

Abstract. Cartoons have been used in advertising in Great Britain for at least 200 years, to promote anything from alcohol and tobacco to motor cars and holidays. With the lifting of taxes on advertising in the British press in the nineteenth century, and the publication of the first major illustrated newspapers, pictorial advertising really took off and cartoons became a significant weapon in the advertiser's armoury.

One particular drawing from 1884, by the **Punch** cartoonist Harry Furniss, became especially well known. Originally intended as a joke about a Pears' Soap advertisement featuring the actress Lillie Langtry (mistress of King Edward VII) it was later used to promote the brand itself. The caption for the cartoon even entered the **Oxford Dictionary of Quotations**.

Keywords: Cartoons, Advertising, Pears' Soap, Lillie Langtry, King Edward VII, Sir John Everett Millais, Harry Furniss, **Punch** magazine.

In Chapter 9 ('Art in Advertising') of his classic handbook, *Scientific Advertising* (1923), the US advertising pioneer, Claude C. Hopkins (1866–1932), warned against using humour to sell products as 'People do not patronize a clown'. None the less many famous names from the world of graphic satire have produced commercial work of this kind, and some have even become art directors of advertising agencies. Most drawings are designed to a specific brief to promote anything from toothpaste, beer and cigarettes to motor cars, medicines and confectionery. However, one of the best-known soap advertisements of the 19th century originally began life as a *Punch* cartoon drawn by Harry Furniss (1854–1925).

The lifting of the taxes on advertising and newspapers in the middle of the 19th century brought with it a steady growth in

A COMIC SOAP OPERA

Harry Furniss and Advertising Cartoons

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pictorial press advertising in Britain. One of the earliest cartoonists working in the field was George Cruikshank (1792–1878) who drew a cat hissing at its own reflection in a highly polished boot for Warren's Shoe Blacking, alleged to be the first nationally advertised household product ('The Cat and the Boot; or, an Improvement Upon Mirrors', c. 1820).

Cruikshank later illustrated *Oliver Twist* (1837) by Dickens, who as a boy had worked briefly in Warren's London factory near Charing Cross, and an unexpected free advertisement for Guinness Stout appears in Chapter 33 of Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) where 'Phiz' (Hablot Knight Browne, 1815–82) draws Sam Weller writing a Valentine in an inn displaying a placard for the beer.

Following the success of the *Illustrated London News* – which was founded in 1842 as the world's first illustrated weekly news magazine (by 1863 it was selling 300,000 copies a week) – a number of rival publications soon appeared. These included *Reynolds Weekly Newspaper* (1850, later *Reynolds News*), *The Penny Illustrated Paper* (1861), *The Graphic* (1869), *The Illustrated Sporting & Dramatic News* (1874), *The Sketch* (1893) and *The Sphere* (1899).

The first daily illustrated newspaper in Britain, the *Daily Graphic*, was founded in 1890 and by the time of the outbreak of the Boer War (1899–1902) cartoons were a regular feature in advertisements for Ogden's Tobacco, Fry's Chocolate and others in a wide variety of newspapers and magazines.

On 12 November 1901, shortly before the end of the war, Phillips' Guinea Gold Cigarettes took out four whole pages of advertisements in the eight-page London evening daily, the *Star*, in an attempt to resist US competition in the tobacco market. The front page featured a large cartoon showing two men in tail coats, smoking cigarettes and standing over a table holding glasses of port as they drink a toast. The caption reads: 'The Englishman's Toast – Don't be gulled by Yankee bluff, support John Bull with every puff.' It appeared beneath the headline: 'The Most Costly, Colossal & Convincing Advertisement Ever Used in an Evening Newspaper the Wide World O'er.'

Twenty years later William Heath Robinson (1872–1944) drew a multi-frame cartoon ('A Half-Hour in Toffee Town', 1 October 1921) over the entire front page of the *Daily Mail* to advertise Mackintosh's Toffee.

