinary appeal in the period. Indeed, to browse or shop for toys was to be entertained and amused. As Percival in 1747 comically noted of Bertrand’s famous toyshop in Bath: ‘To this fam’d shop all loitering people run, Where with incessant noise they stun, [...] Charm’d with the sight, they think such Jewells rare – But think themselves the finest Jewells there!’

Like many men of his social status, Viscount Fairfax was a regular patron of toyshops, spending significant sums on decorative ‘trinkets’ and entertaining novelties. In May 1741 Fairfax spent a staggering £143. 5s. in Bertrand’s toyshop in Bath on a ‘Brilliant Girdle Buckle’ and a ‘Wrought silver tea kettle and lamp’, presumably for his second wife Mary. Bertrand’s offered a range of payment options for its wealthy clients, something the Viscount appears to have capitalised upon when paying for the girdle and kettle. Receipts for the transaction note that Fairfax paid £111. 15s. in cash and £31. 10s. by trading in some diamonds. It was a method of payment the Viscount was to repeat closer to home with ‘Goulet’s’ toyshop on Blake Street in York, where he paid for his purchases using ‘old silver’.

'The Mind's First Luxury': Booksellers, Stationers & Print-sellers

The acquisition of books in the eighteenth century was seen to reflect the purchaser's education and learning. Indeed, the ability to converse on a variety of different topics was one of the hallmarks of a polite gentleman. In this pursuit consumers came to rely heavily on their booksellers to recommend the latest essential read.

York had many reputable bookshops in the period, prime amongst them being Ceasar Ward's on Coney Street (run by his widow Ann from 1759) and John Hinxman on Stonegate (later the premises of John Todd's Warehouse). Booksellers, such as Hinxman, Todd and Ward, would entice new customers by displaying an array of informative and entertaining prints in their shop windows. Once inside customers would be confronted with ordered shelves of books running the length of the building from floor to the ceiling. In Todd's Warehouse books were stacked 9-10 shelves high and in 1792 the shop could boast in excess of fifty thousand volumes in its catalogue.

Bookshops would also sell a variety of other desirable items. Existing advertisements from the period show that these could include pocket books, cases for visiting cards, fans, stationary, art supplies, as well as prints, maps and topographical imagery. Perhaps more unexpectedly some booksellers also branched out into medicine, selling popular patented treatments such as 'Daffy's Elixir' and 'Beaume de Vie'. Many booksellers sought to further enhance their profits by commissioning and printing new literary works. Ann Ward appears to have been especially adept at this, publishing in December 1759 the first two volumes of Lawrence Sterne's wildly popular book *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. She also oversaw the publication of William Mason's poems and in 1774 his *Life and Letters of Gray*.

Fashionable Diseases: Shopping for Health

Apothecary shops abounded in the eighteenth century, even in regional centres such as York customers were able to purchase a plentiful supply of medicines and drugs. In order to entice customers, apothecaries would fill their shop windows with ornate drug jars and colourful medicine bottles. Once inside customers were confronted with ordered shelves and display cases packed with expensive and exotic tonics, powders, creams and elixirs. In the highly competitive medical market many apothecaries also vigorously marketed their unique ‘cure-alls’ in newspapers, pamphlets and through trade cards, promising unrivalled results for a bewildering array of illnesses.

Working on the frontline of healthcare, diagnosing and treating the sick, apothecaries promised bespoke remedies for their clients; their knowledge and discretion guaranteed by the ‘extravagant’ prices they could command. Viscount Fairfax was a habitual user of apothecaries, regularly spending significant sums of money on remedies for himself, his daughter Anne and even his servants. A 1753 bill from his nephew Francis Bredall, who was registered with the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London, is typical of the range and scale of products that Fairfax was purchasing on a monthly basis – this included: ‘a bitter stomatick mixture for swerall bones’, ‘pot of laxitive’, ‘powder of myrrh’, a ‘purging potion’ for his daughter, and ‘opening draught with rhubarb’ for the laundry maid.

