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Purvis, MC (2015) *Direction and discretion: the roles of centre and branch in the interwar management of Marks and Spencer*. *History of Retailing and Consumption*, 1 (1). pp. 63-81. ISSN 2373-518X

<https://doi.org/10.1080/2373518X.2015.1015239>

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**Direction and discretion: the roles of centre and branch in the interwar
management of Marks and Spencer**

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Abstract

The successful expansion of multiple retailing in interwar Britain is often seen to rest, in part, on the inculcation of efficient and uniform working practices throughout a company's branch network. Major multiple retailers often placed considerable stress on codifying the standards expected of store managers and their staff; on creating systems of branch supervision and inspection by staff directly responsible to head office; and on the submission of frequent and detailed returns outlining the operational and financial performance of individual stores. In practice, however, this did not always lead to the degree of operational centralisation and uniformity which is sometimes assumed. Evidence from the Marks and Spencer Archive reveals not only the limitations of local compliance with officially sanctioned policies and processes, but also an expectation that managers would exercise positive discretion in implementing standards in a locally appropriate fashion. The paper thus sheds new light on the role of the multiple store manager – hitherto a somewhat neglected figure – in the retail evolution of the interwar years.

Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to record my appreciation of the help provided by the staff of the Marks and Spencer Archive in accessing much of the material for this research. The paper has also benefitted greatly from incisive comments by two anonymous referees. Responsibility for any remaining deficiencies remains, of course, with the author.

Keywords

Multiple retailing; store management; retail work; company organisation; Marks and Spencer.

Introduction: scale, management and the interwar advance of multiple retailing

Some of the most frequently cited studies of the distributive sector in interwar Britain focus on the rise of multiple retailing.¹ This was a phenomenon which prompted much debate amongst contemporaries exercised by its implications, perceived to be social as well as commercial; and which has attracted the subsequent interest of economists and historians.² Although the years before 1914 had seen the emergence of several hundred retailers operating chains of ten or more stores as a single business, multiple retailing gained in significance during the 1920s and 1930s as it outgrew its origins as a means of selling a limited range of mass-produced staple goods to poorer consumers. The proportion of total retail trade conducted through chain stores rose from no more than 10 per cent in 1920 to nearly 20 per cent by 1939. Growth was thus driven not only by rising consumer spending, but also by sales gains at the expense of independent shopkeepers and, in some areas, consumer co-operatives. Most multiple retailers still operated on a district or regional basis, but the amalgamation of existing enterprises alongside the opening of new stores created an increasing number of multi-million-pound businesses trading nationally through hundreds of outlets.³ Operations on such a scale, both commercial and geographical, confirmed the business potential of the emerging model of multiple retailing, but they also raised substantial managerial challenges.⁴

The success enjoyed by many multiple retailers is commonly linked to the economies secured by the growing extent of their trading operations and to the development of centralised management systems.⁵ Multiple retailers bought, or themselves produced, consumer goods on a new scale, sourcing the bulk of stock for their entire store chain through a single purchasing operation. Working in this way not only secured scale economies, but also increased the retailer's power relative to producers. Some multiples began to dictate to external suppliers in matters of design and quality, as well as the price that they were willing to pay for goods.⁶ Moreover,

integration and standardisation frequently extended beyond stock acquisition to matters such as the appearance, layout and equipment of stores.⁷ This enabled further economies in the purchasing of fixtures and fittings, and time and cost savings when building or refurbishing stores. But store design was also key to the development of a widely-recognised brand image. Multiple retailers thus presented their stores as reassuringly familiar spaces that consumers could enter with confidence, knowing that they would find the goods which they wanted to buy at prices they could afford to pay.⁸ The most successful multiple retailers were thus marked by their astuteness in judging which goods would most appeal to consumers and how they could best be displayed. Many also invested considerable effort in identifying store locations which would maximise passing trade and in securing the necessary finance to obtain these prime sites.⁹

Accounts of the rise of multiple retailing in general, and of individual concerns, thus frequently stress the strong control exercised by central management; sometimes, indeed, by a single owner or owning family.¹⁰ The leadership of Simon Marks and Israel Sieff, for example, is widely acknowledged as vital to the interwar development of Marks and Spencer.¹¹ Amongst their contemporaries, John Sainsbury was described by the *Grocers' Gazette* as 'an unapologetic dictator'; whilst Montague Burton exercised near absolute authority over the tailoring chain which bore his name.¹² More generally it was the case that important decision-making powers regarding product lines, stock purchasing, staffing, store development, design and layout were reserved for a small and often self-perpetuating group of directors and head office managers. In a turn towards Taylorism operational procedures at the level of the individual stores seem often to have been centrally determined and documented for faithful replication throughout a company's entire chain. Local managers, moreover, were required to submit increasingly frequent and detailed written reports on the trading performance of their stores. Further to ensure that local

practice matched the expectations of head office, managers and their stores were also subject to the oversight of a growing army of visiting inspectors and supervisors.¹³

In the United States Woolworth's produced rules for the conduct of its stores at least as early as 1892, and imported this managerial ethos on arrival in Britain in 1909.¹⁴ Sainsbury's published its first rule book for branch managers in 1914, and a head office circular of 1916 is taken to mark an equivalent stage in the efforts of Curry's, the bicycle and electrical retailer, to unify its expanding chain of stores.¹⁵ Although different in detail these documents covered similar ground, defining matters such as store opening hours and standards of staff dress and behaviour, but also setting out expectations about display, stock control and the monitoring of sales to maximise income from the fastest selling and most profitable lines. It is striking, however, that we know more about the existence of these systems and rules than about their application in practice, or about the branch managers whose working lives they shaped.

The branch store manager has not attracted particular attention from retail historians.¹⁶ Nor are they necessarily well represented in larger studies of the evolution of managerial systems; including Chandler's influential work on Sears in the United States, which concentrates on the relationship between head office and executives overseeing groups of stores at the regional or district level.¹⁷ What little we know of the selection of store managers in interwar Britain often to reinforces their image as subordinate figures, working within a system in which 'the brains' were 'supplied from headquarters with the consignment of goods'.¹⁸ We are told, for example, that multiple retailers were often wary of recruiting the most educated or ambitious individuals, preferring to appoint trainee managers directly from secondary school, or to promote existing employees already familiar with the company's

practices and philosophy. Promotion was, moreover, as likely to have been a reflection of administrative competence in record-keeping and other routine tasks, as of any demonstration of commercial flair or capacity for leadership. Thus whilst ideal candidates were honest, reliable and efficient, they were also conformist and ultimately limited in their ambitions.¹⁹ It is unsurprising, therefore, that the glimpses that we catch of store managers elsewhere are often unflattering. Some appear rather downtrodden, subject to constant head office pressure to boost sales, reduce costs and eliminate waste, yet poorly paid given the scale of their responsibilities for stock and weekly sales often worth hundreds, or even thousands, of pounds.²⁰ Others are portrayed as bullies, unfairly pressurising their staff in response to the performance pressures which they themselves felt; or, for similar reasons, as over-zealous in their pursuit of suspected shoplifters.²¹ Critics, not least independent retailers and their champions, also condemned chain store managers as company men, concerned more with 'sending big cheques' to head office, than with their responsibilities – civic as well as commercial – to their own local community.²² Yet from their earliest days there was also a case to be made that multiple retailers' success was 'due not merely to the brainy organization at headquarters, but likewise to the efficient managers who control the branches'.²³

The managerial structures of multiple retailers have sometimes been likened to those which had previously developed on the railways to co-ordinate a geographically dispersed workforce; in turn echoing a military hierarchy of command.²⁴ But such parallels are revealing in that they do not necessarily imply the absolute centralisation of management. Early railway companies are best understood to have had a cellular, rather than a unitary structure. Within each cell – a goods depot, a station, a signal box – there was scope for individual employees to interpret and implement company practice in their own way. Moreover, these differences of interpretation were not simply a product of minor acts of rebellion, or of the varying

commitment and capabilities of individual workers; they also reflected company expectations that staff would display discretion where necessary to ensure that rules and regulations were intelligently applied in ways that were locally appropriate.²⁵ Multiple retailers had, by definition, a similarly cellular structure, potentially conferring a degree of freedom on managers and their staff in the day-to-day running of individual stores. This is acknowledged by Raucher in his exploration of managerial practice in North American chain stores.²⁶ Walsh, too, offers some insights into Woolworth's expectations of its British store managers, although her account chiefly stresses the discipline imposed by the company's operational procedures and training programme for managerial recruits.²⁷ But otherwise there is little historical research which explores managerial discretion and its impact, both positive and negative, on company performance.