Other well known cartoon advertising campaigns of the 20th century featured drawings by John Hassall (1868–1948) for Colman's Mustard (also the railway poster 'Skegness is so Bracing'), Will Owen (1869–1957) for Bisto Gravy, Leo Cheney (1878–1928) for Johnnie Walker Whisky, Alfred Leete (1882–1933) for William Younger & Co.'s Scotch Ales, H. H. Harris (fl. 1910) for Bovril, John Gilroy (1898–1985) for Guinness, Ronald Searle (1920–2011) for Lemon Hart Rum and Mark Boxer (1931–88) for Smirnoff Vodka.

In 1887 Pears' Soap would break new ground in advertising with its adaptation of Sir John Everett Millais' painting *A Child's World* (1886, later known as 'Bubbles'), which featured his five-year-old grandson, William Milbourne James (later Admiral Sir William Milbourne James GCB), as a golden-haired boy blowing soap bubbles. The original painting – and its copyright – was bought from Millais by Sir William

Ingram, the managing director of the *Illustrated London News*, who reproduced it in his weekly paper as a special presentation colour print with the Christmas number of the magazine in 1887. (Other paintings of children by Millais had been published with previous Christmas numbers.)

The 'Bubbles' colour print was seen by Thomas Barratt, the Managing Director of A. & F. Pears, who immediately saw its potential as an image which could be adapted to promote Pears' Soap. Barratt paid Ingram £2,200 for the picture and its copyright and had it reproduced – with the addition of a caption and a bar of Pears' soap in the bottom right-hand corner – as a colour poster.

Barratt had earlier pioneered the use of testimonials in advertisements. His most celebrated instance of this was in a Pears' Soap advertisement for 1882 featuring Lillie Langtry, the actress and former mistress of Edward VII who was known as 'Jersey Lily'. That year, Barratt had persuaded the society beauty to add her name (and face) to his campaign and she thereby became the first woman to endorse a commercial product of any kind. The original words attributed to her were: 'Since using Pears' Soap for the hands and complexion *I have discarded all others*', but this was later changed to: 'For years I have used your soap, and no other'.

Two years later, the cartoonist Harry Furniss (1854–1925) drew a very famous joke in *Punch* which was a spoof of the Langtry advertisement for Pears' Soap. Based on a sketch sent to him by a reader of the magazine, it showed a dirty and dishevelled old tramp, smoking a pipe and supposedly writing a letter to the manufacturer: 'I used your soap two years ago; since then I have used no other'.

Furniss, who was born in Dublin, had been at school with George Bernard Shaw and Edward Carson, studied art at the Royal Hibernian Schools and the Hibernian Academy (his first published cartoon appeared in *Zozimus* magazine on August 1870 while he was still a student) and worked as a clerk to a wood-engraver.

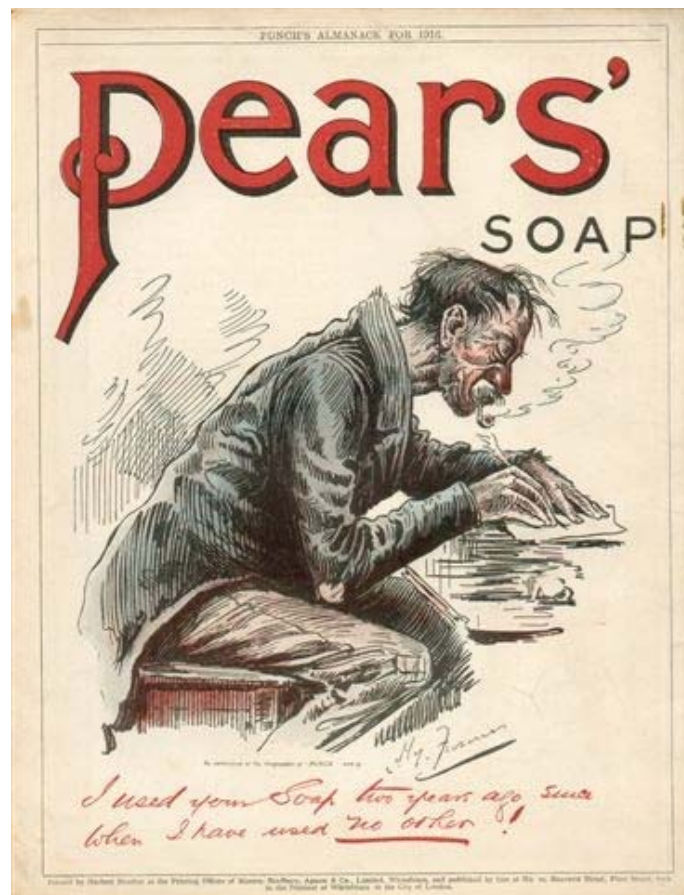


Fig. 1 – A colour version of the famous Pears' Soap advertisement by Harry Furniss, reproduced in the *Punch's Almanack for 1916* (December 1915).