Whilst the profession of the apothecary was recognised as a ‘genteel business... in great vogue of late years’, suspicions persisted that they were nothing more than ‘quacks’. The old joke ‘I felt unwell – I resolved to get better – I took medicine – I died’ reflected the concern in the period that many modern medicines were positively harmful to customers – the standard use of mercury to cure venereal diseases being a noted case in point.

The Perils of Business: credit and debt

Credit, next to real stock, is the foundation, the life and soul, of business in a private tradesman; it is his prosperity; it is his support in the substance of his whole trade; even in public matters, it is the strength and fund of a nation.

The Complete English Tradesman, Daniel Defoe, London 1726

What price success in the capricious luxury market for the enterprising shopkeeper and hard-working craftsman of the eighteenth century? For such people, entirely reliant on the patronage and repeat custom of wealthy and hopefully loyal clients, business life was often a perilous balance between solvency and bankruptcy. While some shops had terms of 'ready-money only', at the upper end of the scale extending credit and long periods of grace to substantial clients of high social standing was the normal practice, and indeed was expected if a shopkeeper were to maintain their valuable patronage.

Many members of the nobility and upper classes were notorious for their tardiness in settling their bills. In such cases raising the difficult subject of debt and outstanding accounts required delicate, tactful and 'polite' handling: pressing too forcefully for payment could result in the swift withdrawal of favour and leave a tradesman's reputation tarnished. It is thus unsurprising to find Defoe recommending a cautious approach, trying 'all the Methods of Gentleness and Patience ... before you proceed to Rigour and Prosecution'. A request rather than demand for money might be elicited via carefully worded invoices penned onto the retailer's elegantly engraved trade card. This might even be followed by a personal call upon a client's home – all methods within the polite bounds of the client-retailer relationship.

Nevertheless resolving issues of non-payment could be a protracted business; accounts could take years to be settled, and all the while a business's credit was expected to hold good. Relying too much on polite reserve at the expense of business acumen could, and often did, drive a retailer into insolvency. Arguably the most eminent craftsman and cabinet-maker in Georgian England, Thomas Chippendale, was plagued by unpaid client accounts. In spite of lucrative commissions, valuable connections, a large workshop and workforce, and the incomparable success of his *Gentleman & Cabinetmaker's Director*, Chippendale was unable to convert his remarkable ability and entrepreneurial flair into financial security. After his death his eldest son, Thomas Chippendale the Younger, struggled with similar difficulties and was declared bankrupt and evicted from the firm's workshop in 1804.

Fashionable Furnishings: Shopping for the home

Once the rebuilding of Anne Fairfax's house on Castlegate was finished in 1763, the process of equipping its interior with soft furnishings of a quality and luxury suitable for this finest of townhouses began. Papers, paint, damask fabrics and borders for the walls, tassels, fringing, bed hangings, curtains and rugs - the opportunities for elevating one's house beyond the level of mere architecture and enhancing it with beauty, comfort and fashionability were endless. Indeed the choices that lay before the wealthy home owner were as plentiful as the array of shop keepers, manufacturers and craftsmen willing to fulfil their furnishing needs.

The Fairfaxes turned to the local family firm of Reynoldson's to furnish and equip their new townhouse from top to bottom in the latest style – a valuable commission for the business. Flock wallpaper in a variety of colours was selected for many rooms, while Anne's own chamber was given a highly fashionable 'Mock India' paper as advertised on the trade cards of the leading paper suppliers of London. Papers, whether hand-painted and imported from the Orient or printed in England, provided a rich variety of striking patterns, bright and vibrant colour and rich texture for the walls. The ultimate expression of luxury and opulence, however, was silk damask fabric, especially when used both to cover the walls of an important room and to upholster the suite of furniture within it. The tacks and fixings holding the fabric in place could be concealed by gilded borders moulded or carved into elegant forms, creating an impression of seamless richness and opulence.

Whilst shops offered satisfying browsing potential and inspiration for the insatiable home-furnisher, the wealthiest of clients, such as the Lascelles family at Harewood and the Winns of Nostell Priory, could afford to commission eminent craftsmen such as Chippendale to undertake large-scale furnishing projects for their grand houses, creating sumptuous interiors to a cohesive decorative scheme.