The following discussion examines evidence from the British variety store chain Marks and Spencer to confirm that, in some cases at least, the organisational structure of interwar multiple retailing was one in which local managers were expected to play an intelligent part, and in which individuals were as likely to be criticised for a failure to show the expected degree of initiative, as for any unwarranted assertion of independence.

Marks and Spencer: changes and challenges during the interwar years

The interwar years were a critical time for Marks and Spencer, during which the company overcame the enforced abandonment of its initial penny bazaar format to transform itself into one of Britain's leading retailers. The outlines of this process are well-known, including the American inspiration for many of the company's advances in scientific management, its investment in larger stores, the emphasis on selling clothes and textiles enabled by the new fixed maximum retail price of 5s., and the importance of partnership with suppliers in improving the quality and value of Marks

and Spencer's goods.²⁸ These innovations are rightly identified as a product of the central leadership provided by Chairman Simon Marks and Israel Sieff, his closest associate amongst the company's directors, who were personally involved in almost every aspect of management.²⁹ But transformation of the company's fortunes also required significant changes in the management and staffing of individual stores.

As penny bazaars, Marks and Spencer branches had invariably been overseen by a manageress – perhaps with a designated deputy – who undertook all supervisory and administrative work, including control of the stockroom.³⁰ Other staffing was limited to female sales assistants with, in some instances, a male porter to undertake heavy work. This model remained unchanged in some smaller stores until well into the 1930s, but was quickly superseded elsewhere as the company's development programme created a growing number of 'superstores'.³¹ These were substantially larger than existing outlets; even the smallest new premises built during the later 1930s had a sales floor that was nearly twice the size of the largest branch in 1920.³² Sales, meanwhile, grew faster still (Table 1). Larger and busier stores necessarily employed more staff; by the late 1920s branches in major cities sometimes had over 200 employees.³³ Even small stores in provincial towns such as Ilkeston, Keighley and Newbury employed at least 40 female sales assistants.³⁴ Staff also began to assume more specialist roles; as stockroom assistants, window dressers, cashiers and office workers, as well as on the sales floor. Greater scale and complexity in turn required new supervisory positions within stores. Experienced sales assistants were appointed as floorwalkers to oversee the routine operation of particular sales counters. Others became staff floorwalkers responsible for discipline and welfare; a function reinforced with the appointment of formally-trained staff manageresses from the mid-1930s onwards. Leadership for this growing team was provided by a store manager, supported by a deputy and, in the largest stores, a series of departmental managers responsible for particular lines of trade, who were usually younger

management trainees. This increasing local support for store managers was not, however, simply a reflection of the growing scale of individual branches. Implementation of the company's vision required active and intelligent decision-making by the managers of stores of all sizes to ensure that stock ordering reflected the specifics of demand in particular communities; that efficient systems of stock control were in place; and that best use was made of staff and space within the store to minimise costs and maximise sales.

Table 1: Growth in annual sales by Marks and Spencer stores 1919-20 to 1938-39

Annual sales per store	Number of stores 1919-20	Number of stores 1931-32	Number of stores 1938-39
£500,000+	-	-	2
£250,000–499,999	-	1	10
£100,000–249,999	-	11	68
£50,000–99,999	-	44	107
£10,000–49,999	-	65	49
£5,000–9,999	24	12	-
Less than £5,000	126	11	-

(Source: Calculated from Marks and Spencer Store Trading and Profit and Loss Accounts for the years ending March 1920, March 1932 and March 1939 [M&S Archive HO/9/1/1/1; HO/9/1/1/7; HO/9/1/1/9])

New stores thus acquired new managers; a development which, in the chauvinistic climate of the times, saw men replace women. This aligned Marks and Spencer with other major multiple retailers, including Woolworth's which had employed male managers from its arrival in Britain.³⁵ Some of the first generation of store managers had previously been employed in clerical positions in Marks and Spencer's offices and warehouses, but most were externally recruited.³⁶ A few arrived with retail experience, former Woolworth's employees amongst them, but others had started their careers as bank clerks, or in the offices of stockbrokers, accountants, shipping companies and export traders.³⁷ Most were in their twenties or early thirties – including a handful with a university education – and this was the age group, rather than school leavers, which Marks and Spencer continued to target as management

trainees.³⁸ After the initial wave of appointments the recruitment process for managers became more organised. By the early 1930s the company had formalised a training programme typically lasting at least 18 months, which took the recruit from first experience of handling goods in the stockroom, to the sales floor, and on to explore ordering, stock control, staff welfare and financial record-keeping to qualify him for appointment as an assistant manager.³⁹ By this stage, too, Sieff could claim that 'labour turnover in the stores managerial staff is negligible'.⁴⁰ This did not, however, indicate that a manager's tenure in any particular post was necessarily a long one. Transfer between stores, sometimes several times a year, was common during training and the early stages of an individual's managerial career.⁴¹ In part this was designed to ensure that managers gained experience of working in different stores, and that their mobility reinforced the consistency of the company's working practices. But the frequency of managerial transfers also reflected the shortage of experienced men at a time when Marks and Spencer was growing rapidly.

Transfers usually entailed promotion to a larger store, with a corresponding increase in pay. Average weekly pay for store managers rose from £7-3-9 in October 1932 to £10-17-6 by July 1937.⁴² This advance was appreciably faster than for any other grade of store staff, partly reflecting the growing scale of individual stores and the attendant increase in managerial responsibilities. It is not possible, however, to establish any more exact link between managerial pay and store size or performance, as surviving personnel records remain closed. Some store managers achieved further promotion to the ranks of district supervisors, overseeing a group of ten or so stores.⁴³ But opportunities for transfer to head office in London were fewer; only a handful of individuals were appointed, from the late 1920s onwards, to posts in buying and merchandising, and in the Organization Department overseeing retail operations across the country.⁴⁴ Nor did Marks and Spencer match the meritocratic recruitment of the most senior management which Walsh notes at Woolworth's.⁴⁵ Not

until 1954 did Jan Lewando, who had worked for the company since 1929, become the first former store manager to be appointed to Marks and Spencer's board of directors.⁴⁶

In parallel with changes at store level Marks and Spencer also overhauled its managerial structures at head office. The detail of these developments is beyond the scope of the present paper, but it should be noted that the company maintained the principle that store managers were directly responsible to head office.⁴⁷ Although groups of stores were overseen by district supervisors, there was no significant administrative infrastructure at a district or regional level as established by Woolworth's.⁴⁸ The task of fostering a common understanding of retail management amongst the rather disparate group of individuals to whom it had entrusted its stores thus fell chiefly to the Organization Department established at head office by Sieff in 1926.⁴⁹ District supervisors functioned as the field agents of this department, reinforcing its pursuit of sales growth and operational efficiency. Supervisors' exact duties and the territories for which they were responsible evolved as the business expanded, until comprehensive reorganisation in 1938 when the company created a series of regional divisions, each overseen by a Superintendent, who directed the continuing work of district supervisors.⁵⁰ The consistent expectation, however, was that the latter would act both as mentors to store managers and enforcers of the company's managerial principles, reporting to head office on their weekly visits to the branches under their charge.⁵¹ During these visits supervisors would typically review sales and expenditure, inspect the stockroom and discuss the manager's planned stock purchases. A more forensic review of store accounts and stockholdings was also undertaken several times a year by a peripatetic staff of specialist accountants and stocktakers reporting directly to head office. Supervisors thus had an important role in shaping local managerial practice, but, as later discussion will confirm, their authority was not absolute.

