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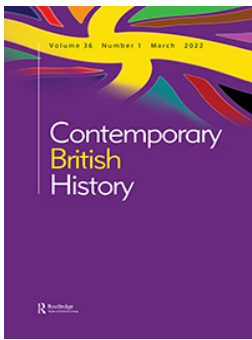
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## The contribution of posters to the venereal disease campaign in Second World War Britain

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### ABSTRACT

In 1942, the British government placed large posters addressing the ‘problem’ of venereal disease (VD) in prominent public spaces, as an attempt to manage this ‘threat’ exacerbated by war. Utilising extensive archival research, this article uses the VD campaign as a lens to examine the way that the state sought to change attitudes and behaviour, and the role of posters in such attempts. With posters reflecting the most publicly acceptable discourses relating to VD, the article investigates state action and public responses, through themes of ‘The People’s War’, medical and moral messages, and discourses of shadows and the home.

### KEYWORDS

Public health campaigns;  
Second World War;  
propaganda posters;  
venereal disease;  
government campaigns;  
British

### Introduction

Posters have been described as the oldest form of advertising,<sup>1</sup> and by the early nineteenth century, they were an extremely popular promotional tool. Advances in technical capabilities in the later nineteenth century facilitated the development of illustrated colour posters, and by the 1870s, lithographic and printing techniques meant that production costs were low enough to facilitate large-scale commercial use.<sup>2</sup> Whilst posters constituted only a small proportion of overall advertising spending,<sup>3</sup> their commercial impact was disproportionately large, partly because of their potential ubiquity.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, their cultural impact was greater than their share of advertising spend would suggest,<sup>5</sup> in part because this advertising existed—and was viewed—in (primarily) urban space,<sup>6</sup> and in the presence of others.<sup>7</sup> Despite this cultural importance, many studies of posters, or studies of the Second World War, omit analysis of British wartime propaganda posters, simply using them as illustration, with little thought as to what led to their creation, and whether the message ever connected with the viewer.

Whilst the great majority of advertising posters inevitably serve a commercial purpose, their characteristics—such as simplicity, boldness, and the need for one dominant message<sup>8</sup>—render them a useful medium for public service advertising, defined in terms of ‘promotional materials that address problems assumed to be of general concern’. Such advertising typically attempts to increase public awareness of the problem and

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possible solutions, and in addition, often tries to influence public beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.<sup>9</sup> Such advertising could, arguably, be considered as propaganda. Jowett and O'Donnell claim that '[p]ropaganda deliberately and systematically seeks to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist'<sup>10</sup>; and is not necessarily carried out for the mutual benefit of both communicator and audience. Posters became a widely used tool of government propaganda in the First World War,<sup>11</sup> and during the interwar years, government communication activity grew further; by 1939, virtually every Whitehall department possessed 'some form of established information or publicity machinery'.<sup>12</sup> Content analyses of public service advertising identify health or personal safety as major topics,<sup>13</sup> and in this paper we analyse such issues in the specific context of government attempts to influence public beliefs, attitudes and behaviours towards venereal disease (VD) during the Second World War through the use of posters.

In 1942, the government first pushed the issue of VD visibly into the public domain, by using large posters in public spaces (such as train stations), rather than (as previously) small posters in private spaces such as washrooms. Infection rates had been falling since the 1920s, which Cox attributes in part to better welfare measures and improvements in living standards.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, civilian attendees to VD treatment centres during the war originally declined.<sup>15</sup> However, after 1941 there was a rapid rise in recorded cases, perhaps exacerbated by the continued disruption to normal life arising from war, and also the increased number of men in the military system, or indeed a greater willingness by public health networks to address the problem.<sup>16</sup> Whilst the numbers infected never reached pre-war figures, the government, needing healthy citizens for the war effort, sought a mix of educational and legal measures to reduce infection rates and to encourage swift treatment where appropriate.

This paper examines how VD posters were employed by the government and associated agencies in the Second World War, showing how the context of the War and mid-twentieth-century statecraft created a 'need' to address VD. The construction of VD as a problem requiring intervention was arguably a consequence of the various surveillance technologies developed at the local, national and voluntary levels indicating that VD morbidity was increasing, and posters were regarded as a means by which information about this disease, and how it could be combatted, could be conveyed. We then examine the posters themselves, drawing out five core discourses: citizenship and the people's war; medical and moral discourses; dangerous shadows and the importance of the home. The article concludes by discussing their influence on public perceptions of VD, through the technologies of opinion polling and social surveys and their impact upon programme evaluation and the feedback effects on policy decisions.

## Historical context

Government concern and campaigns relating to sexuality and sexually transmitted infections dating back to the nineteenth century are manifest in the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869 (suspended 1883, repealed 1886),<sup>17</sup> and the Indecent Advertisements Act of 1889, where VD posters and advertisements were deemed 'indecent' or 'obscene'.<sup>18</sup> However, repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts heralded the end of a twenty-year experiment of 'control', in which attention began to move from coercion to voluntary treatment through readily accessible nationwide clinics.<sup>19</sup> In this period, the age

of sexual consent was raised from thirteen to sixteen for girls in 1885,<sup>20</sup> whilst the availability of new chemical treatments led to the abolition of regulatory approaches and the adoption of a strictly voluntary approach to treatment.<sup>21</sup> VD 'represented a lurking, undefined threat to stability, the family, the British race and Empire', but 'self-regulation was a prevalent theme in the teaching of all aspects of health and hygiene in this period'.<sup>22</sup>

A spate of research into VD in the early years of the twentieth century had concomitant health policy implications.<sup>23</sup> Intellectual debate and public discourse focused around the eugenics movement,<sup>24</sup> whereby a 'new morality' in which 'planned and scientifically guided reproductive behaviour' became the norm in the West.<sup>25</sup> These debates articulated 'essentially middle-class values of moderation, self-restraint, abstinence, and hygiene as a means of remoralising the poorer classes who attended the clinics'. However, Hall notes that in the early twentieth century, many men still 'considered their first dose of clap a rite de passage into manhood',<sup>26</sup> and Cox notes that VD was not a source of as much shame for men (especially those in the armed forces), as it was for women.<sup>27</sup>

These inherent inconsistencies, and the lack of a cohesive policy approach towards VD, were set into sharp relief during the First World War, which challenged the Victorian demarcation between military and civil spheres.<sup>28</sup> The Army was 'loath to have soldiers absent for long periods being treated back at base'.<sup>29</sup> There were concerns for 'khaki fever', as thousands of women, who wanted to feel like they were 'participating in the war', congregated around the growing tent cities of the soldiers. It was the women, especially 'the enthusiastic amateur', who were portrayed as sexually deviant and 'infectious to the body politic'. The view that women's actions needed to be controlled in order to control VD influenced policy thinking for decades afterwards.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Regulation 40D, introduced in 1918 under pressure from the Canadian and Dominion war offices, 'empowered magistrates to assess, judge and ultimately control women's sexual behaviour in the name of national security',<sup>31</sup> although this was swiftly rescinded.

