



Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1DL

Tel: 01449 612229

www.eastanglianlife.org.uk

Object(s): Educational Posters about food production

Object Number(s):

STMEA:1989-4.2

STMEA:1989-4.3

STMEA:1989-4.163 to STMEA:1989-4.221

Researcher details: Richard Hall, Volunteer

Educational Posters

For anyone educated in the UK between 1940 and 1970, these objects in our collection could be a very familiar sight. A series of educational posters, from a larger collection, depicting agricultural and rural scenes of food production and harvesting from across the globe.

These posters include images of everything from a Miller at a local watermill, greeting a farmer who has brought sacks of grain to be milled; to a modern milk bottling plant at work. Not just limited to scenes typical of the rural British economy, other posters cover food production across the world. Images include rice farmers in Chinese paddy fields, coconut harvesting in Ceylon, a Jamaican banana plantation, rice planting in Burma and many other scenes.

The posters were all part of a collection donated by the Heath C.P. Primary School in Kesgrave and were published by Macmillan History or Macmillan Geography respectively. They were printed as educational reference material for teachers use before the advent of more modern media and the internet.

Macmillan Education

The company who produced our posters are known as Macmillan Education Ltd. The company was founded in London in 1843 and have grown to become one of the world's largest suppliers of educational materials. According to the company's website¹, the company was founded by brother's Daniel and Alexander Macmillan with an aim of publishing the works of British writers, including; Tennyson, Hardy and Kipling.

Returning home following the First World War, Harold Macmillan (later to become a Conservative British Prime Minister) joined the family firm in 1920 as a Junior Partner.² He re-joined the firm following the Second World War and became its Chairman in 1964. His direction led the company to establish themselves as a world leading educational publisher. It was during this time that the posters in our collection were produced.

¹ Who we are | Macmillan Education | Macmillan Education Homepage | Macmillan Education | Springer Nature [Internet]. Springernature.com. 2020 [cited 15 December 2020]. Available from: <https://www.springernature.com/gp/macmillaneducation/who-we-are>

² Harold Macmillan [Internet]. En.wikipedia.org. 2020 [cited 15 December 2020]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Macmillan

Today, Macmillan are a global brand offering educational materials and writing for the modern age in a range of accessible formats to draw the attention of children and those in higher education.

Posters as tools for education and persuasion

We all have images in our mind of posters we have seen used for advertising - although today, many such adverts are carried using digital media platforms.

Educators of the 20th century have found visual media in the form of posters a valuable supplement to other learning methods and materials. Osa and Musser³ suggest that learning posters can be used by educators to illustrate a concept or thing, demonstrate a process, differentiate between similar things and capture interest and stimulate emotion. They also suggest that the value of learning posters really lies in their ability to illustrate processes and cultural differences thereby stimulating interest in a subject. Hence, the posters in our range include topics of both historical and geographical interest.

Interestingly, Harold Macmillan⁴ travelled extensively during his time as Prime Minister. It was a period in our history, when there was a general desire among former African British Colonies for greater independence and the right to self-determination or even independence⁵. Much of what he saw undoubtedly influenced his decision to set up branches of Macmillan Education in several countries as well as the content of many of the posters in our collection.

Posters are often used to persuade and influence. A typical example of this type of poster was promoted by Lord Kitchener in 1914, to persuade men to enlist in the Army (Figure 1). This poster was widely credited with attracting up to 2.5 million men to enlist in the British army between 1914 and 1915. However, it didn't actually appear until the end of September, after recruitment had already peaked.⁶

There are similarly, examples of posters having been used for ideological and propaganda purposes, particularly during the so called 'Cold War' era when the western world saw the communist countries as a significant threat to global stability.

³ Osa J, Musser L. The role of posters in teacher education programmes. Pennsylvania State University; 2004.

⁴ Harold Macmillan [Internet]. En.wikipedia.org. 2020 [cited 15 December 2020]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Macmillan

⁵ Morgan K. The Oxford history of Britain. [Pages 571-578]. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1984.

⁶ 'Your country needs you' advertisement [Internet]. The British Library. 2020 [cited 15 December 2020]. Available from: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/your-country-needs-you#>



Figure 1: Britons (*Lord Kitchener*) wants you!⁷

What do our posters tell us about our world?

Some might describe the images in our posters as representing an 'idealised' view of the world; neglecting as they do, some of the conditions in which the people in the posters were working at the time. You might also argue that such a view offers a glimpse into the world of our colonial past

You could also argue that these images promote gender stereotyping depicting the differing roles expected of men and women in the production of food. However, it is important not to lose sight of the period in which these posters were produced, judging them contemporaneously with everyday life at the time, rather than the way we might think today.

What we can learn from these posters is about how the world of food production has changed by the introduction of technology into farming and agriculture. Many of the tasks seen here, such as ploughing, milling and milking, required significant labour to complete. The same tasks today, thanks to modern technology, can be completed more efficiently and with less human effort than these images portray.

Above all, these posters provided children with an insight into a world beyond the classroom and captured their imagination at the time. From an educational perspective, it was the beginning of an

⁷ 5. By Eybl, Plakatumuseum Wien/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=43336500>. Britons (Kitchener) wants you! [Internet]. 2020 [cited 15 December 2020]. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Kitchener_Wants_You#/media/File:30a_Sammlung_Eybl_Gro%C3%9Fbritannien_Alfred_Leete_\(1882%E2%80%931933\)_Britons_\(Kitchener\)_wants_you_\(Britten_Kitchener_braucht_Euch\).1914_\(Nachdruck\),_74_x_50_cm._\(Slg.Nr._552\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Kitchener_Wants_You#/media/File:30a_Sammlung_Eybl_Gro%C3%9Fbritannien_Alfred_Leete_(1882%E2%80%931933)_Britons_(Kitchener)_wants_you_(Britten_Kitchener_braucht_Euch).1914_(Nachdruck),_74_x_50_cm._(Slg.Nr._552).jpg) Attribution: © Eybl, Plakatumuseum Wien.



Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1DL

Tel: 01449 612229

www.eastanglianlife.org.uk

understanding of where our food came from and how it was produced. I can vividly remember seeing similar posters in my classroom as a child so this is certainly the view I would subscribe to.

We would not expect to see this type of poster in the modern classroom in spite of the assertion that the use of posters still “has an important part to play in stimulating learning” (Osa J, Musser L, 2004). As we have already seen, the images on the poster can only be described as an idealised snapshot of what they are trying to teach. Their usefulness, other than for providing instruction or reminders, is certainly limited with the advent of the internet and new media channels. Nevertheless, as objects worth holding in our collection, they offer us an insight into food production in the 20th century, the like of which may never be seen again.