

Yesterday's Papers

A talk to The Eltham Society by Monty Parkin
Thursday 3rd July 2008

Monty Parkin in a return visit to the Eltham Society gave a brisk, entertaining talk on Yesterday's Papers, with the emphasis on their advertising standards.

British newspapers got under way in the 17th century and their popularity led to the imposition of stamp duty in 1712 – leading to a claim that it was a tax on knowledge (whereas with today's press it could be considered a tax on ignorance). Early advertising standards were so wretched that Henry Fielding campaigned for parliamentary control to be introduced; but some adverts seemed to be self-defeating, such as Mr Parr's Invigorating Pills with a picture of Mr Parr that made him appear to be embalmed rather than enlivened.

Later adverts included: Koko Hair Oil to help your tresses reach the ground; an electric corset to cure hysteria; an indoor saddle to facilitate riding at home; Joy's cigarettes for asthma and bronchitis; Burgess Lion ointment to save legs from amputation; and the ever popular Dr Williamson's Pink Pills for Pale People.

There was much advice on means of improving and prolonging life: when on the beach cover yourself with ointment and mustard, don't go into the sea and after ten minutes enter a dark room for a few hours; learn how to play the piano in two weeks or the xylophone in five minutes; it is not the pretty or clever girl who gets married but the one who eats Bile Beans; and the famous exhortation 'Don't let housework kill your wife, let electricity do it for you!

Other unfortunate campaigns Monty mentioned were 'Craven A for your throat's sake' and 'You're never alone with a Strand' portraying a man who was very much alone so that smokers immediately abandoned the brand.

The talk was lively and entertaining, albeit with sombre undertones.

Les Murrell