In 1918, Marie Stopes published the popular but controversial book *Married Love*, to help deal with patient (and medical) ignorance. The 1916 Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases report had recommended educating the public on the 'grave evils which exist among us, and their effect on the national life, present and future', concluding that a consistent communications effort would keep the issue in the public mind,<sup>32</sup> as it was a 'racial poison' sapping national energy.<sup>33</sup> As a consequence, The National Council for Combatting Venereal Diseases (NCCVD) was established in the same year, formulated as an independent society as recommended in the Commission's final report, and regarded its role as giving effect to the policies recommended in the report, with a remit for moral education.<sup>34</sup> Concerned about the overtly moral focus of the NCCVD, and in response to increasing criticism of the NCCVD's approach,<sup>35</sup> in 1919 The National Society for the Prevention of Venereal Diseases (SPVD) was formed, focussing more on the use of preventative medical prophylactic measures.<sup>36</sup> In 1925, the NCCVD became The British Social Hygiene Council (BSHC), encompassing wider issues of health education.<sup>37</sup> During the interwar period, an increasing number of women joined VD services, illustrating changing social and medical attitudes to venereology.<sup>38</sup>

At the time, the Medical Officer of Health provided by each local authority ran free tuberculosis and VD treatment centres.<sup>39</sup> Whilst such treatment centres were regarded as an important step towards what would become a 'comprehensive, state-funded, free and nationwide health service', it did not offer an equally comprehensive service to all patients, often dependent on geographical location as treatment was in part dependent on perceived priorities of local authorities.<sup>40</sup> Despite the centrality of the VD issue in health education, and Ministry of Health (MoH) claims that it was 'fully aware of the importance of education', local authorities were not compelled to undertake such communications, and many failed to.<sup>41</sup> Still, by the Second World War, a view had emerged whereby a "'manly man" appears to have become one who had the sense and control to take precautions against infection',<sup>42</sup> and policy-makers worried that an emphasis on treatment would lead to a false sense of security, promiscuity, and even a rise in VD.<sup>43</sup> In 1939, the SPVD tried to place adverts in magazines, but the funds were largely returned; for example, Odhams Press refused to have adverts relating to sex in their magazines.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, the BSHC called for sex education funding to be enforced, arguing that the expense would be offset by savings in medical costs and time off work, and that the policy would be of 'great and lasting benefit to our young men and women, both morally and physically'.<sup>45</sup> The Exchequer did not wish to expend extra funds, hoping that inter-war publicity on the subject 'would have had the effect of minimising the danger of any widespread trouble during this war'.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, VD was deemed to be a problem intensified by war, exacerbated by the disruption to normal life and by the movement of peoples and the armed forces.<sup>47</sup> There were some sixty million changes of address amongst a civilian population of thirty-eight million between 1939–1945, and for many it was their first time away from home, with a consequent sense of 'freedom'. Hasty war marriages 'left both parties with little sense of responsibility or obligation towards each other'.<sup>48</sup> With death so close, soldiers and civilians free from usual surveillance, and American GIs described as 'overpaid, over-sexed and over here', sexual behaviour became much freer.<sup>49</sup> With a rapid rise in cases in 1941 (statistics were easy to collect from the national network of clinics),<sup>50</sup> the SPVD complained that the government was still not addressing the problem of VD, nor providing funding for others to do so.<sup>51</sup> Thus, war arguably fractured social norms, and propaganda and education were regarded as vital adjuncts to medical science to promulgate better public health.<sup>52</sup>

### **1942: government objectives for VD campaigns**

Local authorities were unhappy with the educational material provided by the BSHC which adopted a 'finger-wagging moral tone', and also reaching the 'worried well', rather than the desired audience.<sup>53</sup> In April 1942, the Central Council for Health Education (CCHE), led by medics in local authorities, took over the educational role of the BSHC, with the MoH saying that VD should be treated the same as other nonsexual infections, such as tuberculosis, and therefore the CCHE would be better than an organisation solely concerned with VD.<sup>54</sup> With this new organisation in charge, pressure from the US Army, and a campaign pushed through the Daily Mirror,<sup>55</sup> it is not surprising that an opportunity was seized to change the message about VD.

In October 1942, Sir Wilson Jameson, Chief Medical Officer of the MoH, gave a press conference, commenting that the incidence of VD was increasing due to wartime conditions, particularly by those who encouraged 'loose living'. Diagnosis and treatment were freely available, but due to the 'old tradition of hush-hush' this knowledge was not being transferred to the general public. He framed VD as 'just another medical and public health problem'.<sup>56</sup> The respected British Medical Journal (BMJ) approved of this speech and gave its official backing to a medical approach,<sup>57</sup> with public opinion at 79% approval for more information, according to a Gallup poll reported the News Chronicle in September 1942.<sup>58</sup>

The CCHE developed a national campaign to 'create an informed opinion and to encourage early and continued treatment', supported by local publicity.<sup>59</sup> Free publicity materials were distributed through pre-existing Ministry of Information (Mol) channels,<sup>60</sup> with press advertising supporting the campaign.<sup>61</sup> As in the First World War, military-civilian interactions caused the most concern,<sup>62</sup> with foreign bodies stigmatised,<sup>63</sup> especially black US soldiers, whom, a 'whispering campaign hinted', had high VD rates.<sup>64</sup> Communication addressing such concerns was to be used in addition to, not as a substitute for, appropriate legislation (Regulation 33B was brought into force in November 1942, providing for notification of carriers of VD). Such communication was emblematic of the new social science of persuasion (incorporating the concept of propaganda), which had developed in the 1930s.<sup>65</sup> Many were keen to emphasise that 'propaganda ... required assessment not by aesthetic standards but by effects'.<sup>66</sup>

It was recognised that changing public opinion and attitudes can be hard and attributing any changes specifically to one particular medium almost impossible. The government was interested in monitoring reactions to their campaigns and turned to surveys, particularly those deemed 'scientific'. These were seen to offer proof because of their quantitative nature, although this masks the fact that categories are a social construct. The Mol asked Mass-Observation (M-O) to help determine public opinion during the first years of the war, although several civil servants felt that M-O was too much 'on the left'.<sup>67</sup> The Mol therefore set up its own Home Intelligence Division (HI) in May 1940, and continued to undertake surveys, producing a report in 1941 for the Advertising Services Guild on the government's domestic propaganda.<sup>68</sup> Calder claimed that the government, having found out what they wanted through public opinion polls, now found it easier to manipulate people.<sup>69</sup>

Between March and April 1943, the Wartime Social Survey (WSS) conducted a survey for the Campaigns Division of the Mol on the public reception of the first widespread MoH campaign regarding VD. Such a development is perhaps indicative of the new ways that the state developed to monitor the effects of its policies to address aspects of social life, as well as identifying new problems in need of solutions. Indeed, much subsequent VD publicity was informed by WSS survey results that it would be welcomed,<sup>70</sup> including, for the first time, posters to be displayed in areas such as railway stations, linked with the intensified movements of people during wartime, despite the fact that the Indecent Advertisements Act of 1889 was still in force. We now move to discuss the thematic content of these posters more specifically.

## Poster themes

Fougasse defines a poster as 'anything stuck up on a wall with the object of persuading a passer-by', further defining a propaganda poster as 'for the common good'.<sup>71</sup> Art historian Ades emphasises the mass-produced quality, as well as the overtly public and promotional nature of a poster.<sup>72</sup> Sontag writes:

A public notice aims to inform or command. A poster aims to seduce, to exhort, to sell, to educate, to convince, to appeal. Whereas a public notice distributes information to interested or alert citizens, a poster reaches out to grab those who might otherwise pass it by.<sup>73</sup>

The propaganda poster operates in the public domain and is 'a product of communication between an active force and a re-active one': the originator has a message to sell, whilst the target audience must be persuaded to buy the message.<sup>74</sup>

Successful propaganda recognises that the viewer has a choice to accept or reject the message, and is a slow process, working best when it chimes with pre-existing attitudes.<sup>75</sup> VD posters were produced for the MoH under the aegis of the Mol, the central governmental publicity machine that formally came into being as war was declared. The poster artist does not initiate the message but needs to remember that it is not intended for artistic self-expression, but to perform a purpose, to sell a product, propagate an idea, or encourage action. It is the artist's job to produce an image that will be remembered by the public.<sup>76</sup> Visually, a poster needs to attract attention from a distance, stand out from other designs, and, with limitations on space for detail, encourage viewers to seek further information elsewhere. The government had a tricky job, seeking to shape behaviour, without losing an audience who they needed to participate fully in the war effort (without compulsion).