The task of fleshing out the specifics of change in managerial practice at the level of the individual store is complicated by the limitations of the available evidence. In common with many other retail companies the Marks and Spencer Archive chiefly contains head office records which offer few insights into how working practices were regarded by managers and other staff employed at store level. Moreover, key documents, including minutes of the meetings of the board of directors are closed to researchers. Some valuable light is, however, shed on relations between head office, district supervisors and branch managers by a series of *Management Bulletins*. Produced by the Organization Department, the *Bulletins* were issued weekly from June 1927 until January 1928, and thereafter at a rate of between one and three issues per month until February 1930.⁵² It is unclear why publication became less frequent and ultimately ceased, but it is likely that the Organization Department became increasingly committed to oversight of the store development programme. Initially the *Bulletins* were distributed only to managers of larger stores, but from autumn 1927 circulation was extended to all branches.⁵³ Copies of over sixty issues survive, all of which have been consulted for the present research, covering the aftermath of public floatation in 1926, during which the company laid many of the foundations of its future success.

Unlike later staff magazines, which had a promotional and welfare function, the *Bulletins* were concerned with the specifics of store management.⁵⁴ Whilst they were intended to inspire confidence amongst managers in the potential for profitable expansion, the *Bulletins* were also clear that this bright future could be endangered by a lack of adequately skilled store managers.⁵⁵ It was vital, therefore, that individuals study and act upon the instructions which the *Bulletins* contained, seeking amplification as necessary from their district supervisor. 'No manager', warned an early edition, 'should be satisfied with only a half-baked knowledge of merchandising.

He must be convinced that he understands the principles about which we have been talking and writing'.⁵⁶ This understanding was to be shared in turn with other staff, particularly assistant managers and trainees.⁵⁷

The perspective of the *Bulletins* is necessarily rather one-sided; it is very much head office speaking to its staff. But the *Bulletins* are unusual in providing both a statement of the managerial principles which store staff were expected to embrace, and a commentary – derived chiefly from district supervisors' reports – on their enactment in practice. They serve, therefore, as an important reminder that even in organisations which successfully negotiate change, the transition may involve a difficult learning process.⁵⁸ The *Bulletins* are also revealing in their attention to store functions and spaces that are vital to commercial success, but which are sometimes neglected by retail historians. In part because of the recent impetus to retail studies provided by a growing academic interest in consumption we know rather more about change on the sales floor, particularly innovations in display and salesmanship, than we do about work undertaken in the delivery bay, the stock room, or the manager's own office. Yet it was often to these latter places and processes that managers were urged to pay particular attention.⁵⁹

The following sections will first outline the managerial principles which the *Bulletins* were at pains to set out; with a regularity of repetition which suggests that they were not immediately understood and enacted by all store managers, or enforced by district supervisors. We will then explore the *Bulletins'* accompanying commentary on local performance, which includes criticism of those who did not meet head office expectations. Revealingly such disapproval was directed not just at managers who ignored company processes and procedures, but also at anyone – including supervisors – who observed them unthinkingly, or who otherwise failed to show the expected discretion and initiative.

The intelligent store manager

The *Bulletins* were important in promulgating the managerial principles which Simon Marks had identified as key to the company's future, at a time when Marks and Spencer had not yet established a formal system of staff training.⁶⁰ In particular, Marks' exposure to US retail methods had inspired a new insistence that stores should maximise the earnings potential of every foot of selling and counter space.⁶¹ This implied an active role for individual managers in organising their stores to achieve the desired result. A manager was expected to be 'in hourly touch with his departments', garnering information, not only about total takings, but also demand for individual product lines, and garment styles, sizes and colours.⁶² On this basis he was to distinguish between fast- and slow-selling lines, ensuring that the former received increased counter space and prominence in displays, whilst relegating the latter to less favoured positions. Any item that proved a persistent 'dud' was to be eliminated altogether.⁶³ The *Bulletin* thus commended the example of a district supervisor who required all his managers to submit a store plan showing takings per counter for the previous week, which was reviewed to ensure the most effective use of space. In this instance at least such discussion involved the alternative arrangement of counter and display space on Fridays and Saturdays when the stores were busiest.⁶⁴

Expectations regarding the reallocation of resources also extended to the deployment of sales staff. Managers were instructed to move the most capable assistants between departments to reinforce the profit-maximising potential of fast-selling lines. By contrast, the least competent were to be dismissed.⁶⁵ The *Bulletin* reminded managers that the Christmas sales period afforded them a particular opportunity of judging the efficiency and sales skills of individual assistants. Those deemed weakest were subsequently to be 'weeded out' and replaced by 'promising'

girls from amongst the temporary Christmas staff.⁶⁶ Decisions about the specifics of staffing, including hiring and firing, were thus clearly identified as the responsibility of the individual store manager. Indeed, sensitivity to criticism that multiples were a disruptive external force in the retail economy of many towns encouraged stress to be laid on the recruitment of sales assistants from amongst the local unemployed, as was evident in press reports of new store developments.⁶⁷ However, the attention that managers were required to pay to the deployment of sales staff also indicates the company's changing expectations of its workforce.

The emphasis on the open display of goods pioneered by Marks and Spencer and other variety stores is often taken to imply an increasingly passive role for counter staff whose functions are sometimes seen as being confined to wrapping purchases and taking payment once customers had made their choice of goods. Indeed, it is argued that this contributed to variety stores' appeal amongst consumers of modest means who avoided interaction with sales staff for fear that it would expose deficiencies in their taste and spending power.⁶⁸ The *Bulletin*, however, indicates that Marks and Spencer demanded rather more of its shopfloor staff. The company's strategy of trading up meant that most sales were of items that were individually more expensive than had been the case when it operated as a penny bazaar, and shoppers would necessarily be more discriminating when making their purchases. Sales assistants, therefore, '**must no longer be mere dummies**, wrapping up parcels, but must take an intelligent interest in the sale of goods in all departments'.⁶⁹ It followed that store managers' responsibilities extended to the provision of training to ensure that assistants were 'able to talk to the customer about the article and point out its virtues in regard to price and quality, and induce her to buy'.⁷⁰ Managers were also urged to take steps to maximise the value of their sales staff as an information source regarding consumer tastes, reactions to particular goods and requests for items that the store did not sell. They must be trained to record these impressions

accurately, perhaps by providing assistants with books in which to note customer comments and enquiries.⁷¹

A company strategy based on maximising sales also prompted regular attention to the techniques of retail display. The *Bulletin* insisted that prominence in window and counter displays should be reserved for the fastest-selling higher-priced items.⁷² It was even suggested that staff might themselves wear featured items of clothing; 'Many Managers', asserted the *Bulletin*, 'are now realising that the sales are greatly increased by having suitable girls dressed as Mannequins'.⁷³ In other respects, however, much of the advice about display was similar to that contained in contemporary textbooks and journals circulating elsewhere in the retail trade.⁷⁴ Careful planning was required to ensure that displays were regularly renewed; that appropriate emphasis was placed on seasonal goods; that displays were entertaining, colourful and well lit; and that their impact was not diminished by inclusion of a confusing diversity of goods.⁷⁵ *Bulletins* also contained lists of those goods which were selling fastest nationally, but this rarely translated into a definite instruction to feature specific items in store displays.⁷⁶ Indeed, managers were encouraged to plan displays in the light of their own understanding of market conditions, for 'a great deal depends upon the individual peculiarities of the store and the district in which the store is located'.⁷⁷ Managers were also regularly encouraged to display goods that could be linked to current performances at local theatres and cinemas.⁷⁸

Effective selling was, however, understood to require equally careful attention to stock purchasing, storage and control. Much of Marks and Spencer's interwar success followed from the partnerships developed with favoured suppliers which produced goods in bulk, not only at highly competitive prices, but increasingly also to the retailer's own specifications.⁷⁹ The range of available goods was in turn

presented to branch managers as an approved list, or 'catalogue', from which they must select when submitting their stock order to head office.⁸⁰ This was a key area in which managers were empowered to exercise a degree of discretion. As well as consulting the *Bulletin* for information about fast-selling lines, the manager was expected to have an exact understanding of the colours, sizes and styles of goods that sold best in his particular locality, and so order those 'lines which, in his experience as well as ours, merit counter space'.⁸¹ In determining their orders managers were instructed to use information from records of past sales, and to take account of both the seasonal rhythms of trade and specific local events and festivities which might affect business at their store.⁸² Given the speed and regularity with which many managers moved between stores, they must, however, often have been reliant on other longer-serving staff for such local intelligence.

