

**Jack Wills:**

A sociological study of elite group identity and sociality  
through the prism of a brand-name corporation

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as a thesis for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology**

In September 2013

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## ABSTRACT:

The Jack Wills brand and the name Jack Wills has become synonymous with an elite group identity in British society, namely the 18-24 demographic of the ‘upper-middle classes’. This group – wealthy, privately educated and attending a Russell Group university – are the subject of this thesis, specifically those involved in the co-ordination and lifestyle events of the Jack Wills brand. This study tracks and distils the identity and sociality of this social group through the prism of the Jack Wills brand’s corporate activity, a role that I outline to be central to the group’s social networking and cohesion through convivial pursuits and lifestyle events. This, I show, creates an elite core group who become the face of the brand; their life being the life-style element that the corporation sells to their consumers. Central to this thesis is the distinction between this elite, core-group of persons that become the basis of Jack Wills advertised lifestyle and those who purchase the product at market. The distinction I make is between a gift and commodity economy where, on the one hand, gifts develop intricate friendships and lasting social ties amongst a small few as an elite segment of the group and commodities, on the other hand, develop a residual role and make those purchasing the clothes an aspirational group. The *name* of the corporation comes to stand for the *name of the group*. And this name contains a contradiction; that of the gift and the commodity as the aspired and the aspirational persons, respectively. This contradiction is explored and dubbed ‘the dialectic of gentry’. Tracing this contradiction at the heart of the brand *and* the gentry group Jack Wills’s target, the thesis traces the value of the brand through ethnographic investigation: What type of economic object is a brand? Arguing it is what anthropologists call ‘inalienable wealth/valuables’, I claim the social group’s elite identity arises through the gifts and patronage the Jack Wills brand supplies them as they withhold these valuables from wider circulation and, therein, the value of the brand is manifested and given its elite stature. Bolstered by ethnographic material I attempt to demonstrate that the Jack Wills brand embodies the aspirational core of elite British identity and aids in the reformation of this elite group in the face of globalising pressures and new forms of sociality mediated by branded goods.

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*Acknowledgements:*

Many people helped in this project – Matthias Varul, Anthony King, Nigel Pleasants, Jane Whittle, Henry French, Brian Rapport, Gisa Weszkalyns, Katherine Tyler, Jonathan Davies, Charles Masquerlier, Dana Wilson-Kovacs, Tia DeNora, Edward Skidelsky, David Inglis, Dave Morning, Victor Gazis, Mark Doidge, Tom Rice, Matthew Swain, Matthew Dwyer, Luc Tudor, David Curran, Chester Burbidge, Timothy Starkey, Claire Colenutt, Clio Andrae, Hannah Brown, Owen Clark, Georgina Hunter, Josie Bowler, Josephine Paris, David Singeisen, James Eales, Oliver Partington, John Micheal-Lynn, Ellen McLagan and Julia Carter.

In terms of the research, all informants appear in pseudonym form but I do wish to thank Cambridge University Polo Club (2011/12; 2012/13) and Oxford University Polo Club (2011/12) for their help, hospitality and time; their guardedness was more than understandable and the window of insight they allowed me is greatly appreciated. In particular, Cambridge's allowing me to attend league games deserves special thanks. I'd also like to thank those on the BUSC (2011/12) committee for replying to my emails and many questions with as much information as they were able to give regarding the skiing fieldwork. And finally thank you to my informants who frequent Rock (2011-13), their hospitality and friendship was a real silver lining to a PhD which felt like it'd never end. I'd also like to extend to all field informants that patience and I hope that the ethnography does justice to our time together. (Of course, all mistakes are my own).

I'd like to thank and acknowledge a vast debt of gratitude to Matthias and Tony, my supervisors. Two people who have been not just a huge help with professional matters but with their generosity of spirit, time and energy. Tony really saw this project for what it was and much of the finished article wouldn't have its overall structure and coherence without his great ability to see the big picture from tiny details. I really appreciate his assistance on this project and in all other matters over the past three years. Matthias has been a constant source of help, assistance and intellectual inspiration for this project. His encyclopaedic knowledge of western (and now eastern) philosophy and social science has been such a help to my arguments and education; he'll notice where his undergraduate courses find their way into this thesis as well as his honing of my wild ideas appear, also. I am deeply indebted to him and I couldn't have asked for a better teacher and supervisor.

Finally, I'd like to thank my family: my mother Ann; step-father David and my brother, Ben.



No – Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men.

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*.

It is not very strange. For my uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mouths at him while my father lived give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats apiece for his picture in little. 'Sblood! There is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out.

- Prince Hamlet. William Shakespeare, *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Demarke*.

## Part One: The Problem

## CHAPTER ONE

### Social stratification and the brand-name commodity – an approach from gift-exchange

#### 1. *The Question*

A cursory observation from the national, student and internet press or forums demonstrates that it is reasonable to assume that those persons who wear clothes bearing the brand-name Jack Wills are usually publically or privately educated, attending an Oxbridge or other Russell Group university and enjoy a lifestyle of countryside pursuits, equestrian sports, skiing in the Alps or boating in up-market seaside towns. This thesis takes this assumption, turns it on its head, and investigates how this situation arose and, sociologically explored, how we can understand the impact of a brand-name corporation giving a (brand-)name to such persons.

As British society enters the twenty-first century, the social groups that have crystallised in the twentieth are being profoundly reformed. The social group whose reformation is in question in this thesis is the late adolescent, early-twenty something demographic of the professional middle-class or ‘upper-middle classes’. Tackling the social changes that have beset them in the twentieth century, most importantly the perceived, meritocratic increase in social mobility and shifts in the traditional class and occupational hierarchies in the new economy (Foster, 2007; Adkins, 2005). The reformation of this elite social group around key sites of sociality is crucial to a sociological study of their consciousness of themselves as a distinct and special group – special to not only their sense of collective identity and British identity writ large. Their reformation shall be studied through the prism of a brand-name corporation, Jack Wills Ltd, whose instrumental role in their cohesion and networked sociality. It is in this regard, as a corporation that commercializes national and class identity – with its motto *Outfitters to the Gentry* and

*Fabulously British* – that I shall outline and demonstrate the critical aspects of the upper-middle classes reformation at the beginning of the twenty-first century and its out growing and reshaping of twentieth century forms of social closure and consolidation of membership.

Jack Wills', founder and CEO, Peter Williams, has stated his central mandate for the named corporation of premium clothing and life-style endorsement is:

“If you're not our target customer, we actively want you to never have heard of us. ... What we want to do is build authentic, grassroots locations and lifestyle specific relations with our target customers.” (Williams, 2011)

Written into the mandates of corporate marketing practice is an active ethos that is central to our sociological question: How is this brand-name corporation engaged in the reformation and consolidation of a key elite group in British society? The answer pertains to the intimate social ties coveted in the distribution, allocation and appropriation of the named clothing to target customers.

This study is a twofold pursuit – How can studying the corporate policy and method of distribution of Jack Wills' lifestyle image and clothing *also* be a study of a sociological reformation? The question asks how a political economy – distribution of branded goods and an ideal of who gets and deserves them – also entails questions of social solidarity, as the goods are a symbol of their association. As a lifestyle brand, the corporate ethos entails the integration and appropriation of sites of sociality that the professional-middle class adolescents attend, network and unify themselves around. It is in the marketing toward and co-option of this social group that solidarity is achieved as membership to the social group may be articulated along the lines of what Jack Wills, as a brand-name, stands for. To use the sociological designation of the term introduced by Durkheim (2001), the name Jack Wills and



the clothing that carries the distinctive branding marks of this corporation comes to be a ‘totem’; a potent symbol of membership and recognition of a common life-style and course of sociality. I shall track the unification of this group through the activities of the corporation Jack Wills Ltd.

## 1.2 The Group in the twenty-first century

No adequate name exists for the social group studied here (but I will suggest ‘gentry’ for reasons given in chapter 2). The British “Establishment” is often the term used for the higher professionals in British society, especially in matters of politics and law, but not exclusively as it also takes into account the military officer class, City bankers and finance, senior university administrators and professors, upper-level journalists, property managers, publishing, media officials and others in higher-level commerce but also with connections to monarchy and aristocracy. This term is not precise for the social group in consideration as I document some of their sons and daughters and consumption of the Jack Wills brand includes those of less prominent families. In the sociology of class and occupational definitions, the concept of the middle classes or professional elite has the term “service class” often employed to define this social group (Savage & Butler, 1995; Butler, 1995; Goldthorpe, 1982). The ‘service class’ consist of those persons whose occupational status is in professional, managerial or administrative roles and who rely upon the development of connected, autonomous networks while also allowing for social mobility through entry into these roles. Distinguished for analysis in the study of class formation for the service class or professional classes is the relational and normative aspects, which refer to the ability of group coherence to manifest itself within the occupational networks through inter-marriage, friendship groups and associations and appeals to common, shared values, beliefs and demonstrated through life-style practices (Lockwood, 1995:5-6). In the early formation of the ‘service class’ ideal, the call was for investigation into the normative realm and as such

studies have focused upon the consumption practices and leisure activities which outline the culture forming effects of networked sociality through class position (Urry, 1995; Warde & Tomlinson, 1995; Majuma & Warde, 2008; Savage, 2000). With the study of the social group targeted by Jack Wills, the perspective approached here is to demonstrate the normative and relational processes of group cohesion (or class formation) mediated through the corporation and its life-style practices.

This is a study of social cohesion and the use of branding as a means to unify the group around enduring symbols of national identity and the two go hand in hand. As Griffiths, Miles and Savage (2008) demonstrate with an analysis the cultural elite – those who preside over intellectual and cultural institutions (the arts, heritage and museums etc.) – these public-school/Oxbridge elites combine culturally salient appeals to enduring national identity symbols. This acting as a core group around which those on the periphery are localised through:

Whatever elite criteria one wishes to take as a marker of an elite background – attendance at private schools, education at Oxbridge, membership of gentleman’s clubs – will only apply to a minority of board members ...this process does not entail the simple decline of traditional elite powers but their reworking so that they now provide the key ‘bridges’ and ‘connections’ in a much sparser network of power. (Savage et. al, 2008:207)

Savage et. al. call for further research on the “actual processes of connection” (2008:208) in a service class elite, suggesting that most evidence indicates it can be found in convivial, informal areas and shared backgrounds – where people meet (either in clubs or school) and engage in shared activity. This study begins to answer this call by focusing upon younger

members of this group destined to become its adult constituent in the years to come. As the Jack Wills brand puts in place a corporate program whose life-style mandate is combined with co-opting and making obligations of shared lifestyle on its participants, it consequently gives rise to a map-able social group connected through corporate obligations.

Brand-name corporations are crucial in the reformation and consolidation of this established group in Britain today. This is because brands are a crucial part of the culture forming sentiments and values of present day Britain. Throughout this study we track the origin of the corporation and its subsequent corporate program so as to demonstrate that what the Jack Wills brand institutes is the means to forge an elite, core-client through its corporate presence that becomes deployed in life-style activities and thereby gives members a shared social network through the brand's identity-symbols. Organised around the *life-style* of the professional service class, those associated and connected socially to these corporate activities become part of a specific selection mechanism for membership to the connected, professional middle class elites. This is a novel development in the twenty-first century and taps into the contemporary problems of our social group's reformation in the era of brand-name, global capital and media technology (see: Lash & Lury, 2007; Lash & Urry, 1994; Lash & Urry, 1984; Appadurai, 1996; Jameson, 1998; Jameson, 1991; Castells, 1998).

### 1.3 The Value of the Brand

Elites are not clear cut and not always easily identifiable as a group and their social profile is not always homogenous (Savage et. al. 2008; Scott, 2008). The normative and the relational aspects of class-formation is crucial, as Scott observes: "solidarity occurs only if social mobility, leisure time socializing, education, intermarriage, and other social relations are such that the members of an elite are tied together in regular and recurrent patterns of association." (Scott, 2008:34) The Jack Wills brand provides such recurrent patterns of

association through its corporate program and the argument supplied in this thesis is that through the brand's economic presence, the social group remains unified through it. The brand-name, this thesis argues, mediates social relations; it binds specific persons in nodal time-space (cf. Castells, 1996; Lash & Lury, 2007 and Lury, 2004 describe brands as a new media object). Yet Jack Wills CEO Peter Williams' mandate to outfit solely his target customer is not an exclusively sociological project. His concern with his target customer is his brand's corporate solvency. The brand, predicated upon the identity symbols of an elite, upper-middle class way of life, is only profitable in so far as the products remain unappropriated by un-desirable customers and adequately sourced and located in the lifestyle conduits of his core customer. Pursuing profitability, I will argue, ironically leads to a reformation of the core, upper-middle class group whose sociological composition it consolidates while also opening up new avenues of social practice and negotiation. Central to this argument is that the core clients – the upper middle classes – provide the basis for elite, exclusive sociality while also a monopoly on the identity symbols of the brand (chs. 4-5).

#### 1.4 Sociological profile of the target group of Jack Wills corporate program

Jack Wills' ideal consumer is the constituents of the "upper-middle class" but, to be precise, a limited segment of this broader social class. Crucially the brand relies upon those who share similar appeals to status honour, i.e. "evaluations which others make of her or his status position, thus attributing him some form of (positive or negative) social prestige or esteem" (Giddens, 1971:166); prestige attached to the identity symbols and practices of national and class identity. This guides our concerns with group reformation as the honourable aspects of Jack Wills brand image and corporate events, however, are not appealing to *all* classified members of the professional elite as the key aspect of the brand is its appeal to aesthetic notions of lifestyle and prestige of social practices.

The constituents of this professional middle-class are narrow and, owing to their elite qualities, constitute a special branch of study in the reformation of their historically enduring linkage to the British “upper” class and national identity (cf. Colley, 1993). The Jack Wills brand’s target customer is the select group of public school-to-undergraduates whose backgrounds are that of Britain’s professional middle class. The demographic composition of this social group/class is slim, in relative terms, to the population at large and has bearing upon what is the central problem of how the reformation of the upper-middle classes is to be conceived. I seek to demonstrate that the Jack Wills brand is implicated within the reformation of the elite-conception of the professional middle classes, strengthening its constituents through its activities in the face of widening participation in their institutional milieu.

Two central sociological facts concern the composition of the professional middle-classes: educational establishments and money are central to membership. Michael Hartmann’s (2007) recent *Sociology of Elites* centralises its importance, demonstrating that in Britain the “Eton and Rugby Groups” of public schools and especially the Clarendon Nine (Eton, Winchester, Westminster, St. Paul’s, Merchant Taylor’s, Shrewsbury, Rugby, Harrow and Charterhouse) still constitute the central selective mechanism behind key social elites which make up the professional sector – putting forth the statistic of 90% of the professional sector having public school backgrounds (Hartmann, 2007:67; cf. Adonis & Pollard, 1997:47). In 1996 the percentage of privately educated persons constituted 7% of the population, a total of 610,000 pupils compared to the 8,883,000 pupils who make up state-funded schools. This – despite being a slim percentile – does show a significant growth of pupil intake considering the percentage was 5.8% in 1978 (Adonis & Pollard, 1997:40, 47, 50).