At the time, the vast majority of advertising budgets were expended on press advertising. In 1938, a total of £59 million was spent on advertising in Great Britain, of which only 8.3% was spent on posters, although part of the appeal of posters is that they are a cheap medium.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, in comparison to other media, where there is an element of choice about participation, it is hard to ignore a large, well-designed poster. In 1940, M-O had noted that '[p]eople are now definitely conscious of the Government's use of slogans to influence them'.<sup>78</sup> Newspapers were widely read, although, regarding more sexually-oriented content, many editors and proprietors were keen 'to maintain a sense of decency in their publications and to protect their status as 'family newspapers''.<sup>79</sup> Coupled with the issue of paper shortages, the poster offered a more efficient option for the government, especially when used in urban spaces. Additionally, with posters there were no editors as 'gatekeepers', although getting the posters displayed on a voluntary basis was still a challenge.<sup>80</sup>

Although the general chronology of VD campaigns is largely clear, the same cannot be said for the posters themselves. No details can be found of posters (for hoardings) before the 1942 campaign. Posters did exist but did not attract the controversy that later campaigns did, as they were limited to places such as public conveniences. In January 1942, blue and white posters, produced by the Mol for the MoH, started appearing on hoardings in anticipation of the major forthcoming 'delay is dangerous' campaign, double-crown posters to be placed in public conveniences.<sup>81</sup> In January 1943, railway companies allowed the Mol to display posters without charge in railway station toilets,



giving details of nearby treatment centres. It was hoped that these would also appear on platforms.<sup>82</sup> In 1943, following nationwide approval of the first wartime VD campaign, the MoH decided to expand publicity among the civilian population. The MoI Campaigns Division 'stepped up the circulation and display of VD posters', along with wider publication through newspapers, magazines, radio shows, lectures and plays.<sup>83</sup>

Government planning, content and design style, and reactions to posters, all give insights into everyday discourse. Discourse is a postmodern construct, a term used to indicate that language is not a neutral way of describing the world and objects which exist in it but that such objects, and our understanding of them, exist only through the categories and concepts we use to describe them: 'people act as if they were true'.<sup>84</sup> Like any mass media, posters reflect and shape public opinion, circulating knowledge about disease, gender and the body.<sup>85</sup> Within this paper, the visual is considered an element of language and discourse, with access to, and familiarity with, images being culturally based. Within a discourse, what is characterised as normal will define who/what belongs, and who/what is excluded, identifying who is deviating from 'the norm' at a particular time in history.<sup>86</sup> Discourse identifies 'silences' otherwise made invisible by those with the power to define 'what is', as discursive formations are 'at once singularly authoritative and deployed in the interests of existing structures of authority and power'.<sup>87</sup>

Audiences are not passive receivers, waiting to receive whatever messages are presented to them.<sup>88</sup> Spectators view visual images with a prior corpus of knowledge, an archive of other images, even if they are not aware of them.<sup>89</sup> In the 1930s, Aldous Huxley recognised that propaganda 'canalises an already existing stream': it is only effective on those already in tune with the ideas expressed.<sup>90</sup> In 1940, Brown echoed this, claiming that nobody can create emotions that are not already there. The propagandist 'is limited to evoking or stimulating those attitudes suited to his purpose out of the total spectrum existing in his audience, attitudes which may be innate but are more usually socially-acquired'.<sup>91</sup> Artists designed posters that sought to provide a meaningful message to their fellow British citizens at war, as we now move on to explore through an analysis of key themes evident through VD posters.

### ***(En)gendering 'the people's war'?***

The majority of men in the armed forces were not career soldiers, and 'ultimately their values were those of the civilian society to which they would one day return'.<sup>92</sup> There was a shift in the cultural narrative from 'dashing officers-and-gentlemen ... to a greater emphasis on the ordinary enlisted men in the later years'.<sup>93</sup> The idea of the 'people's war' was a contemporary wartime phrase, popularised amongst post-war generations by Calder,<sup>94</sup> with those on the home front encouraged to feel as though they stood together with fighting men.<sup>95</sup> This was a useful trope for the government to capitalise on, and consequently leaders sought to convince, rather than order.<sup>96</sup>

From the eighteenth century onwards, the State had 'targeted the body, intervening in the hitherto private lives of individuals to monitor and regulate, for example, health, hygiene and nutrition'.<sup>97</sup> In wartime, one of the most visible discourses was citizenship, with associated discourses defining those who did not contribute in expected ways as not truly belonging, with those who engaged in sexual promiscuity 'lacking in good

citizenship'.<sup>98</sup> On the home front, keeping the general public (physically and psychologically) well was fundamental to Britain's wartime strategy, with healthy bodies to fight, to manage the home front, and to produce future generations. Wartime posters aimed to emphasise similarities amongst the population, rather than constructing social difference, as everyone was a part of the discourse of 'citizenship'; and being sexually informed and responsible, had become part of this discourse.<sup>99</sup> This message continued throughout the war, with textual poster designs from a campaign in early 1945, stating that 'Every citizen should know' and that 'VD is a great evil and a great menace',<sup>100</sup> explicitly acknowledging the notion that VD was a problem that needed to be addressed.

Citizenship, however, involves concepts of social difference, typically gendered,<sup>101</sup> and often class-based.<sup>102</sup> British men were depicted as 'temperate heroes', in opposition to hyper-masculine enemy,<sup>103</sup> whilst British 'good time girls' were seen as out-of-control, irresponsible, selfish and pleasure seeking.<sup>104</sup> In April 1943, a series of posters was released, all clearly marked with MoH logos, designed in duplicate form for specifically gendered audiences, highlighting the need to act if one had VD. Posters directed at those who 'exposed themselves' to risk of infection were considered more suitable for indoor sites, whilst those addressed to the public at large were suitable for outdoor sites, although it was hoped that, because of the amount of discussion on the subject, all could be displayed on outdoor sites.<sup>105</sup>

In this 'Delay is Dangerous' series of posters; each poster depicted a lone civilian, male or female, unlike many wartime posters that depicted only men in uniform. The civilian walks past a marker, on which a month indicates time passing. The dangers of delay are a recurrent theme throughout wartime VD literature. As in an earlier campaign 'Diphtheria is Deadly', the MoH used alliteration to get its message across.<sup>106</sup> The imagery is quasi-traditional, non-photographic realism, with indistinct faces. Sombre colours are used for this solemn topic, although paper and ink restrictions may have had an impact. In the posters, the 'VD' letters are emphasised, thereby highlighting the issue but 'venereal disease' could also be spelt out, to ensure that people knew what it stood for, although often this elaboration was considered suitable only for accompanying leaflets.<sup>107</sup> To address the shame associated with VD and doubts about the confidentiality of consulting the family doctor, the government wanted to emphasise that only proven medical methods would work, and were easily available, in order to stop people wasting money on 'quack cures', which only delayed 'proper' medical treatment. [Figure 1](#) utilises photography, providing an 'authority' to the image, appropriate for propaganda that replaces argument with statement.<sup>108</sup> The man in the image appears wary, as though unsure about the 'quack' pills he is taking. A graphic arrow points away from the quack pills, towards the real medical solution, which we now focus upon.

### ***The appliance of science: medical intervention***

The body had become a target of intervention, with medicine defining what was 'normal', and what was 'sick', and the subject 'no longer has power over his or her body and needs to act in a certain way for 'rehabilitation and reassimilation into society'.<sup>109</sup> In a nation where the topic seemed to be one of broad public concern, as



**Figure 1.** 'VD: Quack cures are useless', April 1943. Source: Image © IWM. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum

evidenced by attendance at public lectures and cinema performances,<sup>110</sup> in February 1943, the Medical Advisory Committee for Scotland (MACS) was asked to advise on how far health propaganda would help to halt the rise in incidences of VD. MACS called for a 'concerted and persistent effort' to eradicate the 'scourge' of VD from 'civilised communities' and believed that the 'moral sanction and active co-operation of the general public' made this seem achievable.