Moving to London in 1873 he was employed at first as a freelance illustrator for *The Argosy* (1873–4), *London Society* (1874–6) – then edited by Captain Marryat's novelist daughter Florence – *Illustrated Sporting & Dramatic News* (1874–78) and the *Illustrated London News*. His first cartoon for *Punch* was 'Take Away That Bauble!' (30 October 1880), about the erection of the griffin memorial marking the site of the Temple Bar in Fleet Street, and by the time he left in March 1894 he had contributed more than 2600 drawings to the magazine.

After leaving *Punch* Furniss set up the short-lived weekly magazine *Lika Joko* (1894–5). He later moved to the USA to work for the Edison Film Company (1912), and wrote and produced his own animated films, such as *War Cartoons* (1914) and *Peace and Pencillings* (1914), almost a decade before Walt Disney. He was also a

prolific author and book illustrator, producing some 40 titles himself and illustrating more than 60 others, including the first edition of Lewis Carroll's, *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893). In addition he exhibited at the Royal Academy and produced two books making fun of RA shows: *Harry Furniss's Royal Academy* (1887) and *Royal Academy Antics* (1890).

However, though he famously created the image of Prime Minister William Gladstone with an enormous winged collar, Furniss is still best known for his *Punch* cartoon of the tramp.

The model for the figure in the cartoon was Furniss's friend, the animal painter, Charles Burton Barber (1845–94), though the celebrated *Punch* artist Charles Keene (1823–91) believed it was an attack on him (a fact unknown to Furniss until after

Keene's death). As M. H. Spielmann says in his *The History of Punch* (1895):

('A further point of interest about this famous sketch was that Charles Keene was deeply offended by it at first – in the groundless belief that it was intended as a skit upon himself. It must at least be admitted that the head is not unlike what one might have expected to belong to a dissipated and dilapidated Charles Keene.')

¹

And the two drawings of Keene by Furniss which are held in the National Portrait Gallery certainly do look very much like the tramp.

However, as Furniss himself admits in his memoirs, *The Confessions of a Caricaturist* (1901, Vol. 1, p. 300): 'The original who sat for it was a brother artist, another Charles, quite as delightful as Keene, equally clever in his own way, and my greatest friend – Charles Burton Barber, the animal painter, in appearance rather like Charles Keene, but

nothing of the bohemian about him, and a non-smoker!'

In return Furniss was the model for the legs of the late John Brown in a painting by Barber.

'Yes, poor Barber sat for the tramp, and I in return sat to him for a figure quite as incongruous in my case as the tramp was in his. I sat for John Brown for the picture Queen Victoria had commissioned of Mr Brown surrounded by her pet dogs, which she had in her private room. She was so delighted with the picture that she had a replica made of it, and placed it in the passage outside, so that it was the first picture she looked at as she left her room. Barber's animals and children were delightful, but he was weak with his men, and was in trouble over John Brown's calves, – it was then that I posed for the "brawny Scott", but only for the portion here mentioned.'

