

A HISTORY *of* NEGLECT

This is one of the most **FAMOUS** ads of all time, created in 1978 by Saatchi & Saatchi, but the only copy the agency has is a low quality scan, with the queueing figures barely discernible. So why has adland been so **POOR** at preserving its past, and how are agencies now trying to right years of inattention?

LOOKING FOR INSPIRATIONAL ads of yesteryear can be straightforward. A quick Google search will result in reams of thumbnails of iconic print campaigns for a quick virtual flick-through of the past. But such abundance is masking a deeper problem. When it comes to preserving its history, adland has been surprisingly neglectful. Just ask creative director Paul Belford (see page 68).

When he was putting together a revised version of D&AD's The Copy Book that showcased some of the most ground-breaking copywriting through the advertising ages, one of his biggest challenges was getting his hands on the work. Much of it didn't exist in a quality good enough to scale up, let alone reprint – some of the industry's most significant ads were no longer usable. "It was shocking how little was available," says Belford. "There were tiny jpegs of most of them, but not anything of sufficient quality to use in the book. Some of them existed on transparencies, but even they weren't good enough to blow up."

So dismal was the quality of much of the work, that Belford had to make the decidedly drastic decision to recreate most of it himself – painstakingly analysing low-resolution images of selected ads, identifying the typeface used and piecing the elements back together. "You just assume the work exists somewhere, but more often than not it

doesn't," says Belford, who ended up recreating around 20 to 30 pieces, from old American Volkswagen ads to Saatchi & Saatchi's iconic 'Labour isn't Working' poster. "It surprised me that some of this wonderful stuff was so hard to find," he says. "Recently agencies have become much better at archiving, and it's easier to keep a digital archive, so things are improving. But anything from the 1990s and before can be pretty hard to track down. A lot of people do keep bits and pieces, but many don't keep their work."

And therein lies one of the problems. In the absence of centralised agency archives, the preservation of much creative work often relied on individuals. But while some creative directors kept proofs and copies of their output – often for sentimental reasons – others have been less concerned with preserving their creative oeuvre for posterity. Independent strategist Alex McKie is governor of the History of Advertising Trust (HAT), which was founded in 1976 to address the problem of ad preservation and archiving, and now stores numerous collections and millions of brand communication items. As part of research for the trust earlier this year, McKie spoke to a number of advertising agencies and creative directors about their approach to preserving their work. "A lot of creatives don't keep things. Often they don't keep work because they're too busy. You always mean to

file work but you don't have time," says McKie. "There is a cultural mismatch, which makes successful archiving tricky. People don't go into advertising to think about history; good archiving is all about detail and diligence. And some creatives really aren't interested in what they've done – only what they do next."

≈ OBSESSED WITH THE FUTURE ≈

Bartle Bogle Hegarty founder John Hegarty, who is also president of the HAT, echoes this notion. "We're an industry obsessed with the future. That's very exciting and I don't for a minute say that should be decried, but there's a huge danger that we forget the lessons learnt from yesterday," he says. "We must be the only creative industry that doesn't look to its past. We have created an industry that was the envy of the world, but we aren't preserving it."

When BBH wanted to compile a retrospective of its work for its 21-year anniversary celebrations nine years ago, "we were shocked to find how little we held onto", says Hegarty. "It was really difficult finding much of the work." But the worth of past advertising is indisputable, he adds: "It has historical value and it is a wonderful glimpse into society. It tells us a lot about what people were thinking at the time."

On a more prosaic level, historic ads are increasingly popular among the mainstream consumer. The originally obscure 'Keep Calm and Carry On' poster created by the Ministry of Information at the beginning of the Second World War but never issued, is now distributed more widely than it ever was in the late 1930s. The Economist recently began selling limited edition screenprints of its iconic 'White out of Red' ad campaign, originally created by Abbott Mead Vickers 20 years ago.

While agencies might have neglected the detail and diligence of archiving in the past, they are now increasingly keen to address the issue of preserving their work, past and present. Since its anniversary wake-up call BBH has become more aware and organised about keeping work, and digitises and files everything on its intranet. At Leo Burnett, Douglas Buffo, vice president and director of information services, rebranded the physical library in 2001 as the digital Information Resource Centre, which includes a small library of iconic print ads.

Saatchi & Saatchi, meanwhile, launched a digital archiving system in 2003/2004, The Saatchi & Saatchi Creative Archive, storing all new global work and gradually digitising historic work going back to the 1980s. Having this resource is crucial, says John Pallant, regional creative director for Saatchi & Saatchi, Europe, Middle East and Africa. "I am forever making up a reel of work from the past, to share with our clients or to pitch to prospective clients – it's important to see

what's happening around the Saatchi world, and be inspired by it."