The importance of money in this regard is that, as fee-paying schools, the tuition becomes the central device of access, not solely educational merit or intellectual capacity. Money is central to educational life and the subsequent opportunities it provides in not only educational qualities but also social contacts and networks: with fees of c. £30,000 for the Clarendon schools (Eton at £32,067 per-year and Harrow at £32,160 per-year)<sup>1</sup>, entry into these institutions is central to elite-status in later life. With Jack Wills' sponsorship of Eton-Harrow polo societies, this also secures the brand's integration into a domain of restricted circulation. Given the central socialising mechanism of the elite public schools being still the genteel practices of certain "public school games" and the strong association with the British "upper-class", the habitus of the pupils remains a traditionalised, elite British identity linked with a strongly affluent background.

Universities also encapsulate this as the hegemonic 'image' of their campuses is toned by the public-school elite who come to encompass the intake of the non-privately educated, but through lesser monetary burdens and assistance tuition (in loans) the composition is demographically widened to other selection factors. The early 1990s saw 6% of first-year undergraduates (233 students) taken from the Clarendon nine enter Cambridge (Adonis & Pollard, 1997:56), while in the present the allocation of state-funded school accepted places at Oxbridge has dramatically increased: as of 2011 Oxford granted 58.8% of offered places to state-school students; 41.5% of offers went to privately educated students (Vasagar, 2011). Other elite universities have ratios which show a higher number of state educated students: Durham has an intake of 59% state-school, Bristol at 60.2%, York at 80%, Edinburgh at 70.8%, Birmingham at 81%. While no percentage was available, Exeter has a ratio of 71:29 of state to private schooled respectively (*The Complete University Guide*): University has

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<sup>1</sup> Fees calculated from per-term figures found at (a) Harrow school website: <http://www.harrowschool.org.uk/1571/admissions/fees-and-charges/> and (b) Eton College website: <http://www.etoncollege.com/currentfees.aspx>.

become increasingly geared toward openness upon academic grounds where attainments of grades grant one a place. This however threatens the professional middle-classes “elite” identity as more persons enter into once restricted fields; the sociological composition places them as a minority within a field their social identity encompasses. The increasing intake to higher-education from students of diverse backgrounds, alongside an enduring cohort of public-schooled pupils, marginalises the group in demographic terms but, given the data we supply on Jack Wills, the brand is able to act as a symbol of group reformation and endurance at a time of social transformation.

The brand-image is restricted to a “public school” type of person but these persons constitute an increasing minority. The number of students taking A-levels and potentially entering university is approximately 300,000 as of 2012 (*Telegraph*, 2012) and in 2011, 102,002 of these were awarded by Independent schools (ICS, 2011). The top British schools are the Clarendon Nine as well as the other high ranking schools that are part of the Eton Group and Rugby Group.<sup>2</sup> Students from these elite schools make up a large portion of the

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<sup>2</sup> Eton Group

1. Bryanston School
2. Dulwich College
3. Highgate School
4. King’s College School
5. Marlborough School
6. Sherbourne School
7. The King’s School Canterbury
8. University College School

Rugby group:

1. Bradfield College
2. Cheltenham College
3. Clifton College
4. Haileybury College
5. Malvern College
6. Monkton Combe School
7. Oundle School
8. Radley College
9. Repton School
10. Rugby School
11. St Edward’s School, Oxford

Jack Wills Season's participants – either in holidaying activities, or equestrian sports as well as university attendance. The Jack Wills brand utilises the “life-style” activities of the professional middle classes as its key viral marketing and mode of distribution of its merchandise. I contend that the “value” of the brand is intimately linked to a slim fraction of the overall demographic of university students and the population of the British Isles writ large. The numerical coherence of this group, critically, demonstrates not only elite station but a map-able ethnographic group for presentation of life-style and its activities which this thesis supplies.

### 1.5 The enigma of the brand

The ethnographic data reveals the central finding of the thesis. Jack Wills creates an *ad hoc* promotional team through be-friending one another in support of constructing, as the main activity, as one informant put it, “an ‘image’ of a lifestyle.” Noting the major finding to be that while ostensibly a publicly accessible commodity, attendance to these seasonal activities consisted of heavily discounted or indeed free clothes. These free items were given to those assisting with the seaside activities, or handed out amongst the BUSC Main Event ski trip during the afternoon-evening après ski by Seasonnaires's to persons who made friends with them. Also, in the form of patronage to the Oxbridge polo societies, these societies saw Jack Wills providing part of the financial solvency to the club as well as kit, tack and other polo requirements (such as a large stipend for ponies) as well as signature Varsity match exclusive to the members of the society. In addition to this, while not covered in the fieldwork, are the Oxbridge Rugby teams and sportsman's who attain “blues” (high sportsperson honours) at Cambridge and on admission to the Cambridge Hawks Club, an elite

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12. Shrewsbury School

13. Stowe School

14. Uppingham School

15. Wellington College, Berkshire



and prestigious sport's club, are granted a Jack Wills branded, Fox Brothers & Co. designed Varsity blazer. On the one hand a disembedded, publically accessible commodity open for purchase through money; on the other the Jack Wills brand is an embedded gift economy manifesting itself through patronage and gifts of favour amongst its core demographic. This outlook frames our ethnographic account and conception of the corporate program (ch. 4-8).

Central to our study of group reformation is brand-value. The two go hand in hand. Asking: Why and how are brands valuable? The answer I propose is that Jack Wills' brand-value arises from its central place in the life-style of its core customer and its role in group solidarity, founded, theoretically, within the Durkheimian tradition with the emphasis upon the work of his nephew, Marcel Mauss (1990; 1994; 2001) and Weber's theory of status groups (1968; 1984). Broadly this can be situated in the current resurgence of 'value theory' in sociology and anthropology (see: Graeber, 2001; 2007; 2011b; Eiss & Pedersen, 2002; Hugh-Jones & Humphrey, 1993). One could suggest that the market acquisition of branded goods need not be understood in traditional terms of commodity exchange (money for goods acquisition) but rather another form of acquisition, notably gift-exchange (Mazzarella, 2003a/b; Foster, 2005; 2007; 2008; see also, Arvidsson, 2008; 2013).

These theories reverse distinctly modern principles of free-market economics, notably the famous aphorism of Marx's that "all fixed, fast-frozen relations ...are swept away ...All that solids melts into air" (Marx & Engels, 1967:223). Jack Wills unknowingly acknowledge this Marxian pessimism of disturbance of 'fixed social relations' and seek to re-establish them. Social sentiments and obligations to persons based upon non-market estimations of their worth remain salient. And neither can brand-name corporations be reduced to money-making as their sole end. Social relations cannot, under brand-name power, be reduced to "callous 'cash payment'" (Marx & Engels, 1967:222). The principle behind brand-name corporations is their relying upon the "archaic" exchange regimes of the gift, demonstrating

that it is the sentiments that organise the production, distribution and destruction of exchanged objects (over and above the emptiness of exchange-value and commodity exchange). In gift economies, sentiments exchange. And the brand-name economy could be aptly described as “embedded” in non-economic institutions (Polanyi, 1957a/b; Mauss, 1990) – that is, lifestyle activities and clubs of the core customer. Over and above the “commodity” aspect of the brand, throughout this thesis I stress we are discussing a *brand-name* (Smith, 2014a/b). Value is manifest in *sentiments; opinion; reputation; promises* as a *name* conjurors up brand-image; “The *brand-name* makes it possible to crystallise a *trend* in public opinion through a *brand image*” (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006:184 original emphasis; cf. Lury, 2005). Without maintaining and proving these immaterial, intangible promises, the brand-name is worthless. The economy of the brand-name is an economy of *fame* and *patronymic* distinction – the name of the corporation stands for its being a patron/benefactor and *cause* to the life-style its corporate activities put in place. It is an engine of life-style and the name stands for the reputation of the social group. The fame of the giver in gift economies is a central leitmotif (Mauss, 1990; Munn, 1986; Graber, 2001) and in this way this thesis investigates “what’s in a brand-name” and answers that it is a short-hand device for the values of the social group and their coherent identity in the national (indeed, global) imagination. This is what is surveyed in this thesis and all arguments are founded with a concern for the embedding of the product within this life-world.

Brands are not solely or exclusively concerned with the exchange of commodities in the generation of wealth – despite, in the long-run, this being crucial to their survival (as Weber described with status groups, as the market “knows nothing of ‘honour’” they need wealth to continue their lifestyle practices (1985:192)). Instead, they are concerned with the moving of goods of high value alongside a more crucial end, that is, arranging social relationships (Smith, 2014a). Tracing the Jack Wills product within life-style and leisure

activities, I outline these social activities with a direct eye on how these social events and networks provide the economic value of the brand.

Mauss' project on aristocratic gift economies answers a Durkheimian question – the religious origin of economic value (Durkheim, 2001:314, n.1; Mauss, 1990:72). Durkheim's concern with religion was predicated upon symbols of group solidarity and their articulation in key ceremonies of connexion. Mauss' suggestion at the end of *The Gift* was to point out those transactions of gifts between aristocratic nobles was based upon the celebration element and these gifts given away elevated their social standing. The items from the rituals – the symbols of group identity – became the source of economic value. One was able to compare the worth of an object to others and a standard conception of value through prestigious objects associated with rituals celebrating the social group itself arose (see Martin, 2013:57-60). The value of economic durables arising from objects implicated in these ceremonies of group celebration is crucial to the study and its ethnographic material. The symbols of Jack Wills' products – their colours, their logos, their style and what type of clothes they sell – are items of group membership when articulated in key sites of celebration. Outside these moments of intimate connection with the group and their sites of sociality, I venture, these items lose their value (brand equity/ importance to the group and identity relevance). Brand-equity is outlined as resting upon image and meaning attributed to products (Beil, 1993; McCracken, 1993): Jack Wills requires a monopoly upon the image so as to retain value for its products while also using this image to unify an elite. This is the enigma of the brand-name commodity – firstly it is not exclusively a commodity but only one at a certain points in its life-span (as Appadurai (1986:15-16; cf. Kopytoff, 1986) has argued for commodities in general) and secondly, it is marketed only to be withheld from circulation to a designated “few.” In truth, it cannot be given away at all. (This is also the enigma of the gift (Godelier, 1999; Weiner, 1985; 1993)).

Robert Foster (2008; also 2005; 2007) has described the enigma of the brand-name commodity as resting upon the enigma of the gift. Foster argues that “the increasing importance of intangibles – specifically, brands – in globalised consumer capitalism encourages us to revisit analyses of gift exchange in order to understand better how durable relations between persons and things take shape in practice.” (Foster, 2008:12) Against the commodity transactions of the modern era, the landscape of late-capitalism may be increasingly immaterial or “intangible.” The economy is organised around ubiquitous symbols in branded products (cf. Lash & Lury, 2007; Lury, 2003; 2004; 2005; Arvidsson, 2005). Foster suggests a study of brands is implicated in a similar process which surround Mauss’ gifting societies: the creation of vast wealth and renown for the party giving away valuables as central to their social standing. The study of Jack Wills demonstrates that the metaphor of gift exchange (as used by Foster and others (esp. Mazzarella, 2003a/b) is in fact not so much a metaphor but an institutionalised device. The brand-name stands for the core social group and is gifted to them through their membership to clubs and lifestyle activities that the brand’s ambassadors – the Seasonnaires’s – generate and through patronage to the Oxbridge societies and life-style events documented in this study. Outside of this framework of embedded economics of gifts and patronage there is the commodity acquisition of the clothes via the market; through shopping either ‘in store’ or ‘online’. This reveals, I will demonstrate in chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, that the Season of the Jack Wills life-style employs a means of distribution justly befitted to serving the interests of its core-clients over and above those who acquire the products through monetary purchase. In this way, the Jack Wills branded goods are not alienated to the vicissitudes of the market. Instead, they act to sociologically consolidate an elite, core group which give rise to the excessive market value of the brand.

The “Season” is a double edged sequence of practices; on the one hand it enacts a gift economy that works to implement the central marketing strategies that generate the life-style content of the Jack Wills brand-image; on the other, it links into the pre-existing life-style activities of the university-aged demographic sought by the Jack Wills brand. The Season becomes an ethnographic field-site to study the Jack Wills brand as a “valuable” in the anthropological sense (Godelier, 1999) as well as a marketed commodity, alienable and open to access through monies. This thesis tracks the two in tandem for the oft cited distinction between a commodity and a gift in economic anthropology and sociology (Carrier, 1991; 1994; Gregory, 1994) provides a two-fold schema: on the one hand the brand is a seasonal gift in life-style arenas based around university terms *and* a seasonal commodity in the season of fashion in stores and product ranges which coincide with university term times. The calendar of the gifting Season, I argue, encompasses that of the commodity season.<sup>3</sup> As with Bourdieu’s famous analysis of the calendar effecting a synoptic illusion, the season of gifts eclipses the commodity season. The publically official, objective sense of understanding the brand through the advertised imagery is, in fact, a synopsis of the life and practices of the gift Season. A distinction between the brand as a clothing company and the brand as a life-style appendage to the social group is what we shall be exploring. Suffice to say, I have constructed the distinction between the Gift Season and Commodity seasons. It is my argument that the Jack Wills brand is using its corporate policy to arrange social relations positively with its core customer at the expense of the non-core customer who ‘buys in’ to the image and aesthetic. I account for this precisely within this invented ethnographic bird’s-eye view one achieved when returning from ‘the field’ to ‘write up’.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.6 Methodology

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<sup>3</sup> One may view the gift-season as “sacred time” and commodity-season as “profane duration.” (cf. Elaide, 1987:68ff)

<sup>4</sup> As Bourdieu says, “the analyst wins the *privilege of totalisation* (thanks ...to the abundant time he has for analysis) (1997:106, original emphasis)

This thesis tells the story of a period of ethnographic study with the ‘core-customer’ which the Jack Wills brand has identified. I conducted interviews and intermittent fieldwork among these three seasonal activities over the period Aug. 2010-June 2013 – attending polo games, the skiing trip and work with the Summer Seasonnaires. I conducted 8 interviews with non-core participants of the Jack Wills brand which were recorded and transcribed. During the ethnography (2012-2013), of which the approximate total of informant participants ~30-40 persons, a selection of around 18 become key informants with on-going contact and gatekeepers allows continued access (Appendix 1). I situate all the arguments within the university life-stage these persons occupy and Jack Wills’ presence within the life-world of these persons around campuses and leisure pursuits. That said, this is the corporation’s sole focus and sociologically this area is in need of study so as to contribute to the body of work on elite behaviour, sociality and their life-world. All arguments rest upon qualitative data drawn from observation, archival research and interviews conducted amongst this group in order to illustrate the claims about the lives led and the sentiments that guide them.

This approach does bring with it some difficulties. First is the problem of how exactly this material has been sourced and operationalised and second how the material fits with the subject matter. As noted, the story this thesis tells is two-fold: on the one hand a story of the sociological reformation of the ‘upper-middle class’ group identified by Jack Wills LTD and, on the other, how the corporate policy of Jack Wills is implicated in this story. The first treats the core-customers in their lifestyle association and depicts a style of life, while the second is concerned with outlining a notion of identity through the brand’s symbols, i.e. its brand-image. A word of caution is therefore needed beforehand.