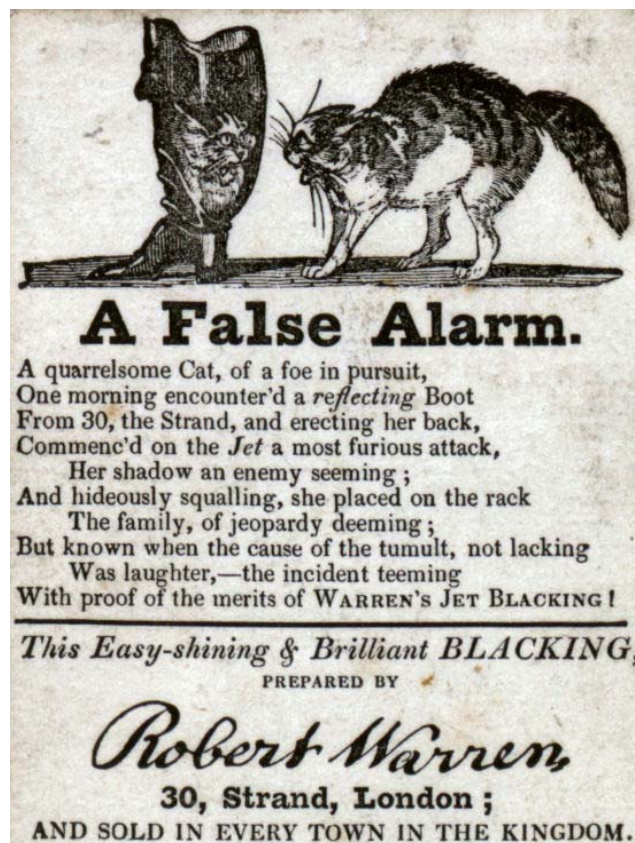
²


Fig. 2 – 'The Cat and the Boot; or, an Improvement Upon Mirrors', George Cruikshank, c. 1820'. One of the earliest cartoon press advertisements, for Warren's Shoe Blacking.



Fig. 3 – An advertisement (on the mantelpiece) for Guinness Stout from Chapter 33 of Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) where 'Phiz' (Hablot Knight Browne, 1815–82) draws Sam Weller writing a Valentine in an inn.

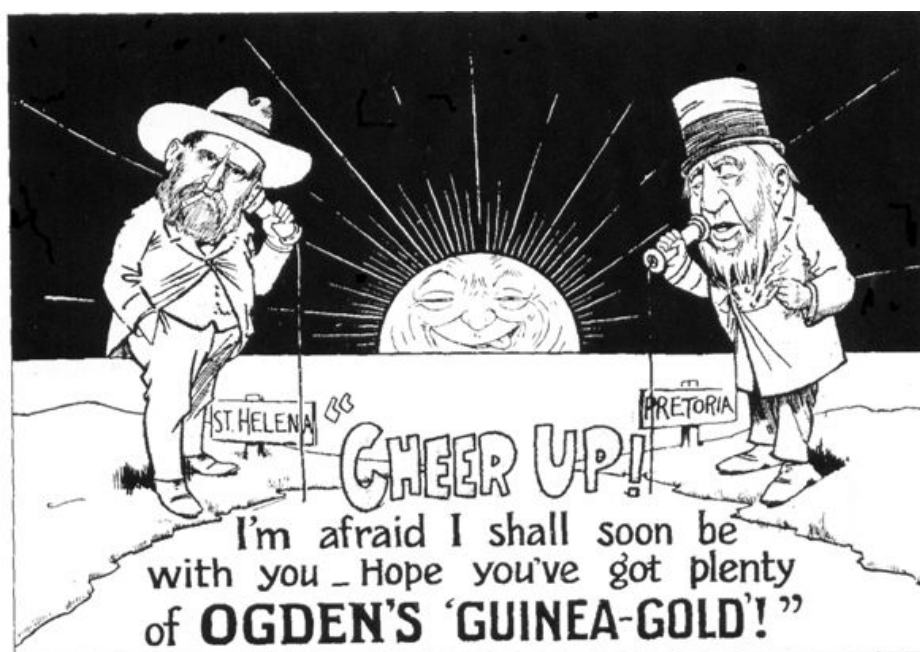


Fig. 4 – 'Cheer Up!', 1900. An anonymous cartoon for Ogden's Tobacco published during the Boer War and featuring the Boer Commander-in-Chief, General Piet Cronje (captured by the British and exiled on St Helena) and Transvaal President Paul Kruger in Pretoria.