Pallant also references past work for training purposes, to convey 'Saatchi-ness' or "what makes Saatchi the agency it is". "The archive connects us," adds Pallant. "I make sure that the guys in my regional offices are in touch with the best work that everyone else is doing, because all the best work keeps them on their toes. It's exciting to feel the life in the organisation."

Keeping the archive up to date is a huge challenge, however. Every office in the global Saatchi network has a nominated uploader who is responsible for adding new work to the archive, tagging it and adding metadata, while a central London team oversees the process. It is something the agency, as well as its parent company Publicis Groupe, is actively driving within the company, and Saatchi & Saatchi's archive now contains more than 20,000 assets. The archive aims to record all work, not just a curated sample of 'best work', according to Pallant. No matter what discipline, "it's important we have everything there, whether we use it all or not".

But responsibility for preserving the industry's heritage also lies with the advertising clients themselves. Some have extensive archives charting the development of brand communications. Nestlé for example has a dedicated historian, or 'heritage assistant', to oversee the safeguarding of its past communications, while Coca Cola keeps a meticulous archive of its ad campaigns which it promoted extensively during its 125 anniversary celebrations in 2011. Consumers can still browse the brand's varied ads via a slew of online galleries, including one showcasing its slogans, from 'Pause for Refreshment' in 1939 to 'Makes other Colas seem Flat' in 1986.

≈ ADVERTISING ARCHEOLOGY ≈

An understanding of a brand's advertising history can not just teach the industry about the past, it should also shape future campaigns, believes Robin Wight, president of communications group Engine and WCRS. Whenever the agency takes on a new client, it tries to revisit much of the brand's historic advertising. "I like to call it advertising archeology," says Wight. "It's layers of communication laid down like geological strata over time, and you can understand a brand by understanding those layers." Many past ads and slogans remain lodged in consumers' brains, no matter how long ago they were disseminated, he points out. WCRS's work for Orange, for example, included the famous 'The future is bright, the future is Orange' slogan, which is still recalled by three quarters of the UK population, even though it hasn't been used for the best part of a decade, says Wight. The Engine group doesn't leave the preservation of work solely to its clients, however


- in fact it takes archiving very seriously, says Wight, and all work is backed up, with master files kept on a server.

≈ LOST IN THE ETHER ≈

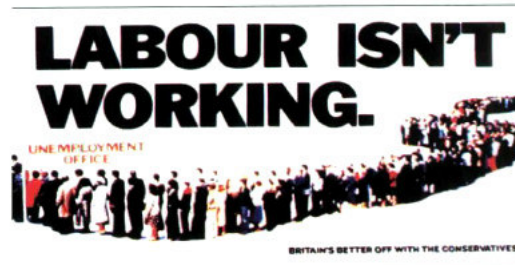
But while digitising has made the life of agencies easier, digital work itself provides another challenge when it comes to archiving. Filing and cataloguing digital work is particularly complex, says Guy Phillipson, chief executive of the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB), especially given the rate of its production. "The best agencies are usually simultaneously working on multiple briefs," he explains. "Some record their greatest hits through their blogs or across a directory of award entry pages. Others develop 'director pack'-style summaries as a monthly milestone of their best work for the client."

The number of different digital formats, appearing on potentially over a trillion web pages, makes archiving particularly arduous, so those looking to save good creative work for future generations need to be selective, Phillipson adds. The IAB has been selecting the best digital campaigns of the month since 2003 in its Creative Showcase, and Australian website Bannerblog has archived banner ads since 2005. Bannerblog's Ashley Ringrose believes it is vital to keep a catalogue of banner ads, no matter how unappreciated a format they might be, especially since the online medium means that much work disappears relatively quickly, due to defunct domain names or unmaintained servers. "Take a look at awards annuals and I'd say over 75% of campaign-driven sites are dead or missing after 12 months," he says. Engine, meanwhile, keeps all its digital assets, just as with its print and TV advertising, while consumer interactions are usually summarised before storing.

However, McKie says that some of the most innovative digital work may already be lost in the online ether. Brands such as Smirnoff and Guinness were among the vanguard of innovative digital campaigns, but it is unlikely that much of that work is still available, she points out.

And despite some agencies' best efforts of righting the neglect of the past, and an increasing awareness of advertising heritage's value, many ads will never be able to grace billboards or online banners again - unless you give Belford a quick ring, that is. 

For more on the History of Advertising Trust, see hataads.org.uk. The Copy Book is published by **Taschen**, £34.99



Right: When Paul Belford wanted to feature Saatchi & Saatchi's Labour Isn't Working in a revised edition of the D&AD Copy Book, existing images of the ad held by the agency were so poor that Belford resorted to recreating the ad himself. Compare the type on his new version

here with Saatchi's on the previous page; Belford had to do the same for a number of other ads in the book, including this classic written by Jim Durfee at Carl Ally for Hertz in response to DDB's famous Avis campaign