MACS deemed that propaganda worked best when presented factually and educationally, and 'prepared by competent people' (i.e. medical professionals), stressing both avoidance and quick treatment. Such factual messages still came with moral undertones, emphasising that the best method of prevention was 'personal chastity', and education in 'clean living', especially for the young, and decrying the effect on 'the innocent' wife and unborn children. Those who contracted VD through 'no fault or responsibility of their own' were defined as being in the minority. MACS

recommended that local authorities display posters prominently, supported by leaflets. Alarm might be raised but thought a certain amount of 'fear' was healthy. They hoped that the public would adopt a similar attitude to venereal infection as to 'ordinary' infectious diseases, and that 'the morbid interest and prejudice' towards VD would disappear.<sup>111</sup>

The 1943 campaign was a widespread educational campaign covering the nature of the diseases, the need for treatment, where to seek treatment, the repression of prostitution, the provision of adequate treatment facilities and the development of methods of case tracing.<sup>112</sup> The campaign intended to end 'the secrecy which covers the subject' and demonstrate 'the need for early treatment' and continued treatment until cure was evident. The campaign also aimed to 'explain the dangers of quack medicines or self-treatment' and encouraged visiting a clinic for proper treatment. Posters had two distinct functions for the campaign: to reinforce the press-advertising message; and emphasise where to go for treatment.<sup>113</sup> The fact that tests often gave a 'false positive', and that treatments were not actually that straightforward or infallible, was ignored in VD literature. Tests did become more efficient as the war continued, with the invention of penicillin, available from March 1945, giving the biggest reduction in statistics relating to occurrence.<sup>114</sup>

Designed by Reginald Mount, an experienced graphic designer,<sup>115</sup> one particular poster, which stressed the need to seek early, skilled treatment after potential exposure to VD (possibly from 'the "easy" girlfriend'), has subsequently become a famous design. Many wartime posters are forgotten, but this poster (known as 'the orchid' as it depicts a picture of a skull wearing a purple veiled hat in the shape of an orchid) is one that particularly stands out. Images do not just exist, 'they must be made visible', becoming meaningful by being spectated.<sup>116</sup> Distribution of this 1943 poster was limited to 500 copies, in certain port areas,<sup>117</sup> obviously intended for a male audience. The flower on the hat, a 'symbol of enticement', has a fleshy 'unhealthiness'.<sup>118</sup> The skull suggests the 'kiss of death', smiling as it beckons the man towards the faceless 'easy' woman (a message emphasised by the text). The veil adds a furtive atmosphere and implies that the true nature of the woman cannot be seen, that she is behaving in the 'shady' manner of a prostitute.

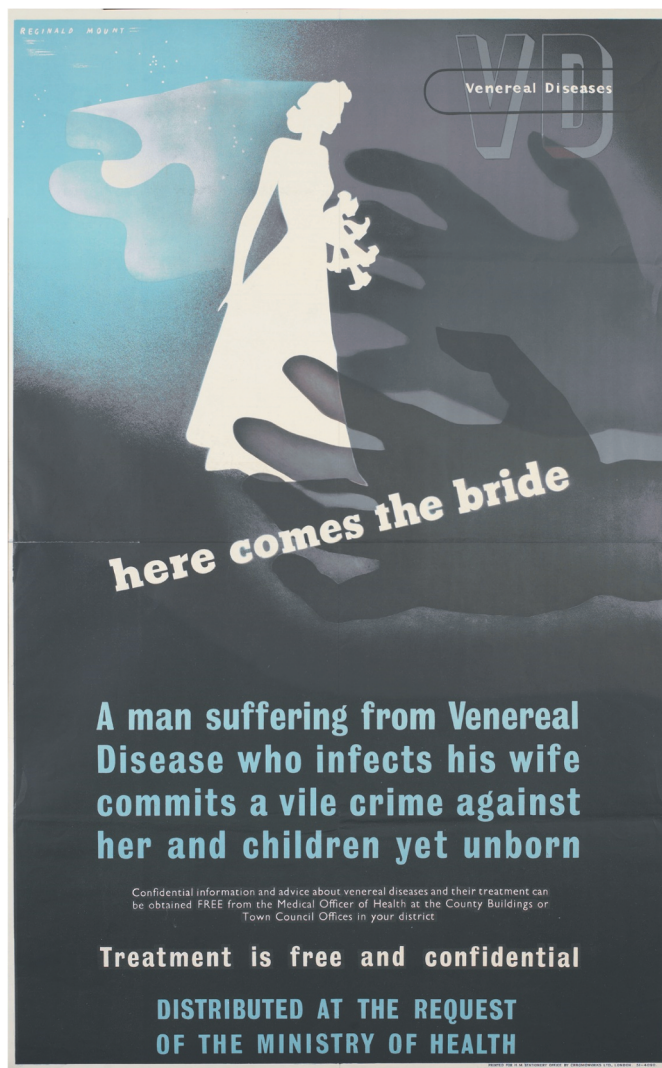
This poster was the first of three, drawing upon what Mort refers to as medico-moral discourses,<sup>119</sup> designed to indicate that VD was not just caught from prostitutes, reflecting worries about 'enthusiastic amateurs' who harboured the disease. Researching message effectiveness via opinion polling in January 1944, a WSS survey of 2,587 people indicated that the poster attracted 59% of favourable comments, including a 'good warning to young men, troops', and to 'carry a special message to "those girls"', with 33% commenting on the physical attractiveness of the poster, and 32% feeling that it got to the root of the problem. Some felt the design was too gruesome, blatant or crude, some that it was horrible, but necessary, whilst others were disgusted at the thought of the poster being displayed at all. Overall, the poster was effective, through its unusual presentation, and the clarity of its warning details about the possible results of VD.<sup>120</sup> The message is consistent with discourses that a man has natural sexual urges, whilst a woman should remain a virgin until marriage or otherwise be stigmatised as 'easy', a recognisable moral argument that we now turn our attention to.

## Religion and the moral argument

In the battle with ‘social evil’, and with religious views still commonly held during the war, the problem was defined ‘as much moral as medical’.<sup>121</sup> Ideas infused by eugenics mixed with ‘religious conceptions of self-control, willpower & morality’ abounded.<sup>122</sup> MACS commented that ‘the Church should be pressed to attack the moral side of the question fearlessly in straightforward, outspoken teaching’, with particular expectation falling upon the Church of England.<sup>123</sup> Condemning ‘fornication’ and ‘illicit’ sex as the main problem, religious discourses emphasised the moral aspect.<sup>124</sup> At the other extreme (mentioned previously), scientific discourse propagated chemical and mechanical prophylaxis. Between those two views, a wide field of opinion and controversy existed, evident at a conference in February 1943, attended by representatives of the MoH, the CCHE and the Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury complained that ‘what is primarily a moral problem with a medical aspect is being treated as if it were primarily a medical problem with a moral aspect’, and that ‘there is a great evil and a grave menace to be met’.<sup>125</sup> Some complained that the Church held the MoH back from using more direct messages, with young people in particular welcoming straighter talking.<sup>126</sup> The most favourably received opinion at the conference was that ‘the prevention of the causes of VD was a moral problem’, whilst ‘the cure . . . was definitely a medical one’, and shame should not prevent people from coming forward for treatment.<sup>127</sup>

In August 1943, the Ministry of War Transport was directed by the MoI to display the posters, reproduced as [Figures 2 and 3](#) on railway sites, including the London Underground,<sup>128</sup> and on government buildings.<sup>129</sup> [Figure 2](#), aimed at men, depicts a bride in pure white, playing on expectations of female purity at marriage (a standard that was not applied to men). She is heading towards grasping, shadowy hands (the concept of shadows is discussed below). It is designed to induce feelings of guilt in a man committing the ‘vile’ moral crime of infecting his wife and ‘yet unborn’ children. Research into message effectiveness indicated that the poster was noticed more by men than women, with 67% making favourable comments: that it provided good information stressing confidentiality, and others noting that the ‘wording and picture catches the eye’. Negative comment about the poster indicated it was ‘too forceful, outspoken, frightening or crude’. The poster had been purposely designed to appeal to people’s sense of responsibility for the young and innocent, and felt to appeal more directly to men, with the wording felt to imply a reproach, and thus was not so constructively suggestive.<sup>130</sup>

In [Figure 3](#), a child is presented as the future—as ‘tomorrow’s citizen’. Aimed at future parents, the poster follows the ideals of eugenics: parenthood is something one should be fit for, something to be earned. Congenital syphilis was commonly seen ‘with the sins of the parent literally visited upon innocent children’.<sup>131</sup> The poster does not specify the symptoms of VD, or the way in which a child would be disabled, as the word ‘handicapped’ alone would strike fear. The boundary that separates the moral from the immoral has always relied on the use of fear.<sup>132</sup> The spotlight shines on a young, innocent boy, with the shadow behind of a young man, standing tall and straight: implying what he should grow up to be, provided VD does not hamper his progress. Again, message effectiveness research found that 70% of respondents made favourable comments about this poster; that it appealed to everyone (especially parents), emphasised the effect on children, had a direct message, and that the shadow was striking. Criticisms included that the image was not forceful or striking enough, and that ‘the results of VD should be