Polite Shoplifting: The Notorious Trial of Jane Leigh-Perrot

A sharp rise in shoplifting in the early 18th century reveals a darker side accompanying the growing market for new and desirable goods. Though most reported property crimes were petty transgressions by the lower classes, on certain occasions a member of the gentry was tried for 'privately stealing' what they presumably could have afforded to purchase. Reports suggest that elite women, in particular, shoplifted items out of temporary boredom or for personal thrill.

Arguably the most infamous account of polite shoplifting at the end of the century was the trial of Jane Leigh-Perrot, the maternal aunt of famous novelist Jane Austen. In the early afternoon on August 8, 1799 Elizabeth Gregory, a haberdasher in Bath, stopped Mrs. Leigh-Perrot in the middle of the street and openly accused her of stealing a card of white lace from her store earlier that day. Local newspapers reported that Gregory proceeded to take a package from Mrs. Leigh-Perrot's hands and upon inspection found the very lace in question.

Under the Shoplifting Act of 1699, Leigh-Perrot faced death by hanging or deportation to Australia for up to 14 years if found guilty. At the trial Gregory supplied witnesses and descriptions of the event as evidence, while Jane Leigh-Perrot countered these accusations by insisting that it must have been the shopman's mistake. She pointed out her affluence and questioned her peers; 'What inducement could I have to commit such a crime?'. Jane was further supported by friends and family who vouched for the strength of her Christian character, as well as by other women who had similar unfortunate experiences at Mrs. Gregory's shop.

The jury met for less than an hour before declaring Jane Leigh-Perrot innocent. Considering the lack of evidence, however, it is unclear whether this ruling reflected their genuine belief in her innocence or, more likely, the jury's desire to protect someone of her status and gender from the indignity of her crime.

Retail Realms: Showrooms of Luxury

Keen to reflect contemporary interests and fashions, Rudolph Ackermann in his popular monthly periodical 'The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashion and Politics' (1809-1828), offered a regular feature which focused on some of London's leading luxury retailers. Each article was accompanied by a coloured illustration of a shop interior and included a detailed descriptive text, which encouraged readers to vicariously experience the spaces represented.

The pleasure to be gained from imagining such interiors and the appeal of the luxury items described, vividly highlights the interest contemporaries had in shopping. Seen as a social, even cultural activity, a visit to some of London's exclusive retailers was an experience to be relished. Ackermann's feature in March 1809 on 'Harding, Howell and Co' offered its readers a step by step walk through the expensive draper's shop. The article's enthusiastic author builds anticipation for his readers, describing the first 'department' customers would have encountered to be 'fans and furs', the next 'silk, muslins, lace and gloves'. Moving deeper into the shop customers would then have a chance to peruse 'jewellery, and ornamental articles', before reaching the final department, that represented in the image, which was 'set apart' for millinery and dresses.

Central to the shopping experience was not just the array of goods on display but also the environment in which they were presented. Throughout his features on London retailers Ackermann was keen to include precise measurements for each showroom, noting the exquisite decorations, the number of display cases used, what they were made of, how the rooms were lit, if there were places for customers to sit, and even the number of staff employed. Such details strongly asserted the shop's luxury credentials, highlighting the significant investment retailers were prepared to make in order to entice the right class of customer.

Luxury Decanted: A Thirst for Fine Wines

Entertaining with fine wines was considered a convivial habit - the host's generosity, wealth and taste being reflected in the quality and variety of the wines he had on offer. However, as a result of heavy import duties many wines in the eighteenth century were 'excessively dear'. German tourist Gebhard Wenderborn noted in 1791 that 'amongst the hundreds, hardly two can afford to drink wine, and the rest do without'. Such punitive taxation also meant that there was a significant amount of 'forgery', but as Wenderborn noted, British drinkers would 'drink anything for port-wine that is red, and will praise it the more it is mixed with brandy to make it fiery'.

Viscount Fairfax's bills and receipts highlight his own enthusiasm for fine wines and spirits, his cellars at Fairfax House being full of port, claret, 'old' and 'new' champagne, Frontignac, Old Hock, Burgundy, Maderia, sherry, brandy, rum, beer and cider. Whilst the Viscount from time to time patronised local merchants such as Bluit's Inn in York, much of the huge quantities of wines and spirits he ordered were supplied by his London wine merchant, James Underhill.