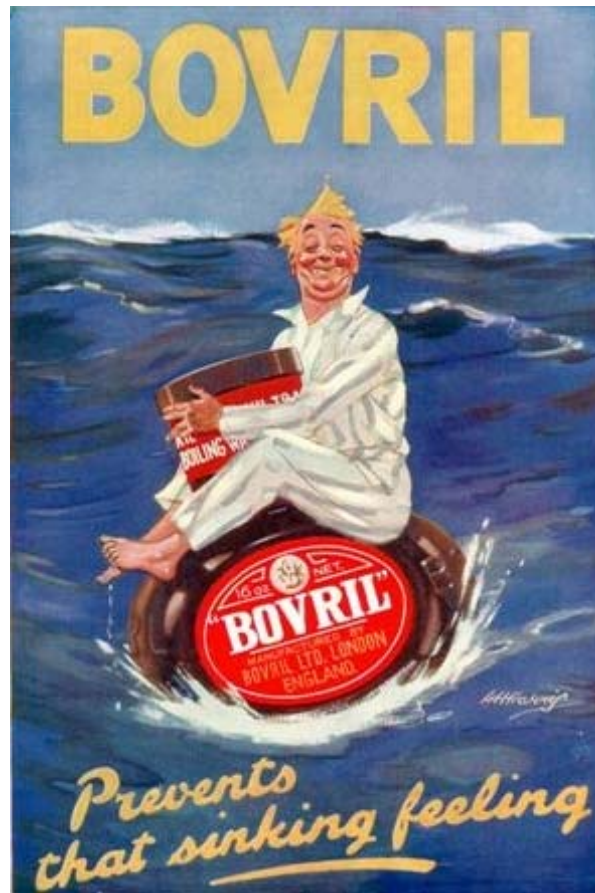


Fig. 7 – ‘Bovril Prevents that Sinking Feeling’, Herbert H.Harris (1920).
The first of a series of Bovril cartoons by Harris featuring a shipwrecked man still wearing his pyjamas.

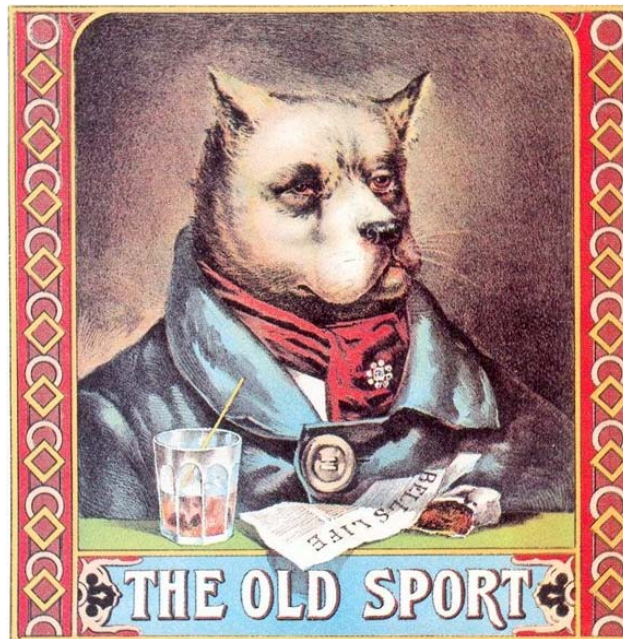


Fig. 8 – A display card for ‘The Old Sport’ tobacco, c. 1880
(*Bell's Life in London & Sporting Chronicle*, which the dog is reading, was founded in 1822).



Fig. 9 – A colour advertisement for Vim scouring powder (Vim was produced by Lever Brothers who acquired A. & F. Pears in 1917).



Fig. 10 – In 1914 the London Museum (later known as the Museum of London) moved to Lancaster House in St James's and, in 1928, the artist Rex Whistler (1905–44) designed a colourful poster, 'Britannia Visits the London Museum', showing Britannia – wearing a plumed helmet and holding a trident – arriving in a carriage with Union Flag wheels which is being driven by a lion and pulled by a unicorn.



Fig. 11 – A photograph of Harry Furniss in 1897.

Pears' Soap



"For years I have used your soap, and
no other."

Lillie Langtry

Fig. 12 – The actress Lillie Langtry in a Pears' Soap advertisement.



Fig. 12A – Lillie Langtry caricatured sitting on a bar of soap and holding a lily by E.J.Wheeler (1848–1933) in ‘The Jersey Lily’ (*Punch*, 1 January 1891).