**Figure 2.** 'VD: Here comes the bride', 1942–1944. Source: Image © IWM. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum

emphasised or shown in the picture'. This poster was felt to carry a definite message urging adults to ensure that they 'do not risk endangering the lives of health of young people, by themselves being carriers of such a dangerous disease'.<sup>133</sup>

Those who did not heed the warnings of experts are 'frequently castigated as irresponsible if not evil', as 'fear appeals work best when they are able to draw on both the authority of science and the language of good and evil'.<sup>134</sup> From October 1943 to March 1944, an experimental contact-tracing scheme in Tyneside looked to establish patterns in social background and persuade those known to be at risk of infection to attend a VD clinic. Women who 'indulged in sexual relations with a chance acquaintance and on the first occasion' were categorised as 'promiscuous'. In contrast, 'promiscuous men' were harder to define, possibly because fewer were contacted, but it was



**Figure 3.** 'VD: Tomorrow's Citizen', 1942–1944. Source: Image © IWM. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum

commented that men 'indulged' in extra-marital sex after quarrels, through boredom, or through 'necessity'.<sup>135</sup> The distribution of prophylactic packets, considered useful for the services, was deemed inappropriate for the civilian population, where it would be difficult to give mass instruction, and would be 'undesirable', encouraging 'a false sense of security'.<sup>136</sup>

### ***The shadow of VD: on innocence, purity, and 'the future'***

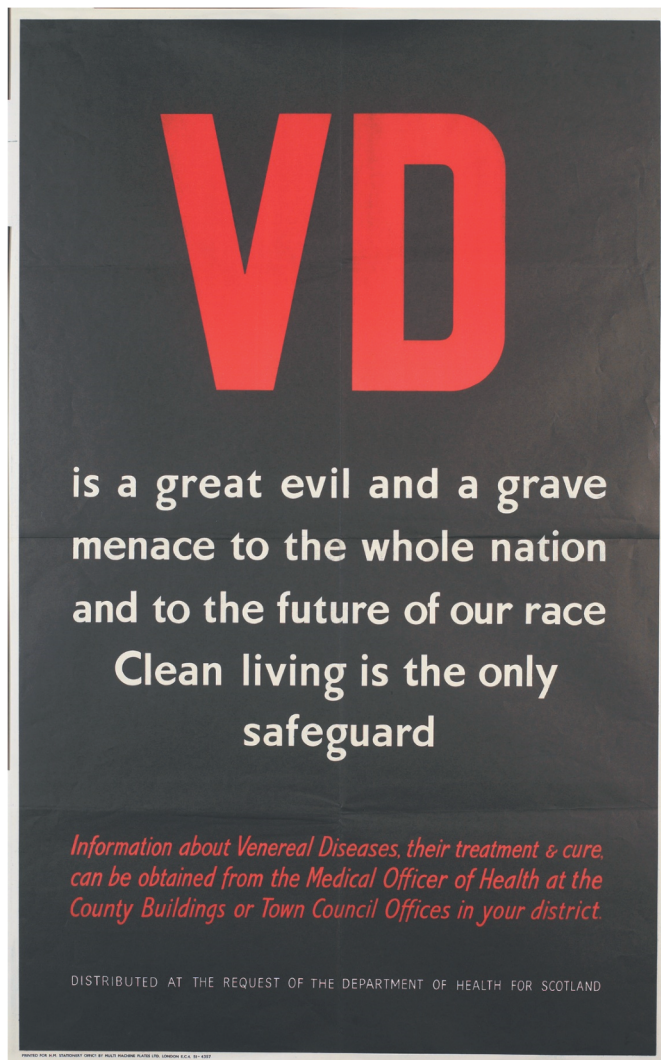
In the *Daily Mirror* in August 1942, it had taken three paragraphs to identify VD as the 'social evil' mentioned in the headline.<sup>137</sup> Posters needed to be much blunter. In early 1945, a series of seven posters was offered free to local authorities, consisting

of three pictorial designs (man, woman and child), and four non-pictorial designs.<sup>138</sup> In the pictorial designs, the VD letters are used to graphically reinforce their message with a blood-red shadow falling over lives, symbolising 'impending death'.<sup>139</sup> The image of a shadow often recurs when dealing with VD, with the discourse indicating something that lurks in the background, damaging what it overcasts. The shadow has long and evocative associations in discourse. It draws on religious ideas of emerging from darkness into the light, educational enlightenment, urban living in enclosed and shadowy areas, and criminal activity transacted in furtive, secretive, shadowy areas. The image would have been familiar from other health campaigns about the 'shadow on the lung', tuberculosis (TB). The pictorial design featuring a man depicts him looking at the reader, behind the letters VD in red, with a large shadow, with VD described as a threat to happiness. Another version illustrating a woman, utilises the same design, but with the word 'happiness' substituted for 'health'. Emphasising the gendered representations, the woman looks apprehensively over her shoulder, although whether she is 'to blame' or an 'innocent victim' is unstated. The man's gaze connects with the viewer, conceivably to induce feelings of guilt, a notion partly inherited from Edwardian feminist campaigns, when the married male defaulter 'was increasingly singled out by public health authorities as a social and sexual pariah'.<sup>140</sup>

The use of photographs, still not commonplace, for this series indicates 'reality': 'real people' have this problem, and so could the viewer. The subjects of these images appear serious, young and middle class, challenging the traditional conception of VD as a problem of the urban poor. The third poster in the series, 'Shadow on his future' (there is no mention of her future), is aimed at both parents, one of whom may be an 'innocent' party. The poster deals specifically with syphilis, an inheritable condition, and stresses the need for clean living to allow the family the best future. Children and babies are often represented as 'the future' of a nation, although this message is more of an emotional, hard-hitting one, aimed at inspiring guilt about the potential to damage future generations, rather than medical detail (confined to accompanying literature). This continued a tradition from fundraising campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s for lock hospitals, when images of children were used in posters: the 'infected child had arguably become the new public "victim" of VD, displacing the fallen woman as the new image of tainted innocence'.<sup>141</sup>

The remainder of the 1945 campaign used only text (Figure 4), possibly indicating doubts about how to illustrate such a sensitive topic to appropriate audiences, or a wish not to categorise the target audience.<sup>142</sup> Within these posters, particular subjects are not identified, and no class or gender divisions appear, although provision of free treatment indicates that it was the poor who were largely seen as the target audience. Although VD is cast as a 'great' problem, with 'grave' and deadly consequences, there is no stress on speed of treatment as in previous posters. The emphasis on prevention, with clean living as the 'real' and 'only' 'safeguard', was consistent with the inter-war idea that 'where there's dirt there's danger', fitting with other discourses about the urban poor. One poster in the series contained space in the centre for overprinting of times and locations of confidential treatment centres. The poster is informational rather than emotional, containing no visuals, aside from an official logo, and an arrow pointing to more information. Such posters were





**Figure 4.** 'VD is a Great Evil and a Grave Menace to the Whole Nation', 1945. Source: Image © IWM. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum

a staple part of every campaign and would have built on those in 1943 that had been widely displayed on hoardings, public buildings and stations, rather than confined to public lavatories as previously.<sup>143</sup>