Managers were thus required to enact the principles of what the *Bulletin* dubbed 'intelligent ordering', taking timely action to ensure that their store held adequate stocks of items known to be in demand, but equally that there was no accumulation of unsold or unsaleable stock. Indeed the degree to which Marks and Spencer also highlighted improvements in standards of stock control and storage provides an instructive contrast to academic studies which have often focused on the public face which shops presented to their customers. Even press descriptions of newly-built stores aimed at shoppers stressed not only the attractions of the sales area, but also the scale of stock storage space and the company's investment in electric hoists, lifts and transporters to ensure the fast and efficient transfer of goods from delivery dock to stock room to sales floor.⁸³ This is mirrored in the importance attached by the *Bulletin* to good management to prevent loss of sales through lack of stock, reduce damage through poor storage and minimise the costly accumulation of surplus stock. Managers must review stock holdings regularly; there must be no unnecessary delays in transferring goods to the sales floor; and stock room space must be

allocated in an ordered and logical fashion to different categories of goods, mirroring the departmental structure of the store.⁸⁴

Effective management was thus seen to require detailed information about retail sales, stock purchasing and stock holding. Record-keeping was important not only in informing managerial decisions at a local level, but also for head office both in judging the performance of individual stores and in longer-term development planning. The transformation of Marks and Spencer's reporting system was central to the company's pursuit of growth and operational efficiency. The company had first required weekly reports from its store managers as early as 1909; the interwar years, however, saw demands for new levels of detail and precision.⁸⁵ Managers were expected not simply to record total sales, but also to specify the performance of each department within their store, along with a comparative statement of the previous week's takings and those for the equivalent week in the previous year. Performance was also judged relative to the counter footage and staff employed to achieve it.⁸⁶ In addition the company introduced a parallel series of weekly merchandise reports, requiring managers to account for any significant changes in sales; identify the fastest selling lines; report on the performance of any new lines; note which goods had featured in store displays and other promotional initiatives; record stockholdings of fast-selling lines and any delays in stock deliveries.⁸⁷ The information resource thus created was used by the company to inform its decision-making at every level. Head office, for example, compiled aggregated returns of the total monthly sales of each individual item of merchandise to assist in the constant refinement of the product range; items which failed to meet a defined sales target were immediately listed for temporary suspension or permanent elimination.⁸⁸ This process of data collection and processing thus embodied the company's ultimate aspiration 'to **entirely eliminate guess-work**' from its managerial decision-making 'and to

substitute therefore intelligent anticipation based on known facts and on known figures'.⁸⁹

Expectations and actualities

The *Bulletins* constitute an important statement of the managerial systems and ideals upon which the successful reinvention of Marks and Spencer as a variety store was based. They confirm the primacy of head office in directing retail operations throughout the country. District supervisors exerted an important and immediate influence over the work of store managers, but the latter were themselves the recipients of a constant stream of information and instruction directly from head office, and were required to submit their own regular and detailed reports in return. Clear, too, is the stress placed on local managerial discretion to ensure that standard processes and product portfolios were fine tuned to reflect the circumstances and spending habits of particular communities. The *Bulletins* are of further interest, however, for what they reveal about the actuality of local managerial practice. In an era when personnel management worked to rules rather different from those of today, the *Bulletins* provided a blunt commentary on the behaviour of employees who were unwilling or unable to adopt the required approach to store management. Such criticism highlights the extent of the transformation of retail practice that Marks and Spencer was enacting. This went far beyond the changes evident to consumers in the scale and appearance of stores, and the range of goods sold. Stock and sales records took on a new importance as planning tools. Whereas managers had previously paid only limited attention to the details of stock control they were now expected to apply the principles of intelligent ordering, and to ensure that their stock rooms were organised with as much care as the sales floor.⁹⁰ No longer was it the case that stores would order items in an unspecified mixture of sizes and colours and 'the manufacturers sent what they liked'.⁹¹ Improved logistics and growing sales of fashion goods further transformed the functions of ordering and stock control.

Managers accustomed to accumulating stock as insurance against the slow delivery of supplies were warned that it was wasteful and unnecessary to carry more than three weeks' worth of goods. Such innovation and standardisation in managerial practices are frequently held to have contributed significantly to the expansion of multiple retailing during the early-twentieth century. The *Bulletins* offer new insights into the process of learning which this entailed.

Although individuals were never named, the *Bulletin* regularly reported observed failings in local practice which reflected almost every aspect of the store manager's role. This is evidence of both the in-store presence of district supervisors as the eyes of head office, but also of the initial limitations of the supervisory system in ensuring that managerial principles and practice were always aligned. Managers were criticised for mounting dull displays, for featuring ill-chosen goods, for delays in displaying seasonal goods, for failing to monitor the impact of displays on sales, and for carrying insufficient stocks of the items chosen for display.⁹² Others were guilty of excessive enthusiasm in mounting displays that used too much stock, which was rendered unsaleable, or which damaged fixtures and fittings.⁹³ Local failures of personnel management were similarly highlighted as a warning to others. Particular attention was expected to the in-store training of assistant managers, not least to inculcate the principles of intelligent ordering. Such training was 'farical', asserted the *Bulletin*, if it ignored 'one of the most important functions in the store'. Any managers who were 'delinquent' in this respect were ordered 'to remedy this weakness immediately'.⁹⁴ Further action was sometimes needed to address problems revealed by store visits where sales were being lost because counter staff lacked knowledge or confidence in dealing with customers.⁹⁵ Managers were also reminded of the need to attend to staffing levels. Ill-planned deployment of sales assistants between departments, or delays in dismissing temporary Christmas staff prompted charges that stores were incurring unnecessary labour costs.⁹⁶

Especial criticism was, however, reserved for behaviour deemed to compromise the company's commitment to scientific management. Inadequate and inaccurate completion of the required weekly reports was a particular concern. The *Bulletin* bemoaned this apparent evidence that some store managers had not grasped the importance of commercial intelligence in informing their own decision-making and that of head office.⁹⁷ Indeed, failure in this respect was often regarded as symptomatic of wider inadequacies, which themselves generated immediate costs. Too often, it was claimed, stores fell at the first hurdle, appearing 'very lax and slipshod' in their arrangements for receiving goods.⁹⁸ This led to losses if unrecorded stock was not promptly placed on sale, or if goods were later found to be imperfect and could not be returned to the supplier. Relations with suppliers could, moreover, be damaged if poor practice in stores led to unjustified complaints about delivery deficiencies and delays.⁹⁹ Disorganisation in the stock room caused further 'futile waste' if goods became soiled or faded, if excessive staff time was required to locate items, or if the misplacement of stock meant that unnecessary replacements had to be ordered.¹⁰⁰ Such failings perpetuated 'rank bad ordering' without reference to accurate figures for sales or stock-in-hand.¹⁰¹