Viscount Fairfax clearly had a discerning palate and was unwilling to accept anything but the very best. When he received a consignment of substandard Burgundy from Underhill, the Viscount had evidently fiercely complained. Keen not to lose his custom Underhill wrote back apologetically hoping that 'your Ldsp will have the goodness to forgive what is past', compensating him with 'two dozen of my best claret and two dozen of my best Burgundy'.

Pampered Pets & Liveried Lavishness

Even servants and pets in the eighteenth century required careful accessorising with the purchase of lavish accoutrements. Carefully paired and chosen footmen required the most splendid of livery uniforms, made in expensive materials with luxurious trimmings and embellishments. Indeed, the closer a servant was to his master the more expensive and extravagant the uniform. Accompanying their master closely on his travels, a footman's uniform tended to be made of particularly fine materials. For the wealthiest in society this meant commissioning a uniform from one of London's leading London tailors. Henry Poole & Co, founded in 1806, was particularly favoured by elite society, offering bespoke uniforms which befitted the status not of the wearer but of the employer.

Within the domestic context the tiny yet highly fashionable squirrel, owned by those who could afford a pet with no utilitarian purpose, was similarly prized and decorated. 'Frolicksome' squirrels were invariably given as pets for children or young women. They offered the opportunity for women to hone their sympathetic and caring skills in advance of rearing children. The Fairfax sisters Anne and Elizabeth both had pet squirrels, as did 'Miss Ingram' of Temple Newsam. Like footmen, pets found themselves adorned and singled out as the property of their owners. Pet squirrels, like the cats and dogs owned by the wealthy, were embellished with carefully crafted collars and chains, made in brass or silver. Such bespoke items often came with the added comfort of having adjustable width settings and almost always the inclusion of the owner's name.

Sipping Luxury: The Three Hot Liquors

Georgian Britain's imperial and mercantile pre-eminence increased the availability of new kinds of luxury consumer goods. Especially prized was tea from China. Originally celebrated for its therapeutic properties, tea was sold through apothecaries, coffee shops, snuff shops, grocers and later 'china warehouses'. Coffee and chocolate were similarly prized 'colonial' beverages. Hot chocolate was often mixed with other exotic flavours such as cinnamon, and consumers strove for a 'full flavour, smoothness on the palate and immediate union with liquids'. In contrast coffee, the 'Turkish drink', was celebrated for its powers to stimulate. Sold primarily in coffee houses it was marketed as an invigorating alternative to beer.

Whilst coffee was associated with the raucous masculine environment of the coffee house, tea was considered to be a more rarefied, domestic beverage. The experience of tea drinking was believed to help facilitate polite conversation, which 'improved' the manners of its participants and in turn helped to create a more genteel society. Tea's popularity far outstripped that of coffee in the period, with blends such as Bohea and Hysan being amongst the most sought after. Between the years 1785-1787 England and Wales imported 16.3 million lbs of tea whilst gross imports of coffee totalled just 7 million lbs, with 85% of coffee being re-exported.

The Fairfax family's appetite for the beverage is well-documented. Bills from between August and November 1767 show that they spent £2. 12s. on green tea, which was the equivalent of a half year's wages for one of their chambermaids. The value of tea and more broadly the social value placed upon its consumption, was also reflected in the lavish accoutrements bought to accompany it. These expensive and often exquisitely crafted objects were essential to the ritual of tea drinking. From finely wrought porcelain cups and saucers, silver teapots, kettles and cutlery, through to mahogany and inlaid tortoise shell caddies, the equipage came to eloquently reflect the glamour of the drink.

'At the sign of the Goldbeater's Arm'

Shop signs were initially identified with particular trades, such as 'three balls' for pawnbrokers, a 'pestle and mortar' for chemists, a 'lamb' for hosiers and milliners and a 'wheatsheaf' for haberdashers and linen drapers. However, over time the use of these trade specific symbols became blurred. Indeed, whilst shop signs acted as powerful visual indicators of the type of businesses they promoted, they also became intrinsically linked to particular addresses - helping consumers navigate the town. When businesses changed premises, tradesmen would invariably preserve existing signage or add it to an element of their own. This often resulted in curious and idiosyncratic hybrids. As a commentator to the *British Apollo* magazine noted in 1716, 'I'm amazed at the Signs, As I pass through the Town, To see the odd mixture; A Magpie and Crown, The Whale and Crow, The Razor and Hen, The Leg and Seven Stars, The Axe and the Bottle [...]'.