Two further designs produced by F.H.K. Henrion, a surrealist graphic designer,<sup>144</sup> were produced towards the end of the war, or shortly afterwards, continued the theme of shadows, using uplighting within photographic images to create a sinister atmosphere. Once again, the emphasis is on skilled treatment to protect (unborn) children who are 'the future', throwing equal responsibility onto the parents. If one parent was irresponsible, the other needed to be persuaded to overcome shame, anger at betrayal, and fear of the consequences, in order to be treated. In one of these posters, the faces are unseen in this 'shadow on health', indicating that this could be anyone,

although in this case a middle-class male/female couple is depicted. The couple in question are seated in the cinema, often the place for a first date, and which offers a shadowy atmosphere that may allow for 'unsavoury' behaviour. Posters were aimed at both genders, but the assumed audience for these posters was a heterosexual one, with no 'need' to address homosexuality as, as Moore describes it 'addressing this was beyond the allowed confines of a public epistemological and ontological imagination'.<sup>145</sup> The language of moral outrage, concerning the behaviour of woman and girls, however, shaped official as well as popular discourse, in which there was as much concern with married women and mothers, as with single girls.<sup>146</sup>

### ***The home at the heart of the nation***

The MACS report in 1943 stated that it was 'clearly in the national interest that the family and the home be protected against the ravages of these infections', with education and propaganda to be addressed to the individual as well as to the whole community.<sup>147</sup> Another key theme in MoH posters stresses the damage to the home by VD. A weekly M-O report noted that home was 'uppermost in many people's minds at the moment', with the family unit presented in propaganda as something that was under threat, but the key institution that enabled Britons to surmount the crisis'.<sup>148</sup> Homes had been split by war, through evacuation and service overseas, and damage limitation needed to be applied, whether by women putting themselves at risk, or men running the risk of infecting wives and mothers. In one such poster the message is stark: 'VD wrecks homes and lives', coupled with a picture of a man with bowed head against a red circular background, the use of which could indicate danger, a red-light district, or a red traffic light indicating 'stop'. The letters 'VD' dominate the image, casting a shadow over the whole of life. The person, of unclear class, but almost certainly (and unusually) a man, is depicted in the centre of the poster in a dejected attitude, head bowed in shame. In another poster, the letters 'VD' take on the form of a V-bomb, arriving quickly and unexpectedly (another unpleasant but familiar wartime experience). The poster depicts structural damage, but it is clear it is the emotional life of the home that will be damaged. There is a clear graphic message although no people are depicted. The colour red is again prominent, although we can question whether it was chosen for its 'dangerous' connotations, or whether it was simply a typical colour for a roof.

Soldiers, as civilians in uniform, were fighting for a home they wanted to return to, and enacted discourses as to what needed to be morally protected.<sup>149</sup> Campaigns aimed at the military were able to take a blunter tone. [Figure 5](#) was produced in both blue and brown, both fairly dull colours, raising the question of how much attention the designers wished to attract attention to the poster although the letters 'VD' are picked out in red. With the strapline 'Will you forget me, or don't you care?' the poster is aimed at men in the armed forces, away for a long time and likely to forget the women they had left. If they were behaving inappropriately, they needed to think about the damage they were doing, although whether this should be through abstinence or prophylaxis is unclear. Another military design, 'Your release can be delayed' ([Figure 6](#)) was obviously produced near the end of the war, or even early post-war, with demobilisation clothes visible. With soldiers returning home, the need to cure VD



**Figure 5.** 'Will you forget me?', Second World War. Source: Image © IWM. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum

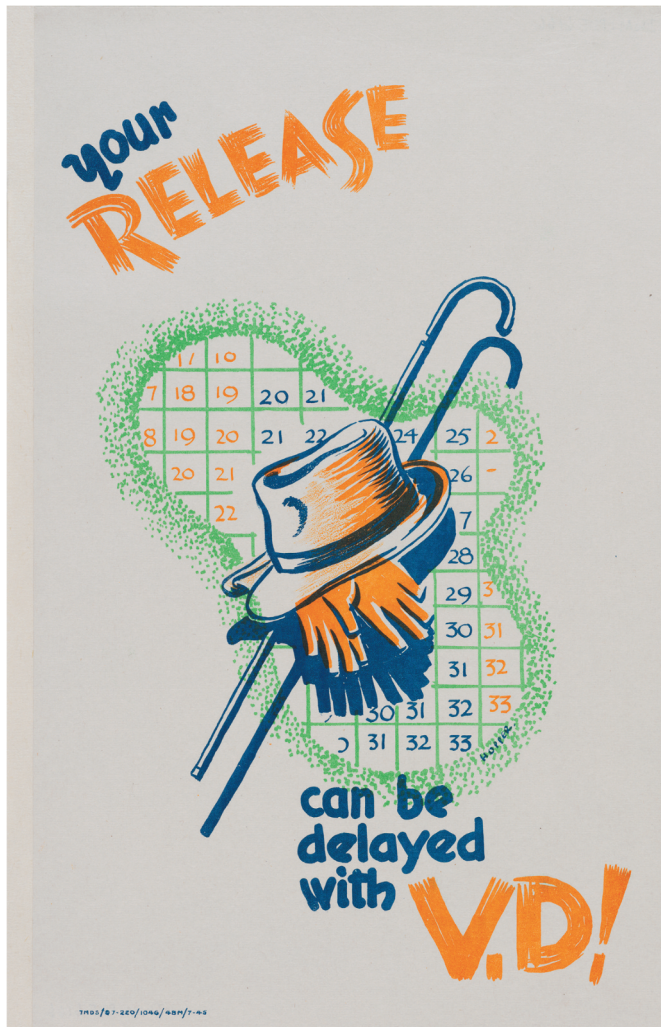
became more urgent, to limit any spread on the return home. The cell contains calendar dates, indicating the passing of time, promoting the all too familiar idea of the danger of delay, although in this case there is more a fear that demobilisation will be delayed.

In a speech in October 1944, Jameson had indicated that the nation's health was good after five years of war. Although people were tired, mortality rates from infectious diseases were lower than in the pre-war years. Influenza had declined since 1937, typhoid fever was at an all-time low, and diphtheria was slowly coming under control; however, the two black spots were tuberculosis and VD. VD rates were still increasing, but the rate of increase was slowing, deemed partly to result from changing attitudes: '[n]o longer are we shutting our eyes to this social plague, no longer do we refuse to discuss it, no longer are we withholding from young people information about its dangers'.<sup>150</sup>

In March 1945, the MoH once again sent out details of new material for local use in support of the national educational campaign against VD. The MoH worked in conjunction with the MoI, the CCHE, and the Department of Health for Scotland, to produce detailed publicity, such as press advertisements, films, lectures, leaflets, and large posters to be displayed on hoardings nationwide.<sup>151</sup> It is not straightforward to define which specific medium to accredit success to, but the previous attitude of secrecy had been sufficiently overcome to launch a programme of public education through the BBC, the press, films, posters and leaflets. Believing that such a programme was largely welcome, the government was encouraged to display nationwide posters that drew attention to 'some of the features of this social problem'. With government plans for a better post-war world evident, in return, people needed to take an interest in their own welfare.<sup>152</sup>

### Discussion: assessing impact of the posters

Often the 'most difficult aspect of propaganda analysis, historical or otherwise, is the attempt to assess its impact',<sup>153</sup> especially with posters often a background medium. Disentangling the impact of one medium from others is fraught, if not impossible,



**Figure 6.** 'Your release can be delayed with VD', July 1945. Source: Image © IWM. Reproduced with kind permission of the Imperial War Museum

although in this case increasing numbers coming forward for testing, and increasing numbers not infected indicate some impact overall. Insights from public opinion polls were key to assessing potential impact at the time (as discussed below), and indeed, these insights are equally valuable to present-day historians trying to find and analyse evidence relating to direct results from public health interventions.

In December 1942, M-O was asked by the government to investigate attitudes to the anti-VD campaign. People (largely Londoners) were questioned about press advertisements. Half still seemed ignorant about the subject, although 'the pox' and 'the clap' and the 'venerable' disease were all referred to.<sup>154</sup> There was largely approval, both for the campaign and for Regulation 33B,<sup>155</sup> which was gender-neutral in language, if not in application.<sup>156</sup> Popular opinion varied over what constituted the best way of reducing VD, with the need to combat ignorance and superstition through education being key to this.