As the reader will discover, the two facets are studied in conjunction with one-another as the associations concern the events of the Jack Wills brand and the events contain within them a distribution of material goods of the brand. Yet there remains the problem of

essentialism as the second (brand image) at times may seem as if it was or is reducible to the first (the association of said upper-middle class persons in a lifestyle). The intention I have with telling the story of this social group through the lens of the brand-image, its appeal to British ideas of elite pursuits and the claims to ‘gentry’, is not to reduce the social group to this brand-image. Rather the intention is to illustrate that the brand’s coveting of core-customers and implicating corporate practice into their core-customer’s social networks also holds with it important information about the meaning of the symbols employed. Notably how the analysis of these symbols, in conjunction with social practice, illuminates important themes about socio-cultural identity.

To be clear: other interpretations may of course be pursued but alternative routes yield different conceptual devices and draw upon alternative sociological, as well as, theoretical traditions. Other approaches to studying this upper-middle class group could include (a) their sporting practices (polo, boating, skiing) or (b) their appropriation of rave and drug culture, which saw a resurgence amongst the British youth in the late 2000s or (c) subcultural analysis and the commercialisation of previously non-corporate practices of association. Others could be listed but the reasons for the approach taken here, that of gentry, is precisely to tell a story of social class and British identity through the lens of a symbol, a brand-name and image, which incorporates these elements as well as detailing the political-economics of this process.

As such, it may be suggested that a brand’s image and symbols could be called ‘multi-vocal’, i.e. they mean many different things when approached from different angles, as Victor Turner (1967:50-52) said of ritual symbols in general. Turner’s approach to multi-vocal symbols was to suggest a three-part analysis: first their ‘indigenous meaning’ (what they mean to the group); second the way they are used in practice / rituals processes – what Turner called the operational meaning; and third their positional meaning, their meaning in relation to other symbols as a whole.

With Turner's approach in mind, this thesis seeks to source the first, the indigenous meaning, of the Jack Wills brand from those deemed Jack Wills target customer and the spaces in British society which manifest this; second the operational meaning arising from the manner in which the targeted group are used to embody this brand-image, those societies and persons who Jack Wills work with to conduct their events and activities. And third, the positional meaning as referring to the status of the Jack Wills brand as a branded series of goods and stores in the wider, commercial economy of British society (or, indeed, the global marketplace). This approach is, of course, selective in its mapping of the meanings of Jack Wills precisely because I seek to tell the story of those targeted and deemed appropriate to embody the Jack Wills brand. This thesis is strictly limited to this scope. The approach taken to operationalise this claim to 'gentry identity' is to identify and hone in on sources where these meanings manifest themselves. With that in mind the reader will be made aware that, with brands in particular, the sources and opinions around them are also necessarily relative and biased; e.g. the opinions that the target customer have is not necessarily the opinions that, say, the older generation may share. Nonetheless, the gentry approach came from documentary sources, developed and explored through what the ethnographic material generated and consolidated through interviews with select persons from the field research (see Appendix 1 for a full list of methods undertaken).

#### 1.6.1 Documentary analysis

As noted, the brand-name is the device which 'crystallises' trends in public opinion (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). The brand name circulates through its publicity and thereby makes manifest its conception in the minds of the public (cf. Arvidsson, 2013). To begin to operationalise this point, I followed the "name" Jack Wills (Lash & Lury, 2007; cf. Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986), through its documented history in various sources. Here the brand develops coherence in the mind of the researcher; and it was through this that I was



able to give a definition of the brand through the opinions and reputations sourced from where it circulates amongst the targeted group.

To begin this task I conducted a blanket search of the printed press using LexisNexis (now NexisUK) with the name “Jack Wills” as the key search word, alongside other key words (Peter Williams, ‘posh’, ‘student’, ‘middle class’) (generating over 3,000 results). Organised in terms of priority, I took the pieces from the major British newspapers – *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, *The Observer/Guardian*, *The Independent on Sunday*, and *The Evening Standard*.

These pieces were electronically filtered in terms of relevance, i.e. in so far as they documented the Jack Wills brand and revealed information about the company and their activities, voices from the brand (e.g. Peter Williams, or others working for the company) and also opinion from the journalist or author. This gave an indication of where the research would go as headlines would focus upon the apparent, as well as symbolised, ‘poshness’ of the brand. Headlines such as “The brand no Sloane dare be without” (Goodman, 2009), “Mary Portas admires the Sloane range at Jack Wills” (Portas, 2008), “All Jacked Up: Posh kids love it ...Gemma Soames on Jack Wills, the boarding school fashion brand...”, “Pretty, Posh and Profitable” (Greene, 2011), give some context to where the opinion pieces placed Jack Wills. This press coverage and the identity it depicted was speaking to a ‘posh’, or at least stereotypically posh, notion of British identity and those consuming the product: i.e. boarding schools and ‘Sloanes’.

Alongside these articles on the Jack Wills brand and its success, the name Jack Wills also came up in opinion pieces and cultural observation pieces conducted by journalists. These pieces ran with a theme of ‘posh as chic/ contemporary cool/ posh as zeitgeist’. First, these pieces included observation from some well-known and, themselves posh journalists,

such as Lord Mount's son Harry Mount and his 'Downton Abbey effects kicks in – Sloane look goes trendy' (2010). Others include Andy Beckett's 'Tory Chic: the return of poshness' in *The Guardian* in 2009, as well as Clare Heal's 'It's ok to be posh again, yah?' in *The Telegraph* in 2011. While these articles do not give any real substantive information on the Jack Wills brand, and neither do they influence the ethnographic data that is presented, what they illustrate and aid in the analysis is the zeitgeist within which the ethnographic data was sourced. Not only is the reception of the brand taken as 'posh' but also there was, during the period of fieldwork undertaken, a general climate of poshness in British popular culture with the name Jack Wills being used in an adjective fashion to conceptualise this, or noun fashion to name and identify the zeitgeist.

With that in mind, the thesis also tracks the documentation of this social group through one of its best-known cultural observers, as well as most thorough on going ethnographic profilers, Peter York and his *Sloane Ranger* series written with collaborator's: *The Sloane Ranger Handbook* (York & Barr, 1982), *Sloane Ranger Diary* (York & Barr, 1983) and latterly *Cooler, Faster, More Expensive: The Return of the Sloane Ranger* (York & Liberty-Stewart, 2007). This is for two reasons, the first being that 'Sloane' was identified in the national presses alongside Jack Wills reportage and, second, because Jack Wills becomes identified in the *Sloane Ranger* series (York & Liberty-Stewart, 2007).

While largely playful and tongue-in-cheek, York's work in detailing the upper-middle classes, or my term 'gentry group', has to be credited with some sociological verisimilitude. During the 1970s-1980s when sociologists were writing ethnographic profiles of purportedly working-class subcultural groups, such as skinheads or punks, the attention granted to the other end of the social spectrum was, quite naturally, left to journalists. And York's work in this respect is just as thoroughgoing and as ethnographically sensitive as, for argument's sake, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: the meaning of style* (1979). For York, himself

an insider to the world he writes about and high-society journalist at the time for Harpers & Queens, was able to write of the ‘Sloane’ group in socio-historic context and depict their lifestyle and world-view in a way which was not just culturally sensitive but illustrating a lifestyle that had been seldom revealed to the majority of the population. *Sloane Rangers* ranges from their view of politics, attitudes to food and sex, choices of universities (Oxbridge, Bristol, Exeter, Durham, Edinburgh) (York & Barr, 1982:97-99), to an analysis of character and dispositions (*habitus*) as well as geographic location: “Sloane Britain is so heavily weighted towards the south and the west it’s not true. In England, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Hampshire and Sussex are the Sloane First Division. Certain parts of Kent and Berkshire are next. East Anglia has lovely light and Suffolk and Norfolk echo to the squelch of green wellies.” (York & Barr, 1982:8) Crucially, York’s *Sloane Ranger* series gave me a means to draw a link between the previous generation of Sloane Rangers (1980s) and the current generation of Jack Wills’ target customer (2000s) as the previous generation of Sloane Rangers are, naturally, the parents of the current generation of Jack Wills’ gentry group. What is more, it allowed me to imaginatively capture the social group within an enduring cultural profile and outlook, i.e. to form continuity with previous forms of upper-middle class, or for me gentry, identity. In this respect, the reliance and framing of our social group within Peter York’s writing is not hindered by a lack of engagement with other sources but rather employed to demonstrate enduring cultural observations and conceptualisations of our social group within British popular culture.

Alongside the national press and York’s *Sloane Ranger* series, the Jack Wills name was investigated at a more localised level through student presses, forums and blogs sourced through Google searches. Mindful of the student opinion and repute of the Jack Wills brand, I found articles from students’ presses at Oxford, Cambridge, Exeter, Durham, and York as well as forums around these universities. This initiative was taken as I experienced this

imagined community as an undergraduate student at Exeter (from 2007-2010) where the name Jack Wills was synonymous with our social group under investigation. This use of Jack Wills, the name, over the use of say Sloane by the national press, hinted at a generational link to focus upon class identity through commercial practice. But also I was mindful that a social group were being reformed through such cultural and economic activity: the Jack Wills brand-name was being evoked to describe the character-type, identity and virtues of the gentry group this thesis tracks as well as itself bounded up with the transformation in the economic structure of British society, where culture and commodification go hand in hand (cf. Smith, 2014a). Ultimately this material served to further bolster the reception of the Jack Wills brand in the national presses as articulating a ‘posh’ identity while giving more voice to the demographic: the 18-25 bracket targeted by the brand. Notably the use of Jack Wills is used within these documents to not only depict class identity through branding but also articulate class conflict and inequalities which are the consequence of Jack Wills’ corporate project.

#### 1.6.2 Ethnography: 2011-2013, The Season

The fieldwork upon which this thesis is based is, in a manner of speaking, a more thoroughly operationalised version of the *Sloane Ranger* series, a series written by those who are “from inside the Sloane Rangers stable, others from outside the fence...” (York & Barr, 1982:npr) My own position within the social group is partially inside, as I have friends who I would consider fully fledged members of the upper-middle class world I seek to explore, but my own background is more modest and less privileged. And as such I wrote the thesis by going inside the Sloane stable perched always on the fence of the group. And it is this position which both hindered the fieldwork itself and also demonstrated the reality of networking amongst our social group.

The initial approach was the conventional attempt to contact the company and associated institutions directly via a series of letters and emails outlining the projects interest in British identity and corporate activities, sponsorship and marketing schemes. To this end letters were written to Jack Wills LTD and Jack Wills store managers. As well as this, I sent letters and emails to Oxbridge polo clubs, Oxbridge rugby clubs and Oxbridge skiing societies (all under Jack Wills sponsorship), York St. John's Rowing Club, which was briefly under Jack Wills sponsorship, as well as Guards Polo Club, which hosts the Jack Wills Varsity Polo and occasional league matches with Eton, also under Jack Wills sponsorship, and their respective rivals. There was no formal letter response from any of these institutions.

After some time I did receive an email from the secretary of the Oxford University Polo Club which, initially, expressed a keen interest in the project and arrangements were made wherein the fieldwork would begin once the 2012 season of Oxford polo began. However, this correspondence dried up and the initial contact was no longer active within the society. Ultimately contact was put on hold. Further contact made with one Seasonairre, through a friend of a friend, was turned down due to the privacy policy which Jack Wills employees were under obligation to follow. Later I received an email from Jack Wills LTD expressing their corporate policy to not engage in third-party interviews or research of any kind, identifying business ethos as the rationale for this and instead, they stated,

“The best way to learn about our brands is to experience them the way our fans do. Please visit our amazing stores, browse our fantastic websites, join our thriving communities and sign up for our legendary handbooks and almanacs.” (Jack Wills, private communication, Jan. 2012)

This practice of corporate secrecy and silence from those under Jack Wills sponsorship, initially, put the study in some jeopardy and set back the research. In addition it suggested, at least from the experience of purported secrecy, that the company had something to hide or there was something going on behind the scenes, if only, a reticence to talk to researchers. I was not alone in this experience. Polly Vernon of *The Guardian* also experienced similar problems two years previously: “Jack Wills won’t talk to me. I ring head office – they don’t ring back. I am told by several industry insiders that the company’s “notoriously secretive.”” (Vernon, 2010)

Reasons for reticence may be multiple but what this set back demonstrated was that the angle to access and ethnographic data would have to be sourced in a way far more congenial to the company’s way of operating. First they identify learning as experiencing the brand as fans do, i.e. become a consumer, and second hold off information sharing, or cooperation from those they sponsor. As such, the manner in which information could be accessed was through (a) the consumers of the product and (b) through the sponsored institutions, but another way rather than a formal approach. It was with this in mind that I conducted, half by accident but in retrospect is completely in keeping with professional capital, the ‘handshake approach’.

As a distinctly self-conscious and often seen to be a “tribal” group, the ethnographic fieldwork became based within not merely the discourse of secrecy and tribal associations but also the activities of the brand so as to operationalize and problematize this concept. Against formality, the Jack Wills brand runs a ‘brand strategy’ which is premised upon seasonal activities and ‘viral marketing’, foregoing what Peter Williams calls “the promiscuousness of advertising relationships” and opting instead “for very deep relationships with very small numbers of customers” (Williams, 2011). As such, I attended as many Jack Wills events as was possible so as to investigate both the ‘deep relationship with customers’ as well as

investigate the internal dynamics of this policy. Access was made through contact with sponsored societies and individuals involved with the brand's strategies but not those directly associated with the brand itself. Access to these informants was made through an initial contact – who was not an informant in the research but rather an incredibly well-connected member of the gentry group I sought to investigate.

Acting as a gatekeeper, this informant became the catalyst to the series of contacts that were made during 2012 and a way into gaining information and context around and about the seasonal activities I attended. I focused upon events which formed 'the season' for Jack Wills, a corporate strategy which mirrored the once famous, now faltering, "Season" of British 'upper to upper-middle class' society (e.g. Royal Ascot Races, Henley Regatta, Royal Academy Exhibition, Chelsea Flower Show, etc.) (Stanley, 1955; cf. York & Barr, 1983; York & Liberty-Stewart, 2007:174-185). Each winter/spring Jack Wills sponsor the British Universities Snowsports Council's "Main Event" week where they play host to parties and après ski, established in 2011 and which in 2012 saw an attendance of c. 1,500 university students from the UK and took place in Austria. Each summer they put on the "Jack Wills Varsity Polo" which includes matches of Cambridge vs. Oxford, Eton vs. Harrow and Harvard vs. Yale at the historic and prestigious Guards Polo Club in Windsor Great Park (Berkshire). This ritual is a restoration of the Varsity polo match between Oxford & Cambridge dating back to c.1879. This is the biggest Jack Wills event, beginning in 2007 with an attendance of c.700-1,000 to 7,000-8,000 in 2010 (Jack Wills Varsity Programme, 2012; Symle Creative, 2010). Additionally the Jack Wills brand provides a "Summer Seasonnaires" programme where a series of university students are hired by the brand to live in affluent seaside towns (Rock in Cornwall, Salcombe in Devon, Abersoch in North Wales, Burnham Market in Suffolk and Alderburgh in Norfolk) to put on beach parties, store parties and partake in life-style activities (notably, boating, fishing or sunning) as well as

promotionally film and photograph the events with those who also work as seasonal employment, i.e. in local stores, in hang out's (bars) and as boating instructors. Peter Williams describes the Seasonnaires as: "the British guys and girls who work in bars and chalet's in the winter, and they bum around on the beach in the Summer." (Williams, 2011) The way into this group was to identify not the Seasonairres, as such, for this road would be blocked so my gatekeeper put me in contact with those who frequent Rock as not Seasonairres but those who live and work there for the summer: this way in then produced an informal, who-you-know network of people from the initial contact.