Managers were also rebuked for a continuing tendency to order equal quantities of all sizes and colours of particular clothing lines, ignoring patterns of local demand revealed by their own previous sales, and increasing the risk of creating unsaleable surpluses of less popular goods.¹⁰² Some, moreover, appear to have misinterpreted the function of the company's stock catalogue. It was not the intention, the *Bulletin* stressed, that all branches should carry every product line. Intelligent ordering required that managers select a range of goods that was proportional to their available counter space; it was 'bad merchandising' to attempt to carry the same range of stock in small stores as in their larger counterparts.¹⁰³ Indeed, the *Bulletin's*

strictures sometimes extended to supervisors, who were warned not to encourage the managers of smaller branches to stock an inappropriate range of goods.¹⁰⁴

Equally serious was evidence that stores were selling goods obtained from unauthorised sources. As a warning to others the *Bulletin* reported the case of a store found to be displaying shirts that were 'in conflict with all canons of good taste'. The appearance of such 'substandard' lines was not only a challenge to the authority of head office, but also a threat to the new trading model which emphasised the guaranteed quality of the company's goods. 'Our business', concluded the *Bulletin*, 'will never make the headway it should do if our Managers try to push lines that have never been selected or ordered' by head office buyers.¹⁰⁵ Yet contrary to instructions some managers continued to deal directly 'with local Manufacturers and have had goods delivered to them and actually paid the manufacturers in cash for these goods'.¹⁰⁶

The *Bulletin's* concerns about ordering and stock control also reflected a perception that some store managers were adapting too slowly to wider changes in market conditions. Falling retail prices during a period of sustained deflation and the extension of notions of fashion to a widening array of clothing, footwear and other goods increased the need to dispose of stock swiftly.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the partnerships which Marks and Spencer forged with manufacturers created a particular impetus for product innovation; with improved lines becoming available 'almost monthly' outdated stock could only be sold at a discount.¹⁰⁸ Managers were therefore reminded that the sourcing of goods directly from trusted British suppliers, together with logistical innovations, had significantly reduced delivery times. Only in exceptional cases was it now necessary to carry stock for more than three weeks ahead; yet too many managers persisted in accumulating six to eight weeks' stock of dry goods. Such 'hoarding', the *Bulletin* warned, 'is not merchandising – it is gambling, and no

successful business can be built upon this principle'.¹⁰⁹ To reinforce this argument managers were reminded that the losses caused when price reductions were necessary to dispose of soiled or surplus stock, and the opportunity costs created by the unprofitable use of capital and storage space could together amount to an annual charge to the company of at least £60 for every £1,000 of overstock.¹¹⁰

Instances of unauthorised managerial behaviour did not, however, always reflect what the *Bulletin* regarded as local resistance to change. Perversely, some appear to have been inspired by the pressure felt by managers to meet the company's increasingly exacting performance standards.¹¹¹ Thus the *Bulletin's* allegation that it 'has become a habit with certain Managers to give **false** stock figures' in their weekly returns reflected concerns not just about 'slovenliness of work', but also more calculated behaviour.¹¹² Some store managers appear to have deliberately understated current holdings in their weekly reports, with the aim of accumulating substantial stocks of seasonal goods ahead of demand. The individuals concerned were evidently anxious that accurate returns would result in the scale of their orders being reduced, leaving them short of stock to meet any surge in sales and open to censure for failing to maximise the earnings potential of their store. In response the *Bulletin* again stressed the financial risks that such behaviour might generate, urging direct consultation with head office – interestingly, with no mention of the supervisor as a potentially intermediary – as an alternative means of addressing the challenge 'without having to carry a large and unhealthy stock'.¹¹³

Capability and compliance: a delicate balance

In concluding we should recall that the evidence discussed above is the product of a particular context. During, and indeed for some time after, the interwar years Marks and Spencer was controlled by directors drawn from a small number of inter-related families. This partly explains the emphasis on direct communication between head

office and branch stores, and the limitations of management at a regional level compared with Woolworth's and some other nationally-operating multiple retailers.

Secondly, Marks and Spencer was a business in transition; during the 1920s and 1930s staff working at all levels faced challenges created by larger stores, a more extensive branch network, and the sourcing and sale of a changing product range. Individuals were thus required to learn to work in new ways. Initially at least some branch managers seem to have been unable – or unwilling – to implement the necessary changes, not least in the balance to be struck between conformity and local discretion in the running of their own stores. But head office, too, was still exploring how best to manage a growing network of stores, increasingly diverse in scale and serving communities which varied in size and prosperity.

It follows that there was a gradual refinement – sometimes responding to specific problems – of managerial systems intended to promote a more exact and scientific approach to ordering, stock control, sales and costs. An instance of over-purchasing of seasonal goods at seaside branches was, for example, the immediate trigger to new documentation for stock checking subsequently adopted in all the company's stores.¹¹⁴ Gradually, too, some of the tensions and disparities between managerial principles and practice were resolved as what had once been a radical break with established methods of ordering and stock control became routine. At the same time the company built up a cadre of experienced store managers, whose transfer across the branch network played an important part in reinforcing standard practices.

The specifics of Marks and Spencer's management were also a function of its adoption of the variety store format. The range of good sold was defined by price, rather than any pre-determined line of business. This offered considerable scope for growth in sales and profits, but also created particular managerial challenges. It was

vital to understand and, if possible, anticipate emerging patterns of consumer demand; to source and deliver goods promptly; and to demonstrate equal efficiency in-store to maximise sales before fashions and the public mood changed. This business model was the source of many of the *Bulletin's* preoccupations regarding monitoring of sales, intelligent ordering, stock control and the deployment of store space and staff.

The extent to which equivalent pressures were felt by other multiple retailers varied. The interwar decades saw fashion exert a growing influence on trades including clothing, footwear and furnishing. Moreover, major multiple chemists, principally Boots and Timothy White's, were starting to rival the variety stores in the range of their stock. Other companies, too, succeeded through diversification; the cycle retailer Curry's, for example, increasingly sold toys, prams, radios and other electrical items.¹¹⁵ But some amongst the many multiples which supplied apparently stable markets for foodstuffs and other basic household goods also felt the need to review their managerial systems. Sometimes, as was true of the Allied Suppliers group of grocery businesses – including the Home and Colonial Stores and Lipton's – change was prompted by faltering sales and a consequent need to secure higher and more consistent standards of operational efficiency. But whilst overhauling branch management during the mid-1930s the group emphasised not only staff training in approved procedures and central monitoring of the performance of individual stores, but also the need to recruit and reward managers capable of showing the necessary initiative to translate standard practice into local success.¹¹⁶ Trading difficulties during the depression years also prompted W H Smith, the newsagent and bookseller, to revise the criteria for the recruitment and promotion of its store managers, placing increasing stress on aptitude for business development, rather than simply clerical competence.¹¹⁷

Evidently, therefore, Marks and Spencer was not alone amongst interwar multiples in placing more emphasis on the initiative, abilities and character of individual branch store managers than is sometimes credited. It was not the case that every detail of local practice was dictated by head office, or that a new era of mass production created an array of goods so desirable as to effectively sell themselves. As the *Bulletin* argued the 'atmosphere of a store is created by the Manager'; it was his, or her, enthusiasm, attention to detail in ordering, stock control and display, skill in dealing with staff and customers, and knowledge of local market conditions that made the difference between a 'stale' and a 'sparkling' store.¹¹⁸ This is not to ignore the extent or significance of standardised systems of accounting, ordering and delivery, company expectations about display and stock control, and the visual impact of consistency in store design, fixtures and fittings. Such efforts were intended not only to raise commercial standards and create new efficiencies, but also, the company argued, to make the individual manager's task easier. Those who failed to heed this message could hardly expect to enjoy a successful career with Marks and Spencer. But the *Bulletin* was equally clear that 'a considerable amount of discretion' was still given to branch managers in the specifics of the selection and ordering of stock, in the local hiring of staff and in the organisation of the store to maximise sales and minimise waste.¹¹⁹ It followed that those who showed too little initiative; who were too reliant on direction by visiting supervisors; who failed to understand the principles of intelligent ordering; or who proved incapable of using local resources to best advantage, were as unwanted by head office as were 'delinquent' managers who bought goods from unauthorised sources, knowingly submitted false weekly returns or deliberately hoarded stock.¹²⁰

The commentary on the realities of local practice provided by the *Bulletin* can sometimes appear overly censorious and it is impossible to judge the number of store managers who acted in ways of which supervisors and head office

disapproved. The frequency with which the *Bulletin* restates the company's managerial principles does, however, suggest that transgression was not limited to isolated instances; in practice branch stores were not always the flawlessly efficient operations that abstract discussions of multiple retailing often suppose. This, in turn, was also a function of what were still relatively unsophisticated mechanisms for coordinating the work of head office and branch stores.