Generally, women tended to be more inhibited about the subject of VD than men, and more afraid to discuss it openly.<sup>157</sup> Others suggested that legislation and health talks to the armed forces were a more appropriate course of action.<sup>158</sup>

The Minister of Health commented that MoH reports were 'of great help in the development of our general publicity on this delicate subject', influencing the 'substance and emphasis' of publicity. Fife Clark of the MoH commented that regular reports on the progress of the VD campaign were particularly useful, as 'public feeling on this subject does not express itself through the ordinary channels of opinion',<sup>159</sup> of press reports and insights from opinion leaders. The first comments on VD in MoH reports appeared in October 1942, after Wilson Jameson's radio broadcast. Favourable comment was received, although the subject was still regarded as too 'hush hush', with insufficient detail on symptoms.<sup>160</sup> By December 1942, there were many more comments on VD, and on Regulation 33B, which was little understood.<sup>161</sup> By March 1943, comment was appearing on the content of advertisements, deemed readable and human. It was believed that 'frankness should not be sacrificed to prudery' and that consequences, rather than the moral tale, should be stressed.<sup>162</sup> The rate of rise of the incidence of VD slowed in 1943, and it was felt that the new measures of control and the educational campaign were being effective. The wide range of media used in the campaign, including posters, appeared to be generally welcomed and approved by the public.<sup>163</sup>

The WSS conducted in March and April 1943, surveyed public reception of the first widespread MoH campaign regarding VD. The survey aimed to measure the extent of approval for the publicity, whether a 'plain and frank statement of the facts' or secrecy was believed to be preferable, and which advertising media were thought appropriate. Questions on VD sat alongside general questions on MoH publicity, in a manner suggesting these were matters in which the public had a right to be interested. Most of the 2,459 interviewees approved of the use of newspapers and the wireless to remove the secrecy surrounding VD, although only one per cent suggested that posters were an appropriate medium,<sup>164</sup> remembering that the Indecent Advertisements Act was still in force.

By the end of the April 1943, MoH noted increased interest in the topic as films and posters promoted discussion and helped remove the associated shame.<sup>165</sup> There were worries that the publicity meant it must be a big problem,<sup>166</sup> that increasing figures of infection indicated that the campaign was failing,<sup>167</sup> and that it would be nullified by the jokes being told about it.<sup>168</sup> In May 1943, there were reports in the northwest that 'loose living' posters, regarded as 'melodramatic' and 'cheap and nasty', were being torn down almost immediately after placement.<sup>169</sup> In July, people complained that the adverts were 'lifeless and monotonous' and so were not read 'by those who need them most'.<sup>170</sup> By August 1943, approval was still being noted, despite doubts that the campaign was reaching 'the right people' and concerns that it was worrying the ignorant unnecessarily.<sup>171</sup> In November 1943, continued support for the posters and publicity was evident: some found them 'rather embarrassing',<sup>172</sup> whilst others evidenced desire that they should be even stronger.<sup>173</sup> Recognising that no form of public survey is perfect, this nevertheless provided increased confidence to commission new campaigns.

Early in 1944, the WSS was asked to investigate the second campaign (relating to some of the posters highlighted in the key themes 3 and 4 above) to ascertain the effectiveness of increased publicity. Only one per cent of the 2,587 interviewed refused to answer questions. Many had seen posters, although the largest proportion (83%) regarded

newspapers as their main sources of information, with radio, magazines (particularly for women) and films also influential. The WSS was interested in the terms people used to describe VD, particularly whether medical or colloquial terms were best used in posters and accompanying literature. Those who had seen MoH publicity seemed better informed and were more likely to recognise the correct terms than those who had not. The majority of those interviewed were aware of the need for medical advice, particularly through VD clinics. People did not wish to appear over-curious about the subject, and when asked what else they would like to know about VD, only 35% said they wished for more information. The younger age groups were shown to be relatively ignorant about VD, and there were calls for sex education to be taught in schools and factories.<sup>174</sup>

It was clear that people wanted knowledge but, although many professed not to need services, there was an emphasis on preserving the privacy and anonymity of those who attended treatment centres. Despite this, when WSS investigators checked for posters in their allocated areas, they discovered limited displays: some were defaced or torn down, with speculation elsewhere as to whether there was an aversion to displaying them, or whether they were looking in the wrong places. Small VD posters were often rendered ineffective by poor lighting, or by larger posters surrounding them,<sup>175</sup> although commercial advertising was at least in tune with government campaigns.<sup>176</sup>

Investigators suggested that posters would be more effective if placed in prominent display areas such as the centre of train platforms, rather than in corridors where people were less likely to stop. Widespread approval for publicity on the matter continued, with a strong feeling that information should change frequently to avoid monotony, and support for the use of all formats to reach the widest audience. Interviewees were questioned as to which media methods were most appropriate in disseminating knowledge about VD, and roughly 90% agreed that newspapers, magazines, posters, radio, films and lectures were all suitable mediums, with only 3% disagreeing with the use of posters. Concerns were that children and young people would get a distorted view of sex, or that parents would have answer awkward questions.<sup>177</sup> In March 1945, the public seemed generally supportive of the campaign, with calls to expand it over the next twelve months.<sup>178</sup> Explicit knowledge about VD was felt to be essential for securing swift treatment. The WSS survey concluded that:

[I]t is abundantly clear that far from being shocked at VD publicity, people are keen to learn everything they can about the diseases, provided the information is given in a form which they can easily understand.<sup>179</sup>

A constant emphasis throughout the VD poster campaigns was on the availability of 'free and confidential treatment', with anything that required people to 'kiss and tell' not deemed British.<sup>180</sup> Dealing with the problem appeared to be more important than 'punishing' those involved with public pillorying or fines; the most important message was to ensure that people knew what facilities were available. Exactly what is at stake, and the damage caused, is generally not elucidated. Often the threats are vague and nonmedical, playing on emotions typical of propaganda: namely, guilt and fear. Rather than any religious or moral messages, the emphasis is on 'duty': the duty of citizenship, to women, children, the country, the race, and the future. In contrast to the past, blame was officially attributed in a gender-neutral fashion.

Posters, however, balanced a discernible protective attitude to women and children with a focus on ‘immoral women’, both messages consistent with the idea of building up the nation. The designs used in the VD campaigns draw primarily on scientific discourse, but also upon moral discourse, to promote their message. Strong graphic design styles, abstract forms, non-realistic elements, and photography are all used to demonstrate that the issue was one to be tackled in a modern and scientific way. Stereotypical ‘medical’ staff are featured, and there is repeated reference to the necessity of swift medical treatment, with moral behavioural changes advocated as a secondary message. The message is a difficult one to represent: too much detail would have been resented, and the humour seen in other posters inappropriate. The statements used within the posters, however, are direct: ‘you will’, rather than ‘you might’ is the message, although this continued to rely upon a voluntary effort, rather than state intervention.

## Conclusion

This paper has built on existing scholarship around VD public health campaigns, focusing upon the often-ignored topic of posters. Posters were a highly visible medium for VD campaigns, although newspapers were still the main source of information on the subject. The campaigns were noticed more than other health campaigns, likely because of their ‘shocking’ nature.<sup>181</sup> Posters were deemed successful for a variety of reasons: their appeal ‘to decency and sense of social responsibility’; their appeal to particular groups in the community; the ‘colour, design and pictorial qualities’; and the subject matter or information they contained.<sup>182</sup> The main criterion for defining campaign success was that the message would reach the appropriate audience, evidenced through either reduced infection rates or increased numbers attending clinics. Persuasion and attitude change is a slow process, especially for such a contentious issue, and the government seemed to make progress in encouraging the topic further out of the shadows and encouraging visits to clinics for treatments. Posters did not stand alone, working alongside other legislative and educational practices, although their size, colour, and location often made them harder to ignore than other formats. Although the war provided impetus to dealing with the perceived ‘problem’, this paper demonstrates that behind the seemingly simple posters, were much more challenging and contested discourses that had their roots in pre-war debates. The government gained the confidence to develop its campaigns, drawing upon the information acquired from public opinion polls to pursue an increased medical message, alongside the moral approach. Within that most visible form of government-sanctioned advertising—posters—VD was constituted as ‘bad’ and ‘evil’, and those who ran the risk of contracting it (whether male or female) were failing in their duty as a citizen to remain healthy and disease-free—especially as they exposed their families to the risk, the family forming the basis of the nation as a whole.