As the reader will gleam from the ethnographic material, there are characters in this thesis – as in other ethnographic writing, the strategy was to provide the voices of the informants to help aid and frame the theoretical and conceptual arguments made. The characters, at a methodological level, stem from the handsakes undertaken. After being put in contact with those in Rock, the first informant put me in contact with three other people, two who also frequent Rock – one from Exeter, another at Nottingham, and they put me in contact with one of the Seasonairres of Rock. The third informant from the initial Rock contact was from the Polo Club from Exeter and she was able, through her friendship with those at Cambridge Polo Club, put me in contact with CUPC through meeting at a game between the two of them. This was a highly productive meeting. Not only did it establish contact with a key informant for CUPC but enabled me to attend more games with Cambridge and also have them answer questions 'in the field' and develop informal ties and experience of the life world of the gentry group. It was also highly productive as I could now, in my imagination and field notes, put together a series of names and contacts and map them out as people who act as pins and threads to each other in the Jack Wills season I was following and engaging with.



In this respect, two field sites were connected not just in terms of the lifestyle they evoked of the upper-middle classes but through the ties that bind them. I was seeing how a gentry group was growing out of the Jack Wills link, their living under Jack Wills' corporate interest in them. This was furthered with the fieldwork undertaken through skiing. The informants from Cambridge and Rock did not, as it happens, accompany me to Austria for the BUSC Main Event (although they did go skiing, in the French Alps). With its Jack Wills Seasonairre sponsorship, the BUSC Main Event was a place for me to develop more ties with other Seasonairres, meeting and interviewing Robo, the head Seasonairre, and gathering more contacts with those skiing.<sup>5</sup> While the skiing produced, through the week itself, a new set of contacts and expanded the information beyond the Exeter-Nottingham-Cambridge and Rock locale of information to Bristol-Edinburgh-Manchester students, these being my key informants. What it also did was further the gentry map: not only did the information gathered further aid my understanding of the practice and meanings around the role Jack Wills plays in sponsorship but also fostered more talking points with prior contacts as information could be shared about common ties, such as Robo, the Seasonairre who bridged the link between Rock and the Austrian informants.

The information drawn from this informal network became the basis for the central research finding: on the one hand the Jack Wills brand is a commodity enterprise, producing goods that persons may acquire through purchase in the stores dotted around the UK (in provincial, middle class locales), but on the other, they are engaged in a seasonal network of on-site, face-to-face, informally distributed gifts and patronage to the clubs and societies monopolised by Jack Wills' corporate concerns. This creates an elite where no elite was previously possible. My informants and the seasonal connections I coveted became the basis for a gentry group, an exclusive group, which enacts and becomes the nexus for the lifestyle

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<sup>5</sup> In March 2014, Robo appeared on the e4 soap-reality show, *Made In Chelsea*.

the brand seek to forge. This is how they *Outfit a Gentry*. When the goods are seasonally acquired, the nominally egalitarian sphere of commodity exchange through money is eclipsed and overthrown as a hierarchical scheme of social relations, privileging those ‘in the lifestyle’, arise out of patronage and gifts. Jack Wills absorbs new members of this elite group while also strengthening and branding the existing group with the brand-name so as to maintain enduring status/class hierarchies.

#### Gift Seasonal calendar

Summer	Winter	Spring
Rock (seaside season)	Skiing (alps season)	Polo (Varsity)
Gifts to select places/persons holidaying	Gifts to select persons on the trip	Gifts to Varsity players of Eton, Harrow, Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard and Yale.

#### Commodity Seasonal calendar

Summer	Autumn	Winter	Spring
Summer holiday collection	Autumn term collection	Christmas holiday collection	Spring term collection

It is out of this ethnographic engagement, the establishing of contacts *within* the lifestyle and how the company latch onto these social ties through their promotional activities of ‘The Season’, which I conceptually started to take hold of a gentry interpretation for this social group and network I’d developed. Let it be clear that the interpretation is based on and through this ethnographic endeavour, and that it arises from linking the corporate interests of the company (to secure their elite stature) and the lifestyle activities I was involved in (going to polo games, going skiing, frequently the beaches where our Etonian prime minister holidays). It is an interpretation that stems from linking the dots of the method together, the reportage, the zeitgeist, the ‘Sloane’ geography and lifestyle I was traversing, and the corporate umbrella that housed them. In short, it is an interpretation that grows out of a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 2009).

#### 1.6.3 Multi-Sited ethnography: the place of the ethnographer and field-site

Methodologically, this thesis is multi-method (drawing up documentary analysis, cultural history, interviews, and participant observation) as well as a multi-sited ethnography written by an outsider. These facets have their problems but also virtues. This has been a topic of concern for two key anthropologists, notably the work of Marcus (2009; Marcus & Fisher, 1986; Marcus & Clifford, 1980) and Nigel Rapport (2002; 1999), who I shall here draw upon to further my direction of a gentry identity for the social group I am investigating.

As stated, the gentry identity that I am documenting in this thesis is one drawn from the field sites and their relationship to the corporate presence of Jack Wills. The question of how to write this and conceptualise this lifestyle necessary requires methodological reflection for it is not the result of (a) a single community, (b) a single field site or (c) a lived reality shared amongst the participants. In his work on multi-sited fieldwork, Marcus (2009) brings up these problems: ethnography usually entails all three of the above criteria, but when

writing about many sites and the ethnographer going from place to place with different informants, the ability to make them all cohere is lost as the site, the people and the shared social reality differs in time, place and social situation. Taking this view means another conception of fieldwork is necessarily.

What Marcus suggests is that the ethnographer connects three things to overcome these problems to the traditional conception of fieldwork as single sited telling the story of, and rendering apparent, the natives point of view on life. The three things are (1) “the objective relations of a system which can be studied independently of ethnography (for example a network)”, which for my study is the season which the Jack Wills brand orchestrates. The next step, (2), is to locate “the relations set into play as an artefact of a research design (this is important to account for as the reflexive dimension of the fieldwork)”, which consists of the ‘handsakes’ I developed and connected set of relationships developed. (I will account for my reflexivity below). The final step, (3), is “the paraethnographic perspective, the clockwork or ‘native point of view’, which is always situated and specific in spatio-temporal terms, that the ethnography works within for its own purposes and produces results in conversation with.” (Marcus, 2009: all quotes on p. 193) This final step, Marcus states, “often entails that field work begins at home” (2009:193) for taking the native point of view in a multi-sited domain requires developing a ‘conversation’ and using this dialogue to establish a time-frame and spatial set of relationships where this conversation takes place. This is something my ethnography develops. It’s time-space is the Jack Wills Season from 2011-2013 and the conversation revolves around Jack Wills’ involvement in the lives of those informants whose voices are heard in this thesis. As Marcus (2009:193) further notes, this means that the field is no longer “out there” but exists as the ethnographer develops the conversation with participants and the connections made with participants become part of a dialogical network of speakers.

What this method of fieldwork gives this study is, as Marcus (2009:193) argues, a concern with a temporal attitude to social life, the time of changes and time the research was undertaken. The Jack Wills brand, its opinion and repute and its relationship to the social group under investigation, is not that which it was during its inception stage, its teething stage or five years down the line. Most importantly, neither is it the same at the time of writing this (March 2014) as it was during the time of research (2010-2013). This is accounted for in this thesis (chapter 4 most significantly) and is part of the point of view of the informants, a temporal consciousness to 'what's going on' with the brand and their relationship to it. The reader is asked to take this into account: the field is dated from the moment of reading and this does limit the representativeness of the views and arguments put forward here.

Also limiting the argument in terms of representativeness and validity of interpretations is how the participants are an artefact, as Marcus puts it, of the research. The relationship I had to them necessarily arose once I identified them as members of a social group, class and identity to which I do not properly belong and also whose lifestyle has been identified, by Jack Wills (not myself), as adequately 'gentry' and 'fabulously British' for their brand-image.

In terms of writing about the lives of my informants, the supercilious label 'gentry' is – I should say clearly – one imposed upon them by the ethnographer, myself, writing about them. This is the vantage point of all ethnography, the representation of 'others' comes from a writer (Rapport, 1999). So for my social group, while the term 'gentry', especially, may not be intentionally used in this way to denote the group under question either by the Jack Wills brand, my informants, nor even the reader, the purpose has been to illuminate the temporal journey of the fieldwork and also the conversations with participants on this matter. Whether the term gentry crops up in the conversation 'in the field' is not the issue (and often, if a term did suggest itself, it would be a pseudo status or class designator such as 'posh', 'toff', 'rah',

‘hooray’, ‘Sloane’, etc.). The issue is that in writing about my own position in this ethnographic journey around ‘posh England’ and ‘posh pursuits’, I have necessarily turned this into a study of a gentry group. As such, when it comes to ‘writing up’, as Rapport (2002; 1999) as well as Marcus (2009; 1986) note, ethnography is also an exercise in genres of representation and writing in such a mode means that the ethnographer must admit their own interested position in writing in such a manner.

When writing this thesis, I often held many perspectives in mind at once, but the central one was that of two competing positions: (1) I am an outsider telling the story of those whose lives I have been party to and spoken to; (2) I am telling the story of a generation and group I have lived with and whose identity is part of my own socio-cultural identity and outlook. As I stated earlier, ‘in the Sloane stable and also on the fence’. On the one hand, the first position is that of an outsider talking to those a class above him. I saw my informants as ‘posher than me’. But, on the other hand, the second position means that I also see those same participants as part of a continuing line of British class identity beyond my own relationship to them. The slogan of brand has framed this for me, revolving around the term ‘gentry’, and I have taken it up as a genre to work with. As Nigel Rapport (1999) suggests of ethnographic writing, it is not merely or solely a presenting of facts, nor of presenting ‘how others live’ but a persuasion to their readers that the author has travelled, not so much physically, but conceptually to a way of life, and meaning, as well as to a genre of depiction. The genre of this thesis is social aspiration, gentrification, and writing from the perspective of an outsider. The framing of this inside-outside dynamic is the central mechanism of understanding. As to the validity and fruitfulness of this approach, I leave this to the reader’s discretion.

### 1.7 Outline and synopsis of the argument

The thesis is divided into three substantial parts. Part 2 is entitled ‘The dialectic of the Gentry’ and takes up chapters two and three; Part 3 is entitled ‘Value of the brand-name’ and takes up chapters four and five; Part 4 is entitled ‘Ethnography of economic processes’ and takes up the final substantial section in chapters six to eight.

In the first part, the chapters are named after the central marketing slogans of Jack Wills – *Outfitters to the Gentry* and *Fabulously British* – and explore these claims within the British national imaginary as well as the socio-historical resonances behind these claims.

Chapter 2, explores the category of “gentry” as a class/status position in British society. The term can be found in the sociology of class as a series of criteria for a socio-economic profile: private education, Oxbridge or other higher stature university, private or public sector employment and wealthy families (Butler, 1995:195-201). This socio-economic profile is found in the informants of this thesis and core-client of Jack Wills’ corporate program. I explore the class/status position of gentry – out of this socio-economic profile – as a *qualitative* category: What *is* gentry? *Who* is gentry and how does it figure in the British national imagination and the ethos behind the Jack Wills brand? Exploring this begins by trying to come to terms with how British observations have made sense of Jack Wills in the press and situates this in the wider responses from those ‘in the field’. The central claim is that the notion of “gentry” is a double-edged sword. The understandings people give of the Jack Wills brand is fundamentally ambiguous. On the one hand it is an aspirational brand; it appeals to an element of lifestyle that is understood as gentry for the service/professional middle class (cf. Urry, 1995:210f). While on the other hand it asserts an inherited personage, an elite person whose social distinction is manifest in lifestyle and practices and manifest in social-economic profile. What I call *the dialectic of the gentry* is elaborated from this understanding of the brand: it is a category of persons that is *partly aspirational and partly ascribed* and is open to both inclusion and a maintained air of exclusion; both aspects are

never fully resolved. *This is the key to Jack Wills continued success in wider, socio-cultural terms.* Singled out for this is the role of material symbols of identity and a suggestion is made that aspirational activities has to be manifest in material appendages that signify social elevation and prestige. Tracing this historically, I single out heraldry as *the* institution that allowed for the gentry dialectic of aspiration and ascription to take on a solidly enduring form and, elaborating this, the brand-name Jack Wills can be demonstrated as instituting a form of heraldic distinction (ch. 5). As a national identity “gentry,” I suggest, is appealed to and also recognised as *the* aspirational class in the British social imagination and Jack Wills is an exemplar of this enduring national identity status position.

Chapter 3 concerns the claims to national the Jack Wills brand has constructed as a corporation which arose in the late 1990s (c.1998/1999) in an era of globalisation and branding. How did Jack Wills fit into the wider, socio-historical epoch at the time of its origins? The chapter begins with an observation that is ambiguous: Jack Wills claim to be *Fabulously British* but draws upon an *American* aesthetic pattern’s for its clothes. By tracing the social history of the Jack Wills core-customer, projected as the ‘gentry class’ (as the section of the professional service class in Britain), the chapter argues that Americanisation and commercialisation of British society saw attempts to re-establish the gentry ideal in the imagination of the British. From the 1980s to the 2000s, the professional /service class appropriated the symbols, lifestyle and practices that became distilled into an ideology of consumerised “tribes” (Maffesoli, 1996). The phenomenon of *Sloane Rangers* (York & Barr, 1982; 1983) fulfilled the role of regenerating a “gentry” identity as the nation was fragmenting politically and economically (Nairn, 1981). By the 1990s, the increasingly Americanised fever of British culture came to be seen as an increasing threat to British identity. An outright national identity crisis was at the heart of the media-discourse of the era,



especially found in books on the ‘national identity question’.<sup>6</sup> That said, I demonstrate that Jack Wills appropriation of an Americanised preppy look is, in fact, found in Jack Wills clever appropriation of some Americanised uses of British gentry identity which stems from the shared history of the American moneyed elite and their veneration of the British gentry group. Through Jack Wills appropriation of shared symbols of distinction, this made the brand both aesthetically viable and a novel innovation for a global consumer society while also centrally appealing to enduring symbols of British national identity. From this I show that Jack Wills preppy look is founded upon appeals to heraldic insignia as the aesthetic device to forge elite social distinction. This claim is inspired from the, purely visual, observation that Jack Wills *imitates the designs, motifs and stylistic devices of heraldry* as found in the British aristocracy and corporate bodies but also *implements a means of distribution that assigns the goods to those who live under institutions that are aesthetically based on heraldry*. Patronage of Oxbridge and Ivy League sports clubs and public school games is not just an act of benefaction or interest in cultural values on the part of the brand but also brings with it heraldry-inspired apparel and symbols which feed into enduring notions of elite social distinction.