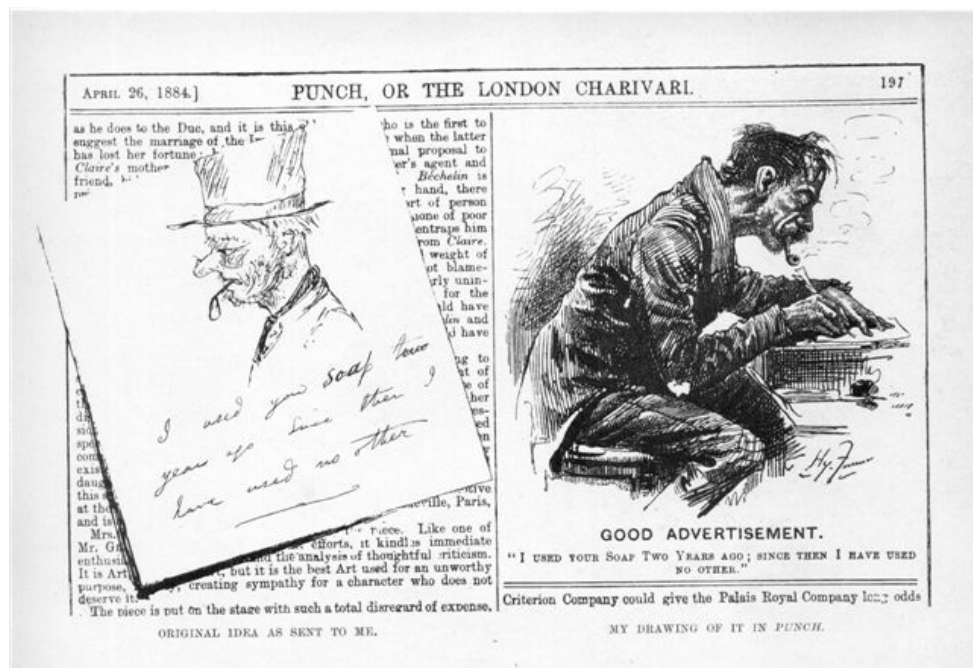


Fig. 13 – ‘I used your soap two years ago; since then I have used no other’, Harry Furniss, *Punch*, 26 April 1884. The original cartoon from *Punch* together with a copy of the sketch which inspired it, as reprinted in Furniss’ *Confessions of a Caricaturist* (1901).



Fig. 14 – The *Punch* cartoonist Charles Keene (1823–91) by J.D.Watson (1870). Keene mistakenly believed he was the model for the tramp in the Furniss soap cartoon.



Fig. 15 – A London Underground poster by Frederick Charles Herrick (1887–1970) for an international advertising exhibition in London in 1920. The tramp figure by Furniss can be seen in the centre talking to Johnnie Walker and Mr Punch.



Fig. 16 – A first-day cover featuring three drawings of the cricketer W.G. Grace by Furniss which were reproduced as Royal Mail stamps in 1973 to mark the centenary of County Cricket. In this version Furniss can be seen drawing Grace.



Fig. 17 – A later Pears' Soap cartoon advertisement featuring a tramp by Phil May (1864–1903).