## Notes

1. Myers, *Ad Worlds*.
2. McFall, *Advertising*.

3. See note 1 above.
4. Cronin, *Advertising, Commercial Spaces and the Urban*.
5. See note 1 above.
6. See note 4 above.
7. See note 1 above.
8. Bernstein, *Advertising Outdoors*.
9. O'Keefe and Reid, "The uses and effects of public service advertising".
10. O'Donnell, "What is Propaganda?" 2.
11. Lewis, *Keep Calm and Carry On*, 11–17.
12. Grant, *Propaganda and the Role of State in Inter-War Britain*, 46.
13. Hanneman et al., "Public service advertising on television"; and Paletz et al., "Politics in public service advertising on television".
14. Cox, "Compulsion, Voluntarism, and Venereal Disease," 96.
15. Howlett, *Fighting with Figures*, 20.
16. Hall, "War always brings it on," 215.
17. McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform*; Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*; Sponberg, *Feminising Venereal Disease*; Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Davenport Hines, Sex, Death and Punishment, 199.
18. HL Deb 11 May 1970 vol 310 cc469-84, <https://api.parliament.uk/historichansard/lords/1970/may/11/indecent-advertisements-amendment-bill-hl>.
19. Cox, "Compulsion, Voluntarism, and Venereal Disease," 91.
20. Bates, "The legacy of 1885".
21. Davidson and Hall, *Sex, Sin and Suffering*, 7.
22. Bland, "Cleansing the portals of life," 192.
23. Tomkins, "Palmitate or permanganate".
24. Carey, "The Racial Imperatives of Sex"; Hale, "Debating the New Religion of Eugenics"; Hanley, *Medicine, Knowledge and Venereal Diseases in England, 1886–1916*; Mackenzie, "Eugenics in Britain"; Pick, "Faces of degeneration"; Redvaldsen, "Eugenics, socialists and the labour movement in Britain, 1865–1940"; and Szepter, "Economic Growth, Disruption, Deprivation, Disease, and Death".
25. Allen, "Feminism and Eugenics in Germany and Britain, 1900–1940," 478.
26. Hall, "War always brings it on," 211.
27. Cox, "Compulsion, Voluntarism, and Venereal Disease," 109.
28. Beardsley, "Allied against sin"; Harrison, "The British Army and the problem of venereal disease"; and Payne, "Private lives and patriotism".
29. Towers, "Health education policy 1916–1926," 77.
30. Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and Its Control", 325–338".
31. Lammasniemi, Regulation 40D, 584.
32. The National Archives (hereafter TNA), MH 55/1330, 'Memorandum from Alan Smith, Treasurer BSHC, for the attention of the Minister of Health', 26 October 1938.
33. Davidson, "Venereal Disease, Sexual Morality, and Public Health in Interwar Scotland," 268.
34. See note 29 above.
35. *Ibid.*, 80.
36. Wellcome SA/PVD, Lesley Hall, Introductory notes.
37. Wellcome SA/BSH, Lesley Hall, Introductory notes.
38. Hanley, "'Sex Prejudice' and Professional Identity".
39. Dawes, *Fighting Fit*, xx.
40. Evans, "Tackling the 'hideous scourge'".
41. TNA MH 55/1330, 'Mrs Neville-Rolfe meeting with Ministry of Health regarding social hygiene', 21 February 1939.
42. Davidson and Hall, *Sex, Sin and Suffering*, 10.
43. Wellcome SA/PVD, 'Army's Social Problem: Does Prevention Really Work?', Reynolds News, Late 1939, 9.
44. Wellcome SA/PVD/5, 'Reynolds', Attitude of War Office is Revealed, 26 November 1939.



45. TNA T 161/1176, 'Letter from Sir Charles Seligman to Sir John Simon', 30 November 1939.
46. TNA T 161/1176, 'Letter from JS to Minister of Health, Walter Elliot', 20 December 1939.
47. TNA 161/1176, 'Letter to Sir Kingsley Wood, Treasury, from Malcolm Macdonald, Ministry of Health', 9 September 1940.
48. Calder, *The People's War*, 312–315.
49. Lee, "A forgotten legacy of the Second World War," 157–181.
50. Dawes, *Fighting Fit*, 213.
51. Wellcome PA/PVD/7, 'Letter to John Hanks', 28 February 1941; 'Letter to W. Widdicome, Esq.', 22 July 1941.
52. Davidson, "Venereal Disease, Sexual Morality, and Public Health in Interwar Scotland," 272.
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64. Bland, "Interracial Relationships," 3.
65. Doob, *Public Opinion and Propaganda*; and Maciver, *Sounding Public Opinion*.
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67. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 52. McLaine does not specify who the 'career civil servants' were.
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70. TNA INF 1/263, November 1943.
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72. Dawn Ades, "Posters for art's sake," in Timmers, 73.
73. Sontag, "Introduction," vii.
74. Timmers, *Power of the Poster*, 7.
75. Perloff, *The Dynamics of Persuasion*, 44–45.
76. Eckersley, *Poster Design*, 7.
77. Freeman, "Professional Organisations," 30.
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102. Cox, "Compulsion, Voluntarism, and Venereal Disease," 110.
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104. Rose, *Which People's War?* 81.
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108. Bartlett, *Political Propaganda*, 54.
109. Fuery and Fuery, *Visual Cultures and Critical Theory*, 16.
110. Davidson, "Venereal Disease, Sexual Morality, and Public Health in Interwar Scotland," 288.
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112. TNA MH 55/2325, "Civilian Venereal Disease Control," July 1943.
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116. Fuery and Fuery, *Visual Cultures and Critical Theory*, xi.
117. See Hall, 'What shall we do with the poxy sailor?' for more.
118. Gubar, "This Is My Rifle," 240.
119. Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*.
120. TNA RG 23/56, 'The campaign against venereal diseases by P.J. Wilson and V. Barker', January 1944.
121. Bingham, "The British popular press," 1060.
122. Davidson, "Venereal Disease, Sexual Morality, and Public Health in Interwar Scotland," 283.
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125. Wellcome SA/PVD, The Archbishop of Canterbury: Most Rev. W. Temple D.D., 'The CCHE Conference', 26 February 1943, 10.
126. M-O FR1633, 'V.D. Publicity in the Press', 20 March 1943.
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128. See note 59 above.
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132. Furedi, *How Fear Works*, 118.
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134. PRO RG 23/56, 'The campaign against venereal diseases by P.J. Wilson and V. Barker', January 1944, 132–134.
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168. TNA INF 1/292 C, 'HIWR, No.146', 22 July 1943.
169. TNA INF 1/292 C, 'HIWR, No.135', 6 May 1943.
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179. See note 174 above.
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181. See note 174 above.
182. TNA RG 23/5.

## Acknowledgements

Bex Lewis, the lead author of this paper, passed away on 18 February 2021. Bex was based in the Marketing, Retail and Tourism Department at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, where she had been a Senior Lecturer in Digital Marketing since 2015. She had previously been employed at the universities of Durham, Manchester and Winchester.

Although her primary research and teaching focus was on digital communication, Bex was also an expert on the propaganda posters of World War II. This had been the topic of Bex's PhD (awarded 2004), which was examined by the late Lord Asa Briggs and passed without corrections—a rare thing in the modern age. More recently, Bex had channeled this expertise into the publication of a book on the famous wartime 'Keep Calm and Carry On' poster campaign, published by the Imperial War Museum.

The breadth and depth of Bex's interests and achievements are far too numerous and substantive to attempt to capture in this short tribute, and if you would like to know more about what Bex did then then it is worth seeking out her best-selling books, or tapping into her remarkable social media footprint. In terms of the latter, many friends and former colleagues have left messages and memories about Bex online, to the extent she was trending on Twitter on the day of her death with the hashtag #BeMoreBex—something she would have undoubtedly appreciated!

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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**Bex Lewis's** final post was as a Senior Lecturer in Digital Marketing at the Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

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