In part 3, the focus is upon the origin and central marketing, corporate policy of the Jack Wills brand and outlines the empirical details of this policy so as to generate a theory of brand-value. Why the brand, as such, is valuable is a question answered in the first instance with the empirical material of what the corporation set as its marketing goals. The category of “fiduciarity” is introduced in chapter 4 to argue that the central concern of Jack Wills is to stay close to and embedded within the life-style of its core-customer. This is a *fiduciary enterprise* and requires *monopolisation of the lifestyle* inhabited by its core customer. Jack

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<sup>6</sup> In the wake of globalisation, many books on the national identity question have arisen, tackling fear of national identity with new journalistic accounts of pockets of Englishness, or Britishness in the face of globalised culture: e.g. Fox (2004), Kingsnorth (2008). Hemming (2009), Paxman (1999), Aslet (1997), O’Brian (2009).

Wills guarantees the authenticity of the lifestyle; while at the same time is granting access to life-style valuables through commodity acquisition. Fiduciarity, (a rather ugly and odd term), is drawn upon for two reasons.<sup>7</sup> As a word which means the relationship that is sought with a trusted party (a fiduciary person or entity), the Jack Wills brand acts as the trustee to the life-style claims it makes of its *product*. First the brand name requires its product to coincide with the image and the reputation it seeks to establish and impose on people's opinions. This is analogous to its economic worth and solvency. Second it requires an institutionalised program to put this into place. This is manifested in its monopolization of the lifestyle enclaves of its core-customer. The brand implements a corporate policy that is increasingly professionalised toward the end of securing the proper, appropriate and desired reputation and image for the brand-name. Brand-name corporations are professional bodies and with the Jack Wills' recruitment of elites in either their patronage of societies and events as well as their team of Seasonnaires's, they implement a means to create a network of persons associated with the prestigious reputation of the Jack Wills brand-name.

Chapter 5 extends this concern with the homology of brand-value and the social networks of association manifest in corporate policy. I pick up on the observation that heraldry was the instituted device to consolidate the gentry' dialectic of aspiration and ascription. The claim made in this chapter is that, on the one hand, Jack Wills *do* imitate heraldry they put in place a series of heralds – The Seasonnaires, those who enter the life-world and declare the presence of the brand-name – while also instituting heraldry, as the science of properly designing emblems on possessions, namely the Jack Wills products. The chapter claims the Seasonnaires's are acting as heralds as they become those who survey and document the members of the Jack Wills core-customer so as to give a coherent sense of membership and association. As such they forge the value of the brand as the networks and

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<sup>7</sup> I first encountered the term in Richard Seaford's (2004) *Money and the Early Greek Mind*. This is a source of inspiration for the category but I take it in a different direction as I apply it to branded goods not money.

dispensing of aesthetic symbols are inseparable and become restricted in circulation to this core group.

Part 4 consists of an ethnographic account of the Jack Wills season from Summer 2011 to Summer 2012 and is conceptualised around three core economic modalities that frame the ethnographic data supplied. The focus is on three primary fieldwork groups I conducted participant observation and interviews with during this year and deals with the Oxbridge polo clubs, BUSC Main Event snowsports week in Austria and those who frequent Rock (Cornwall) in the summer and, also, draws upon ethnographic interviews with the non-core customer conducted from the period October 2010 to April 2011 which is supplied in chapter 8.

The ethnographic account of the economic modalities is framed around patronage (6), gifts (7), and commodity acquisition (8). The moral assumptions and categories of justification that underpin worth are framed around the people documented in the ethnographic data (cf. Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Graeber, 2011a/b; 2001). The three different economic modalities give us a series of obligations and life-world understandings that, while overlapping and separated here for heuristic purposes, are not a base to a superstructure or reducible to the economic form. Rather they demonstrate that, with the ends set by the Jack Wills brand to covet only a core personnel of elites, the brand ethos installs different economic regimes to this end.

Chapter 6 discusses the first type of gift giving, that is, aggressive, hierarchal or precedential gifting as the brand puts in place patronage. Patronage institutes a power relation where the patronised are under the obligation of a patron's wishes and have to negotiate their relationship this patron. A species of patrimonial authority arise as the patronised become subject to a branded form of patrimony. The account of patronage taking the form of

aggressive, agonistic gift giving obliges those patronised to act as the conduits and persons standing for the renown and repute of the brand name and have this repute attributed to them. From this, the ethnographic accounts develops an account of how patron-patronised relations are liable to violent appropriation and open up conflicts amongst those in the vicinity of the patronymic patron (the brand-name).

Chapter 7 details the intimate exchanges that take place during the season and become the basis for intimate friendships to develop around the brand. This is the second form of gifting giving and is based around positive reciprocity. Stemming from the gift / commodity divide, it argues the gifts are exchanged for the purpose of augmenting the fame, repute and renown of those soliciting them but in the process these gifts granted during the season also create friendships. The seasonal gifts are part of constructing the life-style imagery of the brand. The pictures found in stores, in the handbook catalogues and on the website of the brand are all sourced from the season itself and sold to persons either inside this network or outside it. But crucially, it is the lifestyle lived by those immersed within the brand's *Seasonnaires* program that comes to stand as not only a brand-image but the name for this social group whose lives are venerated by an anonymous public. The ethnographic account follows the manner in which the *Seasonnaires*'s develop friendships with those immersed in elite life-styles and develop positive relations of reciprocity and engage in convivial activities that not only solidify brand-image but also through gifts and parties create lasting friendships, thereby adding to the elite connectivity through branded programs (cf. Savage, et. al. 2008).

Chapter 8 develops an account of what it means to 'buy into' the Jack Wills brand-image and life-world. I argue that commodity acquisition, always-already, occurs within a dramatic enactment of social relations and is implicated in positioning persons in a lifestyle space and economy of distinction (cf. Veblen, 1994; Bourdieu, 1984; Baudrillard, 1981; 1996). The chapter places this well-established sociological conception within the gentry'

dialectic of ascription and aspiration established in chapter 2. Beginning with an account of the Varsity Polo, it demonstrates how, as a space, it orchestrates a social hierarchy that shows those under patronage, those under gifts of friendship and those who consume the commodities ostensibly around the aesthetic appeal and repute of the Jack Wills brand. Having given this account, the chapter looks at the moral underpinnings of monetary acquired commodities wrapped in the sentiments of Jack Wills' gentry England. It gives a series of interview accounts that show that aspirants are ambiguously placed within this social hierarchy and demonstrates a profound ambivalence toward their purchase of Jack Wills clothes and have to negotiate a purchase which when elaborated demonstrates it arises from their relation to the life-style as an aspiration but mediated through money. Money is shown to inspire a thought process that on the one hand allows persons to commit to aspirations through purchase but, overall, leads to disquieting or ambivalent thought-processes as money is only-ever about the exchange of money for commodity *not* entry into the elite-lifestyle network.

The concluding chapter consolidates the themes presented throughout the thesis, notably the leitmotif of ambivalence from respondents. Respondents in this thesis, either those privileged by the brand to represent its lifestyle and image as well as those who consume the brand through purchase, remained incredibly ambivalent in the reaction and negotiations of Jack Wills. The theme of gentry is elaborated to explore these ambivalences and the claim is that 'gentry' exists at such a plane of abstraction in the British social and cultural imagination that it acts as a 'floating signifier' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966): it has no intrinsic function other than that of maintaining discursive notions of privilege, exclusion and elite identity in British society. To conclude, the suggestion is made that Jack Wills taps into an elite fantasy of a utopia world, an Arcadia, for the twenty-first century.

## Part Two: The dialectic of gentry

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Outfitters to the Gentry*

#### 2. Introduction

Jack Wills' principle slogan is *Outfitters to the Gentry*. It begs a serious question – what is and who are 'the Gentry'? The *Gentry* of Jack Wills core-customer is my object of study in this chapter and it provides the backbone of the material that will be presented in the subsequent chapters. Gentry, as I want to understand it here, has not been a topic of study for sociologists – quite understandably as 'gentry' is a pre-modern and pre 'class' society category. Since the term no longer denotes a category of people, nor stands as a proper class position, it is an idealised position in the British imagination that the Jack Wills brand inspires as the spirit behind its brand-name. As with Weber's (1993) study of the *Spirit of Capitalism*, the only way to understand gentry is by appreciating it as a *historical* product. To 'the spirit of gentry', following Weber's method (1993:13), is to recognise "it must be gradually put together out of the individual parts which are taken from historical reality to make it up" so that "the final and definitive concept cannot stand at the beginning of the investigation, but come at the end." (Weber, 1993:13-14) What this means is that only by supplying historical material – which I draw out from archives, national and student presses, interviews and internet forums (below) – will a conceptual category of the 'gentry' appear. As with Weber's method, the same cautions apply, namely the characteristics singled out for the term 'gentry' are the ones that "interest *us* for the purposes of our investigation" (Weber, 1993:14) in order to present subsequent material.

In the interests of academic disclosure, however, this chapter seeks to explore this question of ‘what is and who are Gentry’ as a principal guiding tool to our study of a brand-name corporation’s involvement in the reformation and consolidation of the sons and daughters of the professional middle classes in Britain. I will call this group ‘the gentry’ from this chapter onwards only by way of the material I shall present here and, again as with Weber’s caution, other perspectives of methodological interest would yield different conceptions. In this study of a reforming social group, gentry is by no means a perfect term; one often thinks of gentry as ‘landed gentry’. Following my material, none such designation is necessary. Adam Nicolson (2011) has suggested that gentry is the single most ambiguous term in the British class system. Following Nicolson, gentry is best described by the oxymoron “ungentle gentles” as gentry rested upon the ignoble persons’ struggle to assert nobility. They were aspirational but had means to prove their aspired status. “This radical uncertainty at the core of English class consciousness was its principal virtue” (2011:xx), says Nicolson, and it is a virtue in the classical sense – it is about character, social position and how to demonstrate one’s social standing through their characteristics (or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977)). Jack Wills may be seen in the same light as it is an aspirational brand as well as enacting, in its corporate program, the life of the aspired; a two way process whose dialectic I establish for ‘gentry’ as a both a class position and set of personal characteristics for the brand Jack Wills and their corporate ethos. A study of ungentle gentility is the oxymoron that governs my purposes in a thesis about the reformation of an elite social group in Britain.

What I attempt to demonstrate is that Jack Wills have appropriated the term gentry for not only branding purposes but, as a group of people, the British social imagination is actively creating notions of gentry in their understanding of ‘what Jack Wills is about’ and ‘who Jack Wills are outfitting’. Exploring Jack Wills’ appropriations of gentry I show in this



chapter how, despite its arcane usage, the term may be adapted. Through drawing upon its imagery, ideals and virtues, the brand-name Jack Wills may also be, ironically, part and parcel of its own sociological reforming. Nicolson stated that once upon a time, “the English gentry ...were the great exchange medium of the culture, where high ideals could interact with the harder more demanding pressures of a fierce and competitive world.” (2011:xvii) In this regard, I will argue that the documentation and discussion of Jack Wills reveals central assumptions about the ideals of gentry and gentrification today. This chapter sets the tone for the whole thesis as it explores the themes of how long standing assumptions about the English class consciousness interact with new, demanding pressures of social life. Jack Wills encapsulate the ideal, utopian world of the archaic Englishness that is associated with ‘gentry life’ but, I contend, the ideals have a tendency to be made actual in everyday conduct and shared social understandings. I approach the Jack Wills brand as a device to express group affiliation but also act as device to speak ‘for’ society, to express how persons are classified in British society as, additionally, the activities of the brand are part-and-parcel of this enduring taxonomy. My two principal aims in this chapter are to investigate: first, how it is people have conceived of Jack Wills and I show this to be ambiguous. Second, I demonstrate this ambiguity is the central facet of gentry as *the* aspirational core of British society and how the Jack Wills brand allows this to be an ‘exchange medium of culture’ as Nicolson described the old, landed gentry. Jack Wills’ programme, I suggest, may itself keep intact key aspects of gentry as a status position in British society.

## 2.1 Jack Wills as a *personage* of the British social hierarchy

In order to study a social group, one needs to be able to fully acknowledge who is being written about. The social group in question for Jack Wills were once called, in the 1980s, ‘Sloane’s’ (York & Barr, 1982) and this was not a commercial development, rather a journalistic invention that summed up a whole group of people. With Jack Wills, however,

the name Jack Wills refers less to a person named Jack Wills who created the brand, nor a group of people known for their commercial appropriation of consumer durables. As one Seasonairre stated,

“it’s not like they’ve [Jack Wills] created a type of person, not a group of people named after being Jack Wills followers, like a brand name has a class. ... I’m not sure if there’s a group that have that name [Jack Wills] associated with them. More associated with the broader upper-middle class, that they love.”

The people associated with Jack Wills are not a mere consumer fad or subcultural trend. The brand’s image does not designate or describe their social identity – a Punk, a New Romantic, a Goth, a Trendy – but rather indicates a clear class-status position, “upper-middle.” This highlights not only the social group that Jack Wills seek to outfit but also the underlying message of social exclusivity. The Seasonairre, who began working with Jack Wills while at Oxford University in 2005 (until 2011), six years after the initial launch of the company (1999), stated:

It was a unique marketing angle ... only 7% of the population goes to private schools and it is quite a unique British thing. There’s a big class association with it; and Jack Wills thrived on that and opened itself up to that criticism but it also loved it, it lived off it to an extent.

Here I wish to place the first hint as to what Jack Wills engages with regard to the reformation of the category gentry. Described as a very slim percentile of the population of Britain – the public school elite – and the association of ‘living’ off the criticism, we see a clear indication that an element of status position is being evoked as the criticism hints at a

form of esteem attributed to the social group. Not wholly applicable to class in itself, a form of esteem, virtue or character is being evoked so as to conceptualise a social group. As such, the designation of Jack Wills' involvement in British society's conception of itself is not, in itself, a clear cut class position, nor a style or zeitgeist fad. As a name for a group, I asked our Seasonairre what he thought of the phrase *Outfitter to the Gentry* and whether it is appropriate – he replied:

It's quite a nice word that sums up quite a lot, whether it's appropriate I don't know, but they've really started to own that word a bit now. I think upper middle class, country, tweed wearing. I think it's a group that doesn't exist anymore – it's a very nineteenth, early twentieth century thing and it's obviously an educated class.

Noting its anachronistic quality, the Seasonairre suggests a series of qualities that makes the person described as gentry recognisable in the British social imagination. In doing he sees that Jack Wills' appropriation of this character-type in British society's status order is clearly recognisable and very much in the vicinity of Jack Wills' overall project. That said, it is still not clear as to precisely what 'gentry' means: the information that we have gathered here describes (a) a class association, so a certain aspect of wealth and taste is evident in the description; (b) it is associated with a preppy, public school 'look' that only applies to a slim percentage of the British population, so we see an understanding of esteem and prestige behind the term; and (c) we have a lingering tone of British identity or even Englishness as it is described as "country", "tweed wearing" and also an once existent (now possibly extinct) group.

If we turn our attention to the national press and their understanding of the Jack Wills brand, we may also find a series of further ambiguities in line with those already singled out – notably its class, status and national identity facets.

In a description of the high-end Westminster night club, Mahiki, one reporter writes:

If a social anthropologist were to descend the staircase there one Thursday, which the club's owner Piers Adam describes as "our biggest Sloane night", he would find it packed to the rafters with square-jawed young versions of the heirs to our throne. They wear jeans, shirts and jumpers from Ralph Lauren, or Jack Wills, or Abercrombie and Fitch. They speak public school, with a smattering of estuary. They work hard, play hard, and party even harder. (Adams, 2007)

Those named are Sloane's in proximity to royalty, singled out by their branded apparel as part of their social character. With the appeal to social anthropological inquiry, one is assumed to be privy to witnessing a marginal, quasi-tribal group of persons upon whom others gaze on discovery. The status position is described in their speech, their education and their uniformed attire and, so named among them, is our Jack Wills. One is thereby associating them *and* the corporations outfitting of them as elite and exclusive, resting on their association with inherited social standing as they party with heirs to thrones.