Nowhere is this complex use of symbols more apparent than in the trade cards used by retailers to promote their wares. The trade card of 'Mrs Phillips', who sold female contraceptives, offers a typical picture of the way in which signage could be appropriated and used to help customers locate particular shops. 'Mrs Phillips' identifies her address as 'no.5, in *Orange-Court*, near *Leicester-Fields*, one End of the Court comes to *Castle-Street*, joining the *Upper Mews-Gate*. To prevent Mistakes, over the Door is the Sign of the *Golden Fan* and *Rising Sun*'.

The value of shop signage in promoting and locating businesses, however, had to be balanced against the inconvenience they caused in the street. Visiting Britain at the start of the eighteenth century French tourist Francois-Maximilien Misson observed that shop signs in the capital were 'commonly very large, and jut out so far that in some narrow streets they [...] run across almost quite to the other side'. The density of such signs, coupled with their tendency to 'creak' and fall down in poor weather, resulted in them being banned in the City of London and Westminster in 1762 and 1763 - a move reinforced in 1766 and 1768 by the Pavement Act. Instead, shopkeepers had to fasten their signs against their buildings, decluttering the street and placing a greater emphasis on shop windows.

A slice of the market: retail tactics and promotion

In the highly competitive world of Georgian luxury retailing, investment in attractive shop frontages, handsome interiors and hanging signs alone was no guarantee of success. It was essential for shopkeepers to employ a variety of sophisticated retail tactics to encourage custom, secure the patronage of a discerning 'polite' clientele, and thus ensure the survival of their businesses.

Retailers became adept at enticing customers with elaborate window displays showcasing their most expensive items, often enhanced with artificial lighting. The most select customers would be offered every comfort - seating, refreshments, and perhaps even an ante-room where they could discreetly examine potential purchases at their leisure. Ever keen to attract the custom of those possessing high social status and deep purses, enterprising shopkeepers who served the Court and held Royal Warrants increasingly adopted the custom of displaying 'by appointment' signs on their shop fronts to advertise the royal and noble patronage they enjoyed.

To all this, a successful retailer had to add his own personal charisma, polished appearance and dress, and a judicious mixture of flattery, deferential manners and obsequiousness. As one eighteenth century authority advised:

'He ought to speak fluently, though not elegantly, to entertain the Ladies; and to be Master of the handsome Bow and Cringe; should be able to hand a Lady to and from her Coach politely, without being seized with the Palpitation of the Heart at the Touch of a delicate Hand, a well-turned and much exposed Limb, or a handsome Face.'

Promotional techniques such as discounts and special offers, sales and weekly novelties were deployed hand in hand with focused consumer marketing to give a shop prominence in the public eye and secure new business. Advertisements, handbills, catalogues and periodicals were all weapons in a trader's arsenal. Beautifully engraved trade cards were a particularly effective promotional tool. Their elegant design and aesthetic qualities attracted notice whilst their inherently luxurious nature, limited print-run, lavish treatment, and cost of production, subtly signalled the exclusivity and superiority of a shop.

Tradesmen, not least of all those in York, made full use of newspapers to promote their establishments. Shop advertisements addressed to the nobility and gentry in

The York Chronicle and Weekly Advertiser and the *York Courant*, boasted of the range and quality of stock available, expounding lists of 'highly superior' goods newly

arrived from London, and highlighting local retailers' connections with royal patrons. Commercial competitiveness could, however, descend into open warfare, with shopkeepers engaging their rivals in lengthy and sometimes bitter, printed battles of words. In 1783 the pages of the *York Courant* became an advertising battleground as two rival merchants, William Tuke and John Wormald, vigorously disputed each other's claims about the comparative quality of their respective supplies of salt.