Studies of branch managers working for today's supermarkets often comment on the erosion of the entrepreneurial aspects of the role, as store performance is increasingly subject to constant and real-time monitoring. Staffing levels and the specifics of workers' tasks are predetermined by head office, meetings run to specified templates and 'computerized schedules, pre-packaged and automatically ordered goods, [and] design planograms' largely dictate store operations.¹²¹ This is a working environment which contrasts sharply with that found in even the most regimented interwar retailers. When almost nothing was automatic, when communication between centre and branch took place chiefly by post, or during weekly face-to-face meetings between managers and district supervisors, the scope, and the need, for local initiative was substantially greater.¹²² This is reflected in the vision of store management promoted by the *Bulletin*. The ideal store manager was thus not the company's compliant servant, but an active agent; gathering detailed data about market conditions, reporting customers' reactions to particular goods and helping to identify new business opportunities. But equally striking is the extent to which store managers working for today's supermarket giants still value those remaining decision-making freedoms which their role affords them, whether in people management, or in the deployment – sometimes without official sanction – of locally-situated knowledge to make small adjustments in store layouts and stock orders.¹²³ Exploration of the balance between direction and discretion thus remains a relevant issue in retailing today.

 Notes

¹ James B Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain 1850-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954). See also company histories including Peter Mathias, *Retailing Revolution: A History of Multiple Retailing in the Food Trades based upon the Allied Suppliers Group of Companies* (London: Longmans, 1967); Goronwy Rees, *St Michael. A History of Marks and Spencer* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969); Eric Sigsworth, *Montague Burton: The Tailor of Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

² Contemporary studies include Lawrence E Neal, *Retailing and the Public* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932); Henry Smith, *Retail Distribution: A Critical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937). As recent explorations of these arguments see: Andrew Alexander, John Benson, and Gareth Shaw, 'Action and reaction: competition and the multiple retailer in 1930s Britain', *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 9, no. 3 (1999): 245–59; Andrew Alexander and Simon Phillips, "Fair play for the small man": Perspectives on the contribution of the independent shopkeeper 1930–c.1945', *Business History* 48, no. 1 (2006): 69–89; Gareth Shaw, Andrew Alexander, John Benson, and Deborah Hodson, 'The evolving culture of retailer regulation and the failure of the "Balfour Bill" in interwar Britain', *Environment and Planning A* 32, no. 11 (2000): 1977–89.

³ Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 40–100.

⁴ The continuing relevance of such challenges is noted in John Dawson, 'Retailing at century end: some challenges for management and research', *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 10, no. 2 (2000): 119–48, especially 123–9.

⁵ The account offered by contemporaries, often American, for example William J Baxter, *Chain Store Distribution and Management* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928); Walter S Hayward, 'The chain store and distribution', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 115 (1924): 220–5, has been rehearsed by later authors including Jefferys, *Retail Trading in Britain*, 80–3; Alfred D Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977), 233–9; John Perkins and Craig Freedman, 'Organisational form and retailing development: the department and the chain store, 1860-1940', *The Service Industries Journal* 19, no. 4 (1999): 123–46.

⁶ Marks and Spencer was amongst the pioneers of this approach: Rees, *St Michael*, 97–108.

⁷ Kathryn Morrison, *English Shops and Shopping: An Architectural History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 193–249.

⁸ Janice Winship, 'Culture of restraint: the British chain store 1920-39', in *Commercial Cultures: Economies, Practices, Spaces*, ed. Peter Jackson, Michelle Lowe, Daniel Miller, and Frank Mort (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 15–34; this is consistent with recollections of authors including Richard Hoggart, *A Local Habitation* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), 121–2.

⁹ Andrew Alexander, 'Strategy and strategists: evidence from an early retail revolution in Britain', *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 7, no. 1 (1997): 61–78; Peter Scott, 'Learning to multiply: the property market and the growth of multiple retailing in Britain, 1919–39', *Business History* 36, no. 3 (1994): 1–28.

¹⁰ See, for example, Harry Lerner, *Currys: The First 100 Years* (Cambridge: Woodhead-Faulkner, 1984); Alan Wilkinson, *From Corner Shop to Corner Shop in Five Generations: A*

History of William Jackson & Son plc (Beverley: Hutton Press, 1994). Also Lloyd C Harris and Emmanuel Ogbonna, 'The strategic legacy of company founders', *Long Range Planning* 32, no. 3 (1999): 333–43 as an exploration of the longer-term legacy of such individuals.

¹¹ Paul Bookbinder, *Simon Marks: Retail Revolutionary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1993), 83–113; Rees, *St Michael*, 55–124.

¹² Bridget Williams, *The Best Butter in the World. A History of Sainsbury's* (London: Ebury Press, 1994), 105; Alexander, 'Strategy and strategists'; Katrina Honeyman, 'Montague Burton Ltd: The creators of well-dressed men'. In *Leeds City Business 1893-1993: Essays Marking the Centenary of the Incorporation*, ed. John Chartres and Katrina Honeyman (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1993), 186–216.

¹³ Marks and Spencer, Boots the Chemists, Curry's and Sainsbury's were amongst the expanding British multiple retailers who instituted more organised supervisory systems during the interwar years: Asa Briggs, *Marks and Spencer 1884-1984. A Centenary History of Marks and Spencer* (London: Octopus Books, 1984), 85–99; John E Greenwood, *A Cap for Boots: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson Benham, 1977), 21–4; Lerner, *Currys*, 45; Williams, *Best Butter in the World*, 95–6.

¹⁴ Alan R Raucher, 'Dime store chains: the making of organization men', *Business History Review* 65, no. 1 (1991): 130–63; Paul Seaton, *A Sixpenny Romance. Celebrating a Century of Value at Woolworths* (London: 3d and 6d Pictures, 2009), 55–9; Barbara Walsh, *When the Shopping Was Good: Woolworths and the Irish Main Street* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 5–6, 25–6.

¹⁵ Williams, *Best Butter in the World*, 57; Lerner, *Currys*, 26–9.

¹⁶ Ingrid Jeacle, 'Emporium of glamour and sanctum of scientific management: the early twentieth century department store', *Management Decision* 42, no. 9 (2004): 1162–77 makes a similar point about department stores, in contrast to the attention devoted to sales staff.

¹⁷ Alfred D Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962), 225–82.

¹⁸ 'The passing of the grocer', *Times*, August 18, 1902, 13.

¹⁹ General surveys chiefly reflecting US experience include Perkins and Freedman, 'Organisational form'; Raucher, 'Dime store chains'. Amongst studies of specific British companies Williams, *Best Butter in the World*, 94 and Wilkinson, *From Corner Shop to Corner Shop*, 18–23 both note a preference for managerial promotion from within. Charles Wilson, *First with the News: The History of W. H. Smith 1792-1972* (London: Cape, 1985), 325–6 indicates that promotion was often a reward for clerical efficiency.