"The wearer of a Wills trucker cap (£19)" writes Ann Ashworth of the *The Times*, "will probably have friends who have friends who once partied with Prince William, although the chain is named not after the heir to the throne but after the grandfather of Peter Williams, it's managing director." (Ashworth, 2007) In this description we notice a further delineation of all three sociological categories: the name Jack Wills is circulated amongst British royalty

as it demonstrates the honourable attire of those who are socially connected to heirs to the throne, yet underlying this description is a sly, somewhat mocking jibe. The assumption is that while the name Jack Wills is associated with those who party with princes, the corporation is not named after or borrowing merely the association of British royalty ('Wills' being the nickname of Prince William). Rather it points to the company's own designation of itself – named not after its founding entrepreneur but rather *his grandfather*. John Williams, the grandfather of Peter Williams – here shortened to the more public school, old English nickname – “Jack (opposed to the middle-class John) Wills (opposed from the middle class Bill or Will)” is singled out as if to mock the corporation. Who would name their company after a grandfather? Is it something used to worm their way into British aristocracy? These questions demonstrate the status aspect of the upper-middle classes, notably Peter York's description of 'Sloanes', persons he described as in part having their social standing through a famous grandfather (York & Stewart-Liberty, 2007:x). Indeed, the name 'Wills' is well established in the gentry world, for it refers to the prominent Bristol family who created a cigarette company in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and entered the peerage in the 1870s with its owner Frederick Wills becoming 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet.<sup>8</sup> These 'famous grandfathers' and famous surnames are, in many ways, attempts to assert nobility through an attempt at lineage as one dates Jack Wills to the 1930s (if the grandfather of Peter). In this manner, Jack Wills is being mocked by others due to a perceived series of status climbing attempts. The brand itself is outfitting an aspirational group, not so much the heirs to throne, nor titular estates.

It is *this* which interests us for gentry. The ambiguity is that Jack Wills' is outfitting those considered intimately associated with royalty and aristocracy but in no way is it considered an heir to any of their deserts – the situation is that of a series of aspiring figures

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<sup>8</sup> As an aside, when discussing my research with the Lindsay-Fynn family and a branch of the Brudenell-Bruce family (in May / August of 2013), both have inquired and assumed the name Jack Wills refers to a descendant of (their) family (in the case of Brudenell-Bruce, as Edwina Wills married into the Brudenell-Bruce family) and were known to the Lindsay-Fynns. As such, the name has a distinctive resonance in the gentry and aristocratic worlds of prominent family names.

*or* the aspired not fully recognised as equal to the aristocratic world of inherited wealth, titles and names. This is most excellently pointed out with regard to the naming of the corporation. Instead of establishing an eponymous brand name – as with, say, Johnnie Boden or Ralph Lauren – Peter Williams has created his ideal brand-name as a patronym. The ambiguity of this situation is not to be overlooked, for as it seeks to associate those outfitted (and Williams himself) with the cultural world of aristocratic primogeniture, where patronymic names become proof of ancestry and ‘noble blood’, it is also a futile gesture. The fact is one may not be fully recognised as a card-carrying member of the group for the ancestor is not famous and, because of this, the inheritor of the name is not fully a member of the group. Ironically, in 2007, York & Liberty-Stewart (2007) asserted that the problem with Katherine Middleton (now the Duchess of Cambridge) was her *two*-generational ‘Sloane status’ when it takes *three* to be fully accepted. This is one of the problems of gentry I wish to single out first and foremost. Gentry is *not* itself an established social station in birth, blood and ancestry nor merely qualities of honour or character (e.g. right clothes, right school, right tastes, right friends and connections, right type of Englishness). Rather it is the sheer ambiguity of all these aspects and Jack Wills’ outfitting of a social group that aspires *or* has aspired to such a station in British society (although not properly named) that I characterise ‘gentry’.

The social climbing aspect has been described by Simon Mill of *The Guardian* in precisely these ambiguous terms: “This is a Johnny-come-lately of a brand – founded in 1999 and named after its managing director’s grandfather – [is] doing its best to pretend it’s been around for years. If Jack Wills was a real person, he’d be dismissed as a nouveau chancer and have his trousers ruddy well pulled off in the quad.” Using the brand-name as personage of the British social hierarchy, Mills places him in the quad – whether it is Oxbridge or a public-school quad is not clear but association is evident – and is described clearly as a parvenu. As a recognisable social character in the British social imagination, we are coming to appreciate

how oddly placed this imaginative use of Jack Wills (as an imaginary figure standing for the social group) is. Brand-names often have sociological characteristics attributed to them. As David Aaker argues, brands are built around a metaphor of personality, “a set of human characteristics ...that includes ... gender, age and socio-economic class as well as such classic human personality traits...” (1995:141) These characteristics may be formed around the aesthetics of the product but, in more restricted use, our understanding of the brand-name Jack Wills arises from a particular cultural world-view of conceiving of persons in British society. The name Jack Wills should be conceptualised into the cultural categories that forge his origins. As we have seen, it is a social station that is encompassed by aristocracy but itself is not recognised completely in these circles, yet neither is it associated with a broader scheme of middle-class, bourgeois life.

Using gentry to describe this social group, no precise definition has revealed itself. Gentry, as a social position, is ambiguous, I venture, because it *stands between two social groups*, the middle classes and the aristocracy but cannot be adequately summed up by either. A counter example from the elite worlds of American Ivy League universities may be helpful in our understanding of this type of social prestige. The example is illustrative as the Ivy League social elite identify with aristocratic British society but, crucially, have no aristocracy to properly speak of. Ivy League universities have elite, exclusive clubs or fraternities and the prominent figures are known as ‘Big-Men’.<sup>9</sup> These personages were described thus by F. Scott Fitzgerald in his Princeton campus novel *This Side of Paradise*, a university described as the most ‘aristocratic’ of all the Ivy Leagues:

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<sup>9</sup> In order to signal the information on potlaches and competitive gift exchange in chapter 6, the “big-man” and “great man” distinction in anthropology by Maurice Godelier (1986) is indicative to the parallels I am drawing between titled men and big men in our western societies: a ‘great man’ in Godelier’s (1986:162ff) ethnography is an inherited status (i.e. a titled man) and a ‘big man’ is an achieved status. Also, see Marshall Sahlins’ (1963) classic article where he draws a line between the big-man of competitive gift economies and the American bourgeois individualist (i.e. an Ivy League preppy) (esp. Sahlins, 1963:289-290).

...wild-eyed and exhausted, the jerseyed freshman sat in the gymnasium and elected someone from Hill School class president, a Lawrenceville celebrity vice-president, a hockey star from St Paul's secretary, up until the end of sophomore year it never ceased, that breathless social system, that worship, seldom named, never really admitted, of the bogey 'big-man'.  
... From the moment he realised this Amory resented social barriers as artificial distinctions made by the strong to bolster up their weak retainers and keep out the almost strong. (Fitzgerald, 2011 [1920]:74-75)

Big-men are selected through 'celebrity' from prep-schools and then guard social prestige. The 'big-man' covets a cult of personality and the name they make for themselves is based upon a career of awarded ranks from (lesser) peers and asserted through a strong hand and co-opting personalities alongside them. But the big-man may 'peak' and no longer maintain his stature and little (or no) patrimony may result; the cult of personality means that one's brothers or children are not 'next in line' but have to 'live up to' their siblings.





Figure 1 Eddie Keaton, 'Big Man on Campus' from 1984 film *Making the Grade*. Accessed:  
<http://thelighthouseprep.com/tag/movie/>



Figure 2 George Balfour, 'Titled Man' from Laura Wade's 2010 play *Posh*: at –  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00s1shj>

In contrast, in the elite of Oxbridge, their crème-da-la-crème clubs persons are known as ‘Toffs’ but I will define them less pejoratively as ‘Titled-Men’. In the case of the Oxford Bullingdon Club, the members consist of aristocrats. In Laura Wades’ 2010 West End play *Posh*, this is described in a key scene during the Riot [Bullingdon] Club dinner:

James: Guys – Balf’s doing the Lady Anne.

...George: Gentlemen: *George raises his glass.*

The Lady Anne.

Hugo: Is that it? ...You’re not going to say anything about her beauty or –

George: Not so good with the wordy stuff, I –

Ed: Who’s Lady Anne?

Hugo: Lord Riot’s girlfriend, mistress, whatever, the one he was in love with.

James: Don’t worry about it, Balf, it’s fine.

Hugo: No, it’s – if it weren’t for Lady Anne, the club wouldn’t exist, would it?

*Dimitri geos to stand up.*

Dimitri: I’ll do it.

James: Not this one, Dims.

Dimitri: What, too dusky for you?

Miles: Why can't Dimitri do it?

Alistair: Have to be titled. (Wade, 2010:58-59)

George, the well-meaning but slightly uninspiring aristocrat, is given the privilege to toast the ancestor who inaugurated the club of elites by means of his birth-right, his equality to the ancestor through kin-based restricted title and, unlike the big-man, has no need for coveted retainers or a cult of personality based upon personal charisma. His personality is inherited, not garnered; his place at that dinner table not “pledged” and hazed for; it is inherited. In the case of those not titled – Dimitri, the extraordinarily rich yet ‘foreign’ parvenu – they have a vested interest in coveting membership and personality *alongside* these titled persons and the appeal is not to the personality of a big-man but of ancestors who truly founded their group and its entrenched exclusivity (a blood, descent usage of exclusion): “if it weren't for Lady Anne, the club wouldn't exist, would it?”

‘Jack Wills’, as a name for a group of persons, stands in-between the big-man and the titled-man. In part well-connected and associated with higher personages, the social group have a series of personable qualities that recognise them as elite, well-to-do and in many ways “posh” but, also, the very ambiguity arises because: what is this “posh” really consisting of? Titles and patrimony (inheriting grand names and estates)? Or is it the money and social circles? Neither is fully adequate, my analysis would suggest.

## 2.2 Jack Wills as a *product* of the British social hierarchy

In this section, what I wish to draw out is precisely the same problem of social position and character but with special reference to how the *products* are part of this problem of ambiguous social position.

Jack Wills' reception in British society as a commodity to be purchased encapsulates aspects of social climbing and is central to certain pieces of ethnographic folklore that one encounters. When you ask people about the meanings or get them to reflect upon 'what Jack Wills is all about', they resort to a series of claims which are completely tautological: "It's part of the aspirational life-style" said one Cambridge polo team member, making it not clear whether Jack Wills itself is aspirational or whether it is the person buying who is aspirational. One Oxford Brookes Law student stated,

you kind automatically think, '... they're wearing Jack Wills, they went to public school' and sometimes you meet people and you always associate that brand with a bit of snobbery and people always looking down on other people and I can see why people think that...the whole "rah" thing is Jack Wills, or Jack Wills is rah; one goes with the other. More so with Jack Wills than other brands.

'More so with Jack Wills than other brands', says our informant, precisely because of the special use of these brand-names in upper circles. They are *used for marking social position*. The tautology of 'Jack Wills' being a personage of the British social hierarchy, 'public school' and 'upper class' ('rah', 'toff', 'posh' etc.) but also a series of commodities only seeks to entrench the conflation of status prestige and honorific insignia. Yet they also inscribe an opposite definition, that of being aspirational products. There is nothing inevitable about a brand being 'aspirational' simply by quotidian observances, neither is there something meaningless about asserting "rah is Jack Wills, Jack Wills is rah." What we see here is a 'dialectical trap' in how social group affiliation is expressing itself. With "rah" (as social position) being a person called 'Jack Wills' and Jack Wills as a series of products, a trap in our understanding arises because, on the one hand, people are expressing their social

position in the cultural meanings surrounding material products, while, on the other, these cultural products are also doing the work of naturalising people as bearers of a social station. Lévi-Strauss (1963:9) described this type of group affiliation as ‘truly culturising a false nature’. People seek social distinction with material objects being used as symbolic devices to indicate, culturally, a social station that is assumed to be natural. The problem is this: the use of these cultural symbols (Jack Wills clothes) to express social standing is overworked or ‘over-determined’ as it is, on the one hand, being used to symbolise membership and, on the other, being used to stand for this membership itself. Symbols are being opened up to non-members and thereby become symbols for new members but also devalue the elite stature of existing members.

Seeing a brand-name commodity as ‘truly culturising a false nature’ is evident in our informant’s statement above as ‘rah is Jack Wills; Jack Wills is rah’ as well as in the previous section our discussion of the ambiguity of the social position of those classified around the brand-name. One informant, whose cousin worked as a Seasonairre for Jack Wills, described her thusly:

... she’s a bit of a Jack Wills girl, loved the atmosphere of it all, the friends, it [working at Jack Wills] was more of a social thing for her.

Daniel: ...so what’s a Jack Wills girl?

Informant: ha, um, I guess it’s the whole, you wear the clothes, but then you have the attitude to go with it; like wearing the clothes, kind of outdoorsyish, maybe.

Daniel: ok, so what’s the attitude then?

Informant: ha, oh, horrible to say but I guess it's that you think you're better than everyone because of the way you dress, little model type... Jack Wills, model girl.

A product becomes a personality; a person turns into a personage of British society. What is more, however, is that this person is characterised as an upper-class English person associated with the countryside (“outdoorsyish”), elitism (“snobbish”), aspiration (“nouveau chancer”) and institutional milieus (“public schools”) through the commodities standing for these ideals. What is becoming increasingly evident is that the products have the aesthetic appeal of the ideals of group membership. People are naturalised by way of cultural products. Taking inspiration from Lévi-Strauss (*op. cit.*), Jean Baudrillard (1981:37-38; 90-91) was first to apply this notion of group membership to commodities. For Baudrillard (1981:38), choosing a certain commodity is the way “each individual and each group searches out his-her place in an order, all the while trying to jostle this order according to a personal trajectory. Through objects a stratified society speaks...” Using the Jack Wills commodities to describe a stratified society, evidenced from our material so far, is also coupled with the notion that there is a *personal* trajectory at work. As we have heard from these informants ‘Jack Wills is part of an aspirational lifestyle’ and the lifestyle is ‘a social thing’, the friends and atmosphere. Yet if the personal trajectory is that of the *buyer*, then ‘Jack Wills’ is a class-above as the aspirant who utilises the *name* Jack Wills to convert their lesser status into that of superior status. Again, we are back at tautologies and ambiguity. As an old-Etonian and student at the University of Oxford said to me, “Jack Wills is like a parasite on upper class life.” Our informant imagines Jack Wills as on the one hand “upper-class lifestyle” of polo and exclusive holidaying, on the other “middle class” aspiration through the metaphor of parasitism. He is, quite simply, dividing what above we called ‘aristocracy’ (as upper-class) and ‘aspirational’ in this metaphor. We see the oxymoron in the speech as at times ‘Jack

Wills' refers to *aspirational people* and at others 'Jack Wills' refers to the brand as an aspirational entity. As a Cambridge varsity polo player told the newspaper *The Varsity* (2011),

Cambridge provides a great opportunity for a lot of students who wouldn't otherwise consider playing polo and it's probably the cheapest place in the country to play because our brilliant sponsors, Jack Wills, provide us with so much kit and equipment.