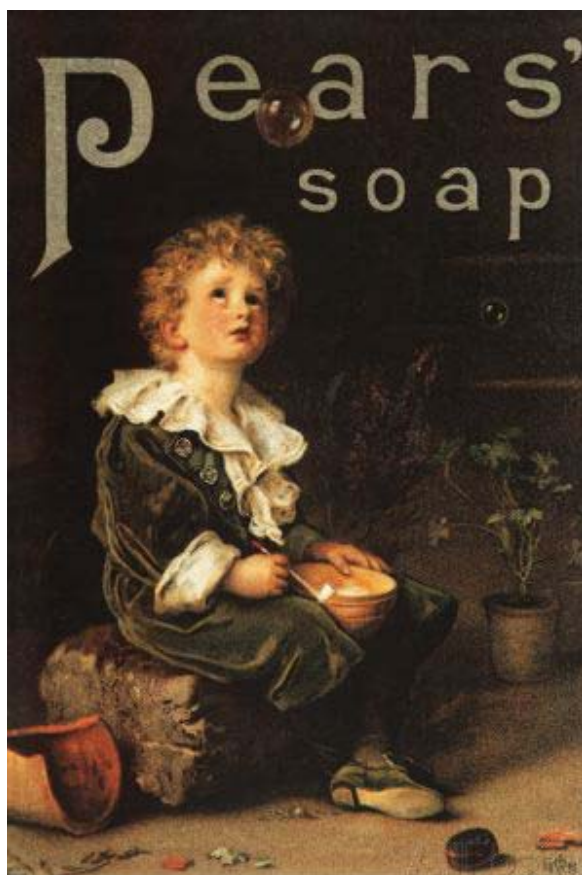


Fig. 18 – ‘Bubbles’ by Sir Edward Everett Millais as adapted for the famous Pears’ Soap advertisement (note the bar of Pears’ Soap added in the bottom-right corner).

Furniss’s son Lawrence was also the model for the child in *Gelert* (c.1894) by Barber.³

However, though Keene was not the model for Furniss’s famous cartoon he none the less had an important link with Lillie Langtry and soap advertising. Keene was not only a friend of Sir John Everett Millais who, as noted earlier, painted the original of ‘Bubbles’ used for advertising Pears’ Soap but also, through him, met Langtry and encouraged her to become an actress. As Derek Hudson says in his biography, *Charles Keene* (1947): ‘At Millais’ house he [Keene] met Mrs Langtry, and Keene was the first to suggest to the Jersey Lily that she should go on the stage.’

Langtry was herself later caricatured by E. J. Wheeler (1848–1933), sitting on a bar of soap and holding a lily (‘The Jersey Lily’, *Punch*, 1 January 1891).

To return to Furniss’s tramp cartoon, *Punch* later sold the copyright to Thomas Barratt at A & F. Pears and, ironically – having been originally drawn as a spoof of one of the company’s own advertisements – it subsequently became a very famous press and poster advertisement for Pears’ Soap itself.

However, after his initial fee from *Punch*, Furniss himself received nothing further for his drawing. As he later complained: ‘I was never offered so much as a cake of soap from those who used my *Punch* sketch so freely!’ Indeed it was later even plagiarised and redrawn for a US advertisement.

None the less, the image became iconic and Furniss’s caption even entered the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*.

When Pears later also persuaded the soprano Adelina Patti to endorse their soap

with the caption 'I have found it matchless for the hands and complexion', another *Punch* cartoonist, Phil May (1864–1903), drew a similar, unwashed tramp figure for a Pears' Soap advertisement. In this drawing the tramp seems to be contemplating throwing himself into the Thames from the Embankment near the Houses of Parliament but is stopped by the words 'Whilst There's Life There's Soap' (instead of 'Hope') inscribed above a lifebelt attached to the riverside barrier (as with 'Bubbles', a bar of Pears' Soap is shown in the bottom right-hand corner of the picture). The advertisement's caption reads 'Pears' Soap is Matchless for the Complexion.' (Phil May also drew a number of other cartoon advertisements for Pears, as well as for

other companies such as Player's Cigarettes.)

The original Furniss tramp was also featured, talking to Johnnie Walker and Mr Punch, in the centre of a London Underground poster by Frederick Charles Herrick (1887–1970), publicising an international advertising exhibition in London in 1920.

Furniss also drew advertisements for Bovril and others and in 1973, nearly half a century after his death, his work was still being reproduced for commercial purposes. Three of his drawings of the famous cricketer W. G. Grace (originally published in 1895) were used by the Royal Mail as postage stamps to commemorate the centenary of English county cricket.

Notes

¹ Spielmann, p. 145.

² Harry Furniss, *The Confessions of a Caricaturist* (1901, Vol. 1, p. 301). The painting by Charles Burton Barber (1845–94) was 'John Brown (1827–1883) with Dogs at Osborne' (1883) in the Royal Collection.

³ 'In the dining-room Landseer, Herkomer, Alma Tadema, and Burton Barber are represented – little Lawrence was the original study for the child in the latter artist's "Bethgeleit.", Harry How, 'Illustrated Interviews XXIII: Harry Furniss', *Strand Magazine*, Vol. 5, June 1893.