

**Object:** Colour Print

**Object Number:** STMEA:1989-4.200

**Researcher details:** Ellie Alexander, Volunteer

The Covent Garden Market print is part of a wider series of educational posters produced by Macmillan Education Ltd, and this particular poster depicts the unloading of fresh produce in the town square. The print itself displays the variety of goods which were sold, and reflects how it was a hub of activity where fruit and vegetables, but also flowers, roots and herbs were sold from as early as 1670.<sup>1</sup>

The market was open six days a week, from Monday to Saturday, and was only required to close on Christmas Day, therefore generating a great deal of activity and money.<sup>2</sup> During the late eighteenth century it became known as the best market for produce in all of England, with 15,000 acres of market garden ground within 10 miles of London.<sup>3</sup> The large amount of land surrounding London, which was reserved to grow crops for the market, signifies the importance of the trade activities which occurred in Covent Garden, as they would have generated great turnover and boosted the British economy. The market was also responsible for bringing further popularity to the area, which was already well established as a hub of the arts and theatre. Such a large land mass was also necessary as the crops grown and sold here were distributed across all of England.<sup>4</sup>

The market was split into different sections for various stalls, with herbs and high class fruiterers in the south row and florists in the west. Garden produce and roots could be found in the north, and peas and berries in the east, organised by season. In the centre of the market you could find bird sellers, iron dealers and large crockery displays.<sup>5</sup> This was made possible partially by the expansion of international trade, with certain goods shipped over from as far as Western Australia, providing exotic varieties to customers.<sup>6</sup> The wide array of reputable trading activities was a far cry from the seedy activities and prostitution which the area had initially been known for, thus uplifting its status.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> London Remembers. 2021. *Covent Garden Market*. [online] Available at: <https://www.londonremembers.com/memorials/covent-garden-market> [Accessed 13 January 2021].

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> "Covent Garden Market," in *Survey of London: Volume 36, Covent Garden*, ed. F H W Sheppard (London: London County Council, 1970), 129-150. *British History Online*, accessed February 13, 2021, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol36/pp129-150>.

<sup>4</sup> London Remembers. 2021. *Covent Garden Market*

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> TJ Poupart Ltd, 2019. *Fruit Shipment from Western Australia 1954 Covent Garden Memories*. [online] Available at: [http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page/tj\\_poupart\\_ltd\\_1954?path=0p40p](http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page/tj_poupart_ltd_1954?path=0p40p) [Accessed 28 December 2020].

<sup>7</sup> Anne Bransford, *Covent Garden Moves Out*, Covent Garden Memories [online] Available at [http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page\\_id\\_36.aspx?path=0p36p](http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page_id_36.aspx?path=0p36p) [Accessed 28 December 2020].

The print also offers an insight into changing technologies available during the twentieth century, with the decline of the horse powered economy and introduction of vans to move goods. This allowed for the transportation of heavier and larger loads at faster rates, which would have been essential to keep up with booming business. Created between the 1940s and 1960s, the poster would have likely been representative of the post-war era and the end of rationing, displayed by the abundance of food available for purchase. This was in stark contrast to the scarcity of food in Britain during the Second World War. Although fruits and vegetables were never directly rationed during the war, they were still impacted by shortages and therefore harder to acquire. This was particularly true of overseas imports including tomatoes and onions, and led to the government creating its 'Dig for Victory' campaign which utilised public parks and encouraged citizens to grow their own produce in gardens and allotments.<sup>8</sup> Although much of the area had been bombed during the War and many residents lost their homes, the remaining community pulled together in an effort to rebuild. Despite the new limitations on space, the market continued to flourish in the post-war era and boasted 5,000 employees by the 1960s who traded £75 million in produce each year.<sup>9</sup>

The lack of female figures displayed in the print is indicative of the mainly male dominant nature of the market, as this was mostly manual labour including the lifting and movement of heavy sacks of produce and crates.<sup>10</sup> Aside from the Women's Land Army, this was also reflective of the gender imbalance in the wider agricultural industry at the time, which largely did not feature women. However, this does not mean that women were excluded from the market entirely. Outside of being potential consumers, they often acted as market traders, and this could also be a family affair.<sup>11</sup> Their involvement was simply limited to less laborious types of work within the market, and focused on perhaps the more 'stereotypical' feminine elements of socialising with customers and assisting with operations. This showed progress in terms of allowing the female contribution to work, but was still based on the assumption that men were naturally stronger than women. This led to a split in the types of roles which they would be expected to fill.

Despite the change in ownership of the Market between 1913 and 1945, it still provides fresh produce today and a bronze relief was built in 2006 to commemorate the rich history of the area and its activities.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Imperial War Museums. n.d. *What You Need To Know About Rationing In The Second World War*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-you-need-to-know-about-rationing-in-the-second-world-war>> [Accessed 13 February 2021].

<sup>9</sup> Jaimie Fiaherty, *Covent Garden in the 20th Century*, Covent Garden Memories [online] Available at <[http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page\\_id\\_119.aspx](http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page_id_119.aspx)> [Accessed 5 February 2021].

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Information Photo Division Photographer, *Cabbages and Prima Donnas: Life in Wartime Covent Garden, London, England, 1940*, Imperial War Museum [Online] Available at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205197578> [Accessed 21 January 2021].

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Information Photo Division Photographer, *Cabbages and Prima Donnas: Life in Wartime Covent Garden, London, England, 1940*, Imperial War Museum [Online] Available at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205197590> [Accessed 25 January 2021].

<sup>12</sup> London Remembers. 2021. *Covent Garden Market*.

## **Bibliography**

Anne Bransford, *Covent Garden Moves Out*, Covent Garden Memories [online] Available at [http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page\\_id\\_36.aspx?path=0p36p](http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page_id_36.aspx?path=0p36p) [Accessed 28 December 2020].

"Covent Garden Market," in *Survey of London: Volume 36, Covent Garden*, ed. F H W Sheppard (London: London County Council, 1970), 129-150. *British History Online*, accessed February 13, 2021, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol36/pp129-150>.

Imperial War Museums. n.d. *What You Need To Know About Rationing In The Second World War*. [online] Available at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-you-need-to-know-about-rationing-in-the-second-world-war> [Accessed 13 February 2021].

Jaimie Fiaherty, *Covent Garden in the 20th Century*, Covent Garden Memories [online] Available at [http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page\\_id\\_119.aspx](http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page_id_119.aspx) [Accessed 5 February 2021].

London Remembers. 2021. *Covent Garden Market*. [online] Available at: <https://www.londonremembers.com/memorials/covent-garden-market> [Accessed 13 January 2021].

Ministry of Information Photo Division Photographer, *Cabbages and Prima Donnas: Life in Wartime Covent Garden, London, England, 1940*, Imperial War Museum [Online] Available at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205197578> [Accessed 21 January 2021].

Ministry of Information Photo Division Photographer, *Cabbages and Prima Donnas: Life in Wartime Covent Garden, London, England, 1940*, Imperial War Museum [Online] Available at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205197590> [Accessed 25 January 2021].

TJ Poupart Ltd, 2019. *Fruit Shipment from Western Australia 1954* Covent Garden Memories. [online] Available at: [http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page/tj\\_poupart\\_ltd\\_1954?path=0p40p](http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page/tj_poupart_ltd_1954?path=0p40p) [Accessed 28 December 2020].