The name Jack Wills is providing entrance to elite social circles; or is he guarding them? Or is it all about parvenus? This question is best answered by drawing upon historical material on the gentry, material which will give us further insight into the cultural significance of the material already presented.

### 2.3 The dialectic of the gentry

'Who *are* the gentry?' is a misleading question. "In truth, the gentry were proud possessors of mansions and parks, were fond of riding, and delighted in country sports." (Mingay, 1976:1) This is *not* the end of the story. This is the imagined historical image that the gentry have as wealthy landowners engaged in lifestyle pursuits – similar to what our Seasonaire informant described above. The question of who the gentry are is best answered in terms of what the '*gentry idea*' has become, not so much a list of the peerage or landowners. Nicolson's *The Gentry: Stories of the English* claims landowning family histories "are, in effect, a self-portrait of the English, or at least of its central and culture forming class ... the responsive and continuous middle of Englishness." (2011:xii) Yet while landowners make up a strong current in national ideas of what 'gentry' is, this designation is not the sole historical origin of a term describing a status group in the hierarchical conception

of Britain. “It was never”, says Nicolson “a closed landowner’s club.” (2011:xvii) They are, indeed, the national identity class par excellence but first I ask what *was* and indeed *is* gentry?

A famous 16<sup>th</sup> century account gives us an indication; William Harrison’s *Description of England* (1577) consolidated what I want to call the dialectic of the gentry in his definition of them. “We in England”, began Harrison, “divide our people commonlie into foure sorts’: noblemen, gentleman, yeoman and the labouring poor.” It is the gentry (dubbed ‘gentlemen’) that occupy Harrison’s lengthiest description for it the most ambiguous. This ambiguity is made clear from the beginning: “Gentlemen be those whom their race and blood, or at least their virtues, do make noble and known.” (Harrison, [1577] 1968:113) Which one is it, blood or virtue?

Harrison defines the gentleman by two differing criteria: one is premised upon ascription (‘race and blood’), the other on achievement (‘at least their virtues’). This we have seen in the oxymoronic descriptions above and I wish to point out that it became the dialectical core of gentry as a social position. A station of trying to sustain the status of ascription through achieved measures. Harrison’s definition continued:

as the King doth dub knights and createth the barons and higher degrees, so gentlemen whose ancestors are not known to come with William, Duke of Normandy ... do take their beginning in England after this manner in our times. Whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, whose *abideth in the university* giving his mind to his book, or professeth physic and the liberal sciences, or, beside his service in the room of *a captain in the wars* or good counsel given at home, whereby his



commonwealth is benefited, can *live without manual labour*, and thereto is able and will bear the *port, charge, and countenance* of a gentleman, *he shall for money have a coat of arms bestowed upon him by the heralds ...* Which is so much the less to be disallowed of for that the prince doth lose nothing by it, the gentleman being so much subject to taxes and public payments as is the yeoman or husbandman, which he likewise doth the gladlier for the saving of his reputation (Harrison, 1968:114, emphasis added)

Harrison notices here how a series of achieved statuses (university, officer, affluence) coupled with an ascribed aristocratic coat of arms defines “gentry” and, as such, it is not a definition of the gentry class but rather their ambiguous position in the social hierarchy. On the one hand he is suggesting that a series of professionals are ‘gentry’ – doctors, lawyers, bankers, priests, royal officials, moneyed persons, university professors. On the other, it’s all blood and patrimony. The ancestry of some is given over to ascription of elite standing, whereas others have to *prove* their gentility and, upon this proof, take their noble qualities. ‘Port, charge and countenance’, as achieved qualities that relate to matters of wealth, style of living manner of spending wealth, and also duties (Whittle & Griffiths, 2012:15). With regards to the ascribed qualities, the gentry’ class sought to look for what emphasised birth and lineage; this is found in the etymology of the word: “*nobiles et generosos...* The etymology of the name expoundeth the efficacy of the word, for as *gens* in Latin betoken the race and surname...” (Harrison, 1968:113). That said, the term “‘gentry’ and its commonest usage was to indicate gentle birth and high rank or to describe the qualities shared by the gentle.” (Coss, 2003:3) The ambiguity of this social position, half predicated upon birth and

the other on wealthy, worldly achievements, can, however, be better elucidated with further description of the *role* of gentry persons.

The Janus-face of the gentry is evident in its historical genesis as they are often termed as part of ‘the ruling class’, but they arose from the process of consolidating political power. They were part of monarchical domination and part and parcel of the governance of a monarchical society through territorial holdings. This was a monarchical society where the aristocracy were a ‘service aristocracy’, a group of persons defined by birth *and* who they attended to. They were defined as a ‘thegn’ [*thane*] (powerful one who serves). The emergence of a ‘gentry’ can be located in accelerating this vertical series of services and associations: Kings have thegns, the noble class have their thegn’s and so forth (Coss, 2003:29-31). Gentry is “a type of lesser nobility” which becomes “a territorial elite” premised upon their governing of a locality; this service of territorial domination became their central status claim and became the basis for expressing a collective identity of the ‘gentry’ class (Coss, 2003:11; cf. Mingay, 1976:18ff). *They were a service class dressed up as noble ruling elites*. The gentry, therein, arise from this noble class of vertical service associations but it does so in a manner which, while following the same pattern of *service*, does not rely upon the same notions of affiliation. It is *not* defined by birth and blood but *is* defined by their place in a service hierarchy. Courtiers often are treated in such a capacity. In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* we see Queen Gertrude address Hamlet’s friends with a promise of fortune that hangs on the adjective ‘gentry’ as indicating a service *worthy of* high station only when *granted* by a higher authority: “If it will please you to show us so much *gentry* and good will ...for the supply and profit of our hope, your visitation shall receive such thanks as fits a King’s remembrance.” (Queen, *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2: Shakespeare, 1994:60 added emphasis)

Gentry *is* (and was) ignoble nobility as gentry persons were ungentle gentles. And the project ‘the gentry’ set themselves was serving over generations and surviving in this social

station. But as they were ignoble nobles, those who had established a position of prominence could, quite simply, be easily replaced by other aspirants. Land, one could argue, become the basis upon which power rested as it gave them wealth and a legacy – but it was not the sole criteria. The Gentry, as Heal and Holmes (1995:381 added emphasis) described them, were the “*permeable membrane*” of English elite culture; *noble families could lose station, while those of the middling sort could rise*. “The openness was surprisingly radical,” says Nicolson (2011:xv): “The English gentry did not, for example, *need* to own land...” as the higher professions granted them entrance and service to nobles but, that said, what they *did* need was some proof of social distinction. Defined as below the nobility, yet serving and consoling with them, they drew upon the same schemes of social distinction as this was, quite simply, the only honourable means as the higher station set the tone for *what* is proper. Harrison’s description gives indication of this social distinction, *heraldry* – make-shift honours that, in retrospect, come to stand for the nobility of person that had, we know, been the motive all along.

Heraldry and other forms of honorific devices have a crucial function; they turn the aspired qualities that persons demonstrate in their worldly achievements into something ascribed. They underscore their historical accomplishments and allow them to move closer to the titled, aristocratic world of peerages and inheritance of wealth and social station. The point being, again, that the virtues of character – in their manner, style of life, habits and tastes – may be more easily appropriated by other aspirants. What we see is how the herald’s work was one of ‘truly culturalise a false nature’. Heraldry constructs imaginary pasts of noble station. For the herald established a nobility of person through the honour of granting a coat of arms and the right to bear it on one’s property. In so doing, it attended to the aesthetic appeal which Simmel (1971) singled out for nobility, notably that it passes into the past and individuals become prominent by drawing upon kinship based ideals of patronymic ancestor

worship. Indeed, gentlemanly status rests not solely upon manners and conduct, nor social circles, but also upon the *fetishisation of material symbols of rank*. This was a culture that prized outward appearances as the proof, in a visible and tangible form, of status position. David Graeber (1997:700-703) forcibly argues that persons in such aristocratic modes of social distinction are constituted as people out of material property. For instance, the disenfranchised Duke of Lancaster in Shakespeare's *Richard II* condemns persons for destruction of heraldic property:

Dispark'd my parks and fell'd my forest woods, From my own  
windows torn my household coat, Razed out my imprese,  
leaving me no sign, Save men's opinions and my living blood,  
To show the world I am a gentleman. (Shakespeare, 1969:103)<sup>10</sup>

Writing of this passage, Peter Stallybrass follows Graeber's argument of property constituting social identity: "name is constituted by things. ... the value of 'men's opinion' and my living blood' ...is inadequate without the value of the actual trees of parks and forest that constitute the name 'Lancaster'." (Stallybrass, 2002:276) As such, gentry persons sought coats of arms to act as cultural devices to naturalise social station, to make their social station seem immutable as it is materialised into status restricted objects. As such, they tended to be obsequious as they were stamped onto ornamental crockery and silverware or anything which was largely useless but able to bear the valuable stamp, or made useless in order to become an ornament of the prime importance of the personage they identify (Woolf, 2003:100-105). One important matter of connecting the coat-of-arms and the notion of lineage and ancestry was the heralds' presence at funeral rites through the sixteenth century as death turns the person into an ancestor and guarantees continuation of a noble lineage (cf. Woolf, 2003:101).

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<sup>10</sup> It should be pointed out that goods which are (a) substitutes for real persons and (b) embody the ancestors and (c) a matter of life and death are the three components Maurice Godelier (1999:161ff) singles out as indicating the highest ranking valuables in competitive status societies.

Yet heraldry is open to a problem. One finds persons purchasing arms with little knowledge of their meaning, or even the traditional rationale (Woolf, 2003:104). In many ways it took the form of a commodity market as heralds were able to grant a coat of arms to any freeborn Englishman whose land was worth £10 p.a. or held £300 in moveable goods (Woolf, 2003:106). As Bernard Mandeville declared in 1714, heralds were “contriving and finding out high and illustrious pedigrees for low and obscure people.” (quoted in Woolf, 2003:110). And this was the oxymoron of constituting oneself as ‘of noble birth’ as it demanded that one utilise the exclusionary means of those the rank above, a strategy which leads to the detriment of the valuable entities. As they were defined by their source of nobility, undermining this branding mechanism is to undermine the very qualities it achieves, i.e. elite status.

The reader may be able to notice a pattern developing from the material presented at the beginning of the chapter: the fetishisation of material symbols of rank and how they are overworked in position marking; the fetishisation of lineage and their attempts at patronymic authority; the aesthetic appeal and their service encompassed social position. The ambiguity we read into the reception, description and understanding of the Jack Wills brand shows a long-standing status position in British society. It is a social station ‘gentry’ which is, sociologically conceived and oxymoronically defined, as the aspirational *class* and the aspirational *ideal*. One seeks *gentry* as one *acts* gentry out. With all the pretensions of the nobility (blood, ancestry and, of course, vast wealth) they retained an active pretence to achieve it through acquisition, i.e. through money and valuable objects (types of titles and coats of arms). This oxymoron discloses the dialectic of the gentry: defined by the criteria of kings and nobility but open to a common market, the means of attaining elite status simultaneously puts in place the means to dilute and devalue the criteria, *yet*, uphold the elite ideal, regardless. To quote Simmel, we could say that gentry

...emerges from among those personalities that are better off than others for whatever reason; but once it has emerged, personalities are then better off – retroactively, as it were, - because they belong to it. (1971:200-201 my brackets)

And it is this retroactive, janus-face that is gentry's central characteristic: "the Gentry, as an institution, which may from a distance have seemed fixed ... by its overpowering sense of the past..." reveals itself "to be turbulent and contingent, with uncertainty and struggle its dominant qualities." (Nicolson, 2011:411) That said, the whole system of gentry did not rest upon landholding, honour systems or retaining good social contacts and a style of life. Rather it becomes, historically, the ideological core of an ideal of English (or British) identity through its institutionalisation, a situation still with us today.

The dialectic of the gentry could be suggested to be the central axis of accommodation and exclusion of persons to elite parts of British society. In historical terms, the transitional period was between the eighteenth and nineteenth century where commercialisation took root and also gave rise to a growth to problems of status blurring and increased awareness of status markers, be it politeness (Langford, 1989) or dress (Hundert, 2003) or ones trade (McKendrick et. al. 1982). And, additionally, the protectionist policy of the Corn Laws was repealed in 1849, thereby, ushering in a decline in status for those landed families. With greater commercialisation, wider circulation of consumer goods, new techniques of marketing and the increased purchasing powers of the many it lead to a tendency for Veblenian emulation: "In imitation of the rich the middle ranks spent more frenziedly that ever before, and in imitation of them the rest of society joined in as best they might..." (McKendrick et. al. 1982:11) Nathaniel Forster wrote in light of this in 1767

In England the several ranks of men slide into each other almost imperceptibly and a spirit of equality runs through every part of their constitution. Hence arises a strong emulation in all the several situations and conditions to vie with each other; and the perpetual restless ambition in each of the inferior ranks to raise themselves to the level of those immediately above them...

(cited in McKendrick, 1982:11)

Located within this gradual move toward socio-economic equality through greater access to money and commodities we also see the tendencies to seek out distinctions. As Forster's words make evident, the ideal of a hierarchical order remains and reveals that a move toward equality itself becomes a vying affair as it sparks agonistic tendencies to reassert hierarchy.

This dialectic of the gentry became the *idée fixe* of British status hierarchies and the mobility *between* classes entrenched what Martin Weiner (1981) amongst others (F. M. L. Thompson, 2001; Landes, 1969) has seen as central to industrial development, that is: the sedimentation of the gentry ideal amongst the middle-ranks of the British social hierarchy. For Landes (1969:49-52), the mobility between ranks was essential to the mobility of exchange and capitalist entrepreneurship; it allowed for ambitious and industrious persons to come to economic prominence. In light of these entrepreneurial endeavours, Weiner's critical account of Britain's economic development in the nineteenth century claimed it gave rise to the *janus-face* of English culture:

New economic forces did not tear the social fabric. Old values and patterns of behaviour lived on within the new, whose character they profoundly modified. [...] Lasting social and psychological limits were thus placed on the industrial

revolution in Britain. ... Out of the successful aristocratic-gentry holding action a distinctly English 'culture of containment' developed. This conflict was never resolved, but internalised within the comprise that emerged: a new dominant bourgeoisie bearing the imprint of the old aristocracy. (Weiner, 1981:7, 10; my parenthesis)

For Weiner, as the English become modernised, their culture ('Englishness') became itself rigidly *anti-modern*: the English imagination was aloft in ancient rooms redolent with ideas of countryside parks and estates while the English reality was swallowed in the grubby dints of towns and cities. This is a dominant discourse of Englishness, *not* its essence as Jeremy Paxman (1999) would have us believe: "when the successful businessman makes his first £10 million, he starts scanning the pages of *Country Life* for a manor house to buy." (Paxman, 1999:175) I am not suggesting that, as many have opposed in the past (notably Weber (1993: esp. p.33)), that the ideals of aristocracy motivated wealth creation. Rather it is the tone, the socially solvent identity of the higher professions that, with new wealth, led to a greater requirement to assert a proximity to the identity symbols and culture of aristocracy. 'Gentry' formed the cultural background to the ethos and honours of central elite institutions that provided access to the money making professions as they became the new beacon for the transplanting of peers of the realm (as the old, landed gentry once were (Mingay, 1976)). The higher professions were bathed in aristocratic colours as identity symbols.