²⁰ Hoggart, *Local Habitation*, 91–2; House of Commons Debates, Volume 330, cc 2065–67, December 22, 1937: 'Conditions of employment in the distributive trades' notes an instance in which a grocery store manager was paid only £2 11s per week.

²¹ George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air* (1939; repr., London: Secker & Warburg, 1986), 13–15; '£800 damages against stores', *Gloucester Citizen*, May 30, 1935, 5; 'Anti-shoplifting methods criticised in court', *Western Daily Press*, June 15, 1937, 5; 'Store customer vindicated', *Yorkshire Post*, November 22, 1939, 12.

²² The quotation is from a speaker at the Scottish Federation of Meat Traders' Association conference 1931: 'Legislative menace to meat trade', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, April 23, 1931, 8. For similar sentiments see House of Commons Debates, Volume 319, cc 1205–64, January 29, 1937: 'Shops (Retail Trading Safeguards) Bill'. See also Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 90–8.

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- ²³ Arthur J Giles, letter to the editor, *Times*, August 21, 1902, 9.
- ²⁴ Perkins and Freedman, 'Organisational form', 130.
- ²⁵ George Revill, *Railway* (London: Reaktion, 2012), 69–75.
- ²⁶ Raucher, 'Dime store chains'.
- ²⁷ Walsh, *When the Shopping Was Good*, 25–9, 50–9.
- ²⁸ Briggs, *Marks and Spencer*; Helen Chislett, *Marks in Time: 125 Years of Marks & Spencer* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2009); Rees, *St Michael*; Rachel Worth, *Fashion for the People. A History of Clothing at Marks and Spencer* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).
- ²⁹ Bookbinder, *Simon Marks*, 101–2.
- ³⁰ Bookbinder, *Simon Marks*, 67.
- ³¹ On the continuing employment of store manageresses during the 1920s and 1930s see: 'Miss Lawrence of Chatham', *Sparks*, Summer 1937, 13–14; 'Who's who in the business: Mrs E Thomas, Cashier, Dewsbury', *Sparks*, July 1952, 2; 'Forty years' service: Miss E M Davies', *Sparks*, December 1954, 4.
- ³² Lewis and Hickey, *Design for Success: The Story of Marks and Spencer Stores 1922-1990* (London: Lewis and Hickey; 1990) [Marks and Spencer Archive – HO/10/3/1/1/15].
- ³³ The new Lewisham branch of 1929 had over 100 staff; the Argyll Street store opened in Glasgow in 1930 had more than 150; whilst Marks and Spencer's Oxford Street store in London employed more than 250 sales assistants from the outset: *Kentish Mercury*, November 29, 1929; *Glasgow Citizen*, April 29, 1930 [M&S Archive: Press Cuttings Album – L/1/1/1]; 'Orchard House: New branch of Marks and Spencer, Limited' *Times*, November 5, 1930, 11.
- ³⁴ *Ilkeston Pioneer*, August 24, 1934; *Keighley News*, March 23, 1935; *Newbury Weekly News*, May 2, 1935 [M&S Archive: Press Cuttings Album – L/1/1/3].
- ³⁵ Walsh, *When the Shopping Was Good*, 25–6. As an isolated instance in which a manageress was reinstated to head a large new store see: *Sparks*, 'Miss Lawrence'.
- ³⁶ 'Who's who in the business: Mr J G Hancock', *Sparks*, September 1950, 1–2; 'Retirements: Mr H Whiteley', *Sparks*, July 1952, 14–15.
- ³⁷ 'Mr F D Marsden's retirement', *Sparks*, Autumn 1951, 3; 'Who's who in the business: Mr W Jacobson', *Sparks*, March 1952, 1–2; Obituary of Joseph Burnet Raven, *Sparks*, March 1952, 50; 'Who's who in the business: Mr L M Churley', *Sparks*, April 1954, 1–2; 'Who's who in the business: Mr A C Woolf OBE', *Sparks*, August 1954, 1–2; 'Who's who in the business: Mr C Speelman' *Sparks*, April 1956, 1–3; 'Who's who in the business: Mr J S Sopol' *Sparks*, August 1957, 1–2.
- ³⁸ Marks and Spencer recruitment advertisement for management trainees, *Times*, July 4, 1938, 3.
- ³⁹ M&S Archive: Curriculum for Trainees: The Stockroom Stage – HO/6/4/154; Curriculum for Trainees: The Final Stage – HO/6/4/155.
- ⁴⁰ 'Marks and Spencer, Limited', *Times*, May 18, 1933, 21.
- ⁴¹ 'Mr L H Humphries' retirement', *Sparks*, Autumn 1951, 4; *Sparks*, Obituary of Raven; Obituary of J C Leigh, *Sparks*, July 1952, 34; 'Retirements', *Sparks*, April 1954, 6.

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- ⁴² M&S Archive: Average wages paid by categories of staff 1932-37 – HO/6/8/1.
- ⁴³ For some supervisors, however, further promotion involved a return to frontline management at one of the company's flagship stores; see, for example, *Sparks*, 'Humphries' retirement'.
- ⁴⁴ *Sparks*, 'Who's who: Jacobson'; 'Who's who in the business: Mr J H Morgan', *Sparks*, September 1955, 1–3; *Sparks*, 'Who's who: Speelman'.
- ⁴⁵ Walsh, *When the Shopping Was Good*, 25–6, 99.
- ⁴⁶ 'Who's who in the business: Mr J Lewando', *Sparks*, April 1953, 1–2; Obituary of Sir Jan Lewando, *Times*, July 22, 2004, 32.
- ⁴⁷ Brief details can be found in Rees, *St Michael*, 90–2, 118–20.
- ⁴⁸ Walsh, *When the Shopping Was Good*, 26; see also Chandler, *Strategy and Structure*, 225–82 on the role of regional offices in the management of the US retailer Sears.
- ⁴⁹ Rees, *St Michael*, 74.
- ⁵⁰ *Sparks*, 'Who's who: Woolf'.
- ⁵¹ There are parallels with the role of Woolworth's Area Superintendents outlined in Walsh, *When the Shopping Was Good*, 95–9.
- ⁵² M&S Archive HO/3/2/2/1.
- ⁵³ *Bulletin*, October 1, 1927.
- ⁵⁴ Marks and Spencer published *Sparks* as a house magazine for staff from 1934 onwards, as well as the *Staff Management News* to inform the training and welfare activities of the staff manageresses who were appointed to work in-store during the 1930s.
- ⁵⁵ *Bulletin*, December 31, 1928.
- ⁵⁶ *Bulletin*, September 17, 1927.
- ⁵⁷ *Bulletin*, July 23, 1927.
- ⁵⁸ Cf Chandler, *Strategy and Structure*, 225–82. Also Ingrid Jeacle and Eamonn Walsh, 'A tale of tar and feathering: the retail price inventory method and the Englishman', *Accounting, Business & Financial History* 18, no. 2 (2008): 121–40 as a study of the difficulties of implementing change in specific retail managerial systems.
- ⁵⁹ Recent work on the historical development of department stores has begun to explore the importance of key functions including purchasing and stock control: Eamonn Walsh and Ingrid Jeacle, 'The taming of the buyer: the retail inventory method and the early twentieth century department store', *Accounting, Organizations and Society* 28 (2003): 773–91. See also Richard Longstreth, *The American Department Store Transformed, 1920-1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 61–81. But Chris Dubelaar, Garland Chow, and Paul D Larson, 'Relationships between inventory, sales and service in a retail chain store operation', *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management* 31, no. 2 (2001): 96–108 comments on the lack of empirical research even in a contemporary context.
- ⁶⁰ From 1928 the *Bulletins* included a designated education section, posing questions to which trainee managers were expected to submit a written response to head office. Model answers were published in a later issue: *Bulletin*, December 31, 1928; February 11, 1929.