This is found in the institutions singled out for processes of elite *selection*, as sociological mechanisms securing membership and its reproduction, notably the British public school system (especially the Clarendon schools) and Oxbridge universities (Weiner, 1981:20ff; Stone & Fawtier Stone, 1984; Rubinstein, 1987; MacDonald, 1995; F. M. L. Thompson, 2001:122ff; cf. Hartmann, 2007:66-70). These institutions consolidated and



unified an elite culture as well as provided the domain of social networks amongst elites. In terms of the networked possibilities, the use of educational establishments to act as more a fertile domain for social ties dates back to at least the seventeenth century (Heal & Holmes, 1994:268-270), some suggesting the fifteenth (MacDonald, 1995:72-73). And it was the gentrified ideal central to the educational complex of the public school system in Britain; ‘gentry’ set the tone of these institutions. These educational institutions provide the means for elite selection but also their practices, especially sports (rugby, polo, rowing, etc.) (Webster, 1937) which have an aristocratic colouring. For MacDonald (1995:128), professional identity is as much esoteric knowledge of practice (law, medicine or finance) as it is “gentlemanly” conduct. Or, as Thompson put it,

[t]he public school, in the business of making gentlemen, was therefore closely identified with a form of gentrification, and even though the gentlemanly ideal which it cultivated was distinctive and far removed from the original landed model with its emphasis on birth, breeding and honour, *that was nevertheless the model from which it ultimately derived.* (2001:126, emphasis added)

What it *did* continue, however, from the landed gentry model was the identity symbols and notions of prestige. Public school tradition that was modelled on a heraldic tradition, which passed over into the university ethos, also: “The Harrow School arms comprise a *lion rampant*, in commemoration of the Founder’s name. This is evident and, in all probability, was John Lyon’s [founder of Harrow School c.1572] own coat of arms.” (Webster, 1937:142, brackets added) Sports and the honours systems internalised in the schools, ‘the colours system’, also became the basis for an institutional form of heraldry as prominent big-men gain surrogate titles – school captain, captain of the XI’s, etc. As David Cannedine

(1990:705) concluded in his *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, the demise of the aristocratic premise has not erased their lingering, ambient presence:

in many areas of British life, patrician values and traditional forms have remained unaltered, even when the substance has been radically transformed. In the great professions, the aristocratic personnel have largely disappeared, but because of the public school, the aristocratic tone lingers on.

What the educational system achieved, then, was a sociological selection mechanism where wealthy persons could be educated in not only scholarly matters but also the culture of Englishness par excellence, the aspirational ideals of gentry identity, i.e. defined by kings but open to ignoble persons. It provided the space for the restriction of a few persons whose aspirations could combine with the efforts to a distinctly English cultural identity. As such, gentry is the *national* class and status position – it asserted the two sides of money as a possession which also allows one to anticipate purchases (Simmel, 1990): aspiration and privilege alongside a demonstration of all the virtues that are said to be culturally ‘English’ or ‘British’ in the elite sense. Gentry, then, from their historical origin of ignoble service-nobles to higher persons – kings & queens – and achievements in professional and national life, has crystallised into a sort of container of, first high ranking person and second symbols, practices and sentiments that make up national identity.

As a status it is oxymoronic (ignoble nobles) but as a social position, it is the dialectical core of British identity – the aspirational station where wealth comes into contact with nobility; the aspired ideal where achievement may be recognised in the only way a monarchical society recognises achievement, in aristocratic symbols – symbols which are, culturally national (inclusion) and socially monarchical (exclusion). Money may be turned

into gentility – a country house, a polo pony, a series of costly equipages, a network of friends that remain exclusive. With that in mind, the next section demonstrates how, today, for this elite, national identity remains reproduced and how, if ironically and imaginatively, the same social position of ‘gentry’ may reveal itself in tact (if unrecognisable from the historical personnel of the (old) gentry).

#### 2.4 The dialectic of the Jack Wills ideology

With that suggestion, a special caution. The concern of the Jack Wills brand is to remain close to and recruit persons whose social identity adequately encapsulates criteria that articulates, symbolises and sells, the national identity associated with gentry personages. That said, the gentry personnel of Jack Wills’ core customer is not a clear cut one. The social group who we could identify as ‘gentry’ is ambiguous with regard to *who* makes the group up at present. Today, the landed gentry are an incredibly marginal social group whose highly limited personnel bears little on our investigation. What does remain is the gentry question: “how do you keep the enterprise going when the world changes? And without abandoning your ideals? ... It is nothing new for a gentry enterprise to feel under threat from the prevailing currents of modernity.” (Nicolson, 2011:407, 408, my parenthesis) This is not about political power or a ruling class; it is about a lifestyle appeal to an enduring idealisation of national identity. In short, how is this aspirational ideal of British identity *as well as* exclusive, elite standing being reproduced at the present? How can a line be drawn from the socially relevant symbols of identity back then and made use of today? Brand-name symbols as surrogates for gentry symbols and also their attempts at imitation of lineage, may be a threat of modernity, but they are also a way to assert identity in a manner that, while distinct, draws upon old notions with new devices.

An unbroken line from the gentry *then* to the gentry *now*. What I want suggest is this: as a cultural forming class which asserted both social station and stands guard to elite symbols of national identity, “gentry” remains in so far as it maintains its central dialectic, inclusion for social climbers as well as exclusion devices. Jack Wills, I wish to argue here and throughout, does just this and its corporate project sociologically contributes to one branch of this enduring social station for the 18-24 demographic.

One of the primary means through which it can do this is symbols and their aesthetic appeal. The gentry appeal is a style of life and as seen from informants above, Jack Wills relies upon these as key devices to market a product, yet this requires, first, a monopolisation of such an aesthetic in the real world. What is adequately gentry for Jack Wills is to let its products, marketing and corporate programme be conceived as evidence of social station. It proves its gentrified lifestyle by marketing itself around an aesthetic appeal of the symbols of membership. Peter Williams says of the product, it’s “grounded in traditions of British aristocracy – riding coats, tweeds, tuxedos and tailcoats” (2011) and its patroned events *demand* these clothes: Varsity polo (c.2007- present) (riding coats and tweed), the Keble Ball at Oxford (2011) (tuxedos and tailcoats) [Fig.3]. In this enactment the reputation of host increases manifold as their *name* (“Jack Wills”) conjures up the totalised life-style the group live and in living this life they assert their precedence and rank in the process. Centrally, the aesthetic appeal is, as Holt argues, how “the person or thing is widely regarded as the most compelling symbol of a set of values that a society deems important.” (Holt, 2004:1) As such, aesthetic use of gentry Britain in brand symbols also establishes the notion that it, itself, is the producer of the persons symbolised. Lifestyle access is manifest in corporate ventures; a continuation of the gentry dialectic.

Continuing in this vein, Williams states:

It is our belief that the store environment where we sell our product adds uniquely to the authenticity of the brand. What we started in Salcombe we have continued to all of our other stores around the world. We always locate them in the heartland of our customer base, whether seasonal resorts or university towns. The real estate we pick provides an authentic backdrop. Interesting old buildings that help create a theatre. Old aristocratic buildings that have a faded grandeur. And we layer on top of this heritage backdrop, an ever-changing veneer of young and contemporary, rebellious brand-relevant cool. (Williams, 2011)



Figure 3 Jack Wills Seasonairres sponsor the Keble Ball, Oxford University - Summer Term, 2011 (photo from:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jwseasonnaires/5725670901/in/photostream>)



Figure 4 Jack Wills Varsity Polo 2012 mastheads (coat of arms)

<http://www.jackwills.com/en-gb/jw-seasonnaires/varsity-matches/polo> (01/05/12)

Such monopolised space for stores, Williams ventures, is a crucial aspect of the brand in its outfitting duties as it helps maintain brand-value. Williams claims that a ‘mall’ or ‘market’ store would never suit Jack Wills: “they can make lots and lots of money in the short term, but every time a customer shops in one of these stores it chips away at the equity of the brand. My philosophy is that every store should add value to the brand, not chip away at it.” Ironically, perhaps, this concern with equity is also a process that leads to a limiting of apparel in the life-world of their target customer: “Our whole philosophy ... is word of mouth. ... We have been hyper selective in our choice of store location in the whole of the twelve years we’ve been operating – and this has naturally filtered our brand into being seen and consumed by our target audience.” (Williams, 2011).

The brand, as a corporation, can be suggested to be contributing to, like the use of heraldry, like the use of the public school and like hypergamous marriages of nobility and non-nobility, *consolidating* a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion as definitive of gentry. Ideologically, the ideal of this redolent aristocratic vision of England and a heraldic sense of unity through lineage is central to the identity of the *brand-itself* but also the social background of its ‘target customer’:

Jack Wills has singularly and shamelessly targeted this demographic with evident success. Williams's first marketing ploy was to send one of the signature hoodies to the head girl and boy of every public school in the country. Since then, it has sponsored polo events and yacht-club balls, and designed T-shirts for the Eton rugby tour. Its emblem is a pheasant in top hat and tails. It's changing rooms are fitted out like public school dormitories ... (Soames, 2010)

In their efforts of securing their target customer, the Jack Wills brand monopolise the gentrified enclaves of British social life through patronage of societies (polo, skiing, holiday resorts, campus tours, costly entertainments etc). Through this monopolisation it witnesses the colonisation of social life with its “name” and imagery. Jack Wills’ monopolise the ‘gentrified enclaves’ of British life so as to forge an idealised target customer as the living and existing “Jack Wills” life, and excluding those who do ‘fit’ this imagery.

In so far as they are monopolising spaces of gentrified Britain, in aesthetic terms of branding, they are also coveting persons through such an image (a facet of gentry being encapsulated by aristocratic symbols of heraldic coats and honours in brand-name guise). Image, as an aesthetic term that encapsulates a consumerised social identity, is often critiqued for fakery, façade and a presumed naivety of those seduced by it. In a satirical rap song entitled ‘Jack Wills’, MC Tarquinius articulates such an idea in his lyrics regarding the brand:

So you’re heading out to uni, but you can’t look whack,  
Let me introduce you to my friend, his name is Jack  
Not Jack Daniels with his whisky, Or Jack Frost with his chills,  
But that suave mother fucker, that’s my boy Jack Wills  
Welcome to the house that Jack built, Won’t you please step inside  
Change your look so much They’ll call you Jekyll and Hyde.

Jack Wills took the preppy look and gave it a price,  
Now we’re rocking stripey blazers, neon pink deck shoes (NICE!)  
Or a trendy pair of loafers or a slick ruggah shirt,  
A superstylish raincoat or a floral print skirt

Jack Wills got you covered, from your tip to your toe



If you wanna hit the lake, take your boat for a row,  
Or just kick it with your homies sipping vintage Bordeaux  
Jack Wills is the name that you all will soon know

(Oh) Jack you are so stylish Jack you are so chique  
Forcing kids to fork out money To be part of the clique  
Well the girlies want it all, Rip the shirt off your back.  
If you aint rocking the Wills then you aint worth Jack

(MC Tarquinus & DJ Horatio: 'Jack Wills' – uploaded Sept. 2011).<sup>11</sup>

In a series of lyrics describing the character of the brand, the assumption is that one 'buys in' as they are seduced by this image. Ironically, this critique grants – albeit negatively – the status honour demanded of the brand: elitist, high-priced exclusion, all based around an "image." One member of the Oxford Polo club explained the club's patronage in precisely these terms: "We're seen as having the image they're trying to convey and they want to project that." (fieldnotes). Again we see another case of the dialectic, for as the brand patronises the spaces of elite life as well as constituting it aesthetically, it also projects an aesthetic appeal to such an elite life. Certain persons preserve the "image", but they also become conduits of its project to be aspired to and appealing. The dialectic of aspirational and ascription remains, reformed into a brand-name image and those intimately associated with *the lifestyle* and those *outside* who 'buy in'. In subsequent chapters, this will be a crucial problem. The brand, as a continuation of the gentry dialectic, works on a similar principle of those *included* in the lifestyle activities of the brand (those under patronage and granted gifts of service) and those defined *against* those who 'buy in'. But, as we know, for those who

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO6nWsgZa7U>

‘buy in’ and for those fully included in the station of the idealised gentry lifestyle is a defining feature of this “gentry” social group.

In terms of the corporate strategy of fastening itself onto the gentrified areas of British life, of public school institutions as selection mechanisms; of public school customs (games of polo, rugby, etc.); of seasonal destinations, the gifts and patronage supply the *ascribed* character of the Jack Wills brand. But they also embody their others side, the *aspirational* dimension: they’re a brand-name *commodity*, a named good open to anyone who desires to purchase it. The dialectic of gentry relies upon a dialectic of gifts and patronage confronting commercial acquisition. And it is with this monopoly on an image and patronised series of institutions that it creates its own notions of exclusion, inclusion and their ambiguous interplay.

## 2.5 The imagined community of gentry

Jack Wills’ corporate program to outfit a gentry re-establishes gentry as a relevant social position through publicity. Jack Wills’ publicity gives rise to an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) based upon the terms gentry set; that is exclusionary practices and aspirational promise through symbols and spaces of national identity with certain persons to bear these characteristics. What Jack Wills does, alongside creating notions of exclusion and inclusion in the lifestyle, is actively create a public concerned with these questions of gentrification (cf. Arvidsson, 2013). As a *Times* article critiqued in dramatic hyperbole:

Jack Wills, whose logo is nothing less than a pheasant in top hat and tails, represents something new and terrifying: the wilful celebration of inherited wealth and privilege. In a time of economic distress this is crass enough, but the label exacerbates matters by mocking the working classes while doing so:

adopting the hoodie, the symbol of the youth underclass as a signature item. (Sanghera, 2010)

Not only is Sanghera wrong that the celebration of inherited wealth and status is “new”; its celebration is a key feature of gentry – conspicuous display of status is central to the status (i.e. nobility obliges). But what Sanghera does is situates the brand-name as itself part of this enduring ideal in British gentry life. Or as one student newspaper stated,

the [Jack Wills] hoodies with generic terms like ‘Varsity’ and ‘Seasonnaire’ printed across them, implying but not necessarily guaranteeing, an expensive education. (Goodsir, 2011).

Publicity in student press and the national press is doubly instructive as Jack Wills and the British social hierarchy are being debated as one and the same. *Excetera*, a University of Exeter magazine, ran the article ‘A Matter of Class – trying to make sense of Exeter’s failure to meet its outreach targets’ with this claim:

...diversity is a real issue for Exeter University and a difficult topic to broach, but it is one that cannot be discounted. Firstly, a meaningful debate on whether Exeter is too upper class is too often betrayed by a culture of painfully reductive binaries on campus. You’re either ‘rah’ or not, ... shop at either Jack Wills or Primark... The reason why diversity is on the menu today is that Exeter was recently named by the government watchdog Offa (Office for Fair Access) as one of 44 higher education institutions in England that failed to meet targets to integrate more students from lower income backgrounds, despite receiving funds from the government to do so... (*Excetera*, Nov. 2011)

Much like the 18