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- ⁶¹ Bookbinder, *Simon Marks*, 90–2; Rees, *St Michael*, 60–3.
- ⁶² *Bulletin*, July 9, 1927; November 19, 1927.
- ⁶³ *Bulletin*, June 18, 1927; September 17, 1927.
- ⁶⁴ *Bulletin*, July 3, 1929.
- ⁶⁵ *Bulletin*, July 18, 1927; August 20, 1927.
- ⁶⁶ *Bulletin*, December 12, 1928.
- ⁶⁷ 'New superstore for Derby', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, May 17, 1933, 8; *Stirling Journal*, September 13, 1934 [M&S Archive: Press Cuttings Album – L/1/1/3].
- ⁶⁸ Winship, 'Culture of restraint'; Stanley C Hollander and Glenn S Omura, 'Chain store developments and their political, strategic, and social interdependencies', *Journal of Retailing* 65, no. 3 (1989): 299–325, especially 318–9.
- ⁶⁹ *Bulletin*, August 6, 1927 (emphasis in the original).
- ⁷⁰ *Bulletin*, July 18, 1927; in the mid-1930 this responsibility devolved to staff manageresses.
- ⁷¹ *Bulletin*, February 4, 1928; Walsh, *When the Shopping Was Good*, 5–6 notes similar practice at Woolworth's.
- ⁷² *Bulletin*, June 18, 1927.
- ⁷³ *Bulletin*, July 29, 1929.
- ⁷⁴ See, for example, H Ashford Down, *The Art of Window Display: A Complete Guide to Modern Methods of Shop Window Publicity, Shop Lighting, Interior Display and the Work of the Display Man* (London: Pitman, 1931); Harold W Eley, *Advertising and the Shopkeeper: Modern Publicity Methods for the Retailer* (London: Pitman, 1924); Thomas Ellison and Ernest W Cooper, *Salesmanship in the Boot and Shoe Department* (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1931). As a recent academic study see: Susan Lomax, 'The view from the shop: window display, the shopper and the formulation of theory', in *Cultures of Selling. Perspectives on Consumption and Society Since 1700*, ed. John Benson and Laura Ugolini, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 265–92.
- ⁷⁵ *Bulletin*, July 9, 1927; August 6, 1927; May 12, 1928.
- ⁷⁶ *Bulletin*, May 12, 1928 contains one of the few instances when managers were instructed to display a specific item; by comparison the edition of May 8, 1929 includes a list of 48 items suggested for display to maximise Whitsun clothing sales.
- ⁷⁷ *Bulletin*, June 18, 1927.
- ⁷⁸ *Bulletin*, September 21, 1928. Examples of such displays can be seen in *Kinematograph Weekly*, May 3, 1934; July 10, 1934 [M&S Archive: Press Cuttings Album L/1/1/3]
- ⁷⁹ Rees, *St Michael*, 97–108.
- ⁸⁰ A small proportion of imported goods, notably Christmas gift items, were, however, directly allocated to stores by head office: *Bulletin*, October 8, 1927.
- ⁸¹ *Bulletin*, September 10, 1927.

⁸² *Bulletin*, July 9, 1927; August 6, 1927; October 15, 1927; November 19, 1927; July 3, 1929.

⁸³ For example, *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, July 18, 1929; *Kentish Mercury*, November 29, 1929; *Worthing Gazette*, August 26, 1936 [M&S Archive: Press Cuttings Album – L/1/1/1; New Store Press Reports – L/1/4/18].

⁸⁴ *Bulletin*, October 15, 1927; October 22, 1927; November 15, 1927; August 2, 1928.

⁸⁵ Briggs, *Marks and Spencer*, 84.

⁸⁶ *Bulletin*, August 20, 1927; January 21, 1928.

⁸⁷ *Bulletin*, August 20, 1927; October 29, 1927.

⁸⁸ *Bulletin*, September 3, 1927.

⁸⁹ *Bulletin*, August 20, 1927.

⁹⁰ Ronald Savitt, 'Innovation in American retailing, 1919-39: improving inventory management', *International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 9, no. 3 (1999): 307–20 confirms the novelty of this development, especially as British retailers generally lagged behind their US counterparts in stock or inventory management.

⁹¹ 'Progress 1926–1936', *Sparks*, December 1936, 15.

⁹² *Bulletin*, July 30, 1927; August 6, 1927; September 3, 1927; May 5, 1928; Circular letter to store managers from Israel Sieff, December 17, 1928 [M&S Archive HO/3/2/2/1/42].

⁹³ *Bulletin*, October 29, 1927; April 19, 1929.

⁹⁴ *Bulletin*, September 17, 1927.

⁹⁵ *Bulletin*, October 15, 1927.

⁹⁶ *Bulletin*, February 4, 1928; Circular letter to store managers from Israel Sieff, December 24, 1928 [M&S Archive HO/3/2/2/1/42].

⁹⁷ *Bulletin*, October 25, 1928.

⁹⁸ *Bulletin*, October 22, 1927.

⁹⁹ *Bulletin*, October 15, 1927; October 22, 1927.

¹⁰⁰ *Bulletin*, June 18, 1927; July 30, 1927.

¹⁰¹ *Bulletin*, March 8, 1929.

¹⁰² *Bulletin*, July 9, 1927; October 1, 1927; October 15, 1927; March 10, 1928.

¹⁰³ *Bulletin*, December 4, 1928.

¹⁰⁴ *Bulletin*, November 19, 1927; March 17, 1928.

¹⁰⁵ *Bulletin*, March 28, 1929.

¹⁰⁶ *Bulletin*, June 18, 1929.

¹⁰⁷ Katie Arber, *Thirtiestyle: Home Decoration and Furnishings from the 1930s* (London: Middlesex University Press, 2003); Catherine Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances. Fashion*

and *Class Between the Wars* (Stroud: History Press, 2011); Worth, *Fashion for the People*, 11–36.

¹⁰⁸ *Bulletin*, August 2, 1928.

¹⁰⁹ *Bulletin*, August 2, 1928.

¹¹⁰ *Bulletin*, January 24, 1929.

¹¹¹ Cf discussion of the consequences of change in a contemporary retail context: Lloyd C Harris and Emmanuel Ogbonna, 'The unintended consequences of culture interventions: a study of unexpected outcomes', *British Journal of Management* 13 (2002): 31–49.

¹¹² *Bulletin*, October 22, 1927; August 2, 1928 (emphasis in the original).

¹¹³ *Bulletin*, August 2, 1928.

¹¹⁴ *Sparks*, 'Who's who: Morgan'.

¹¹⁵ F R J Jervis, 'Profits in large-scale retailing', *Manchester School* 21, no. 2 (1953): 165–175; Lerner, *Currys*, 35, 42; Cecil Roberts, *Achievement: A Record of Fifty Years' Progress of Boots Pure Drug Company Ltd.* (Nottingham: Boots Pure Drug Company Ltd, 1938).

¹¹⁶ Mathias, *Retailing Revolution*, 282–4.

¹¹⁷ Wilson, *First with the News*, 324–30.

¹¹⁸ *Bulletin*, June 18, 1927.

¹¹⁹ *Bulletin*, November 12, 1927.

¹²⁰ *Bulletin*, September 17, 1927.

¹²¹ Irena Grugulis, Odul Bozkurt, and Jeremy Clegg "No place to hide"? The realities of leadership in UK supermarkets', in *Retail Work*, ed. Irena Grugulis and Odul Bozkurt (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 193–212. See also Alison Fuller, Kostas Kakavelikas, Alan Felstead, Nick Jewson, and Lorna Unwin, 'Learning, knowing and controlling the stock: the nature of employee discretion in a supermarket chain', *Journal of Education and Work* 22, no. 2 (2009): 105–20.

¹²² Israel Sieff, *Memoirs*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970), 159–60.

¹²³ Grugulis et al, "No place to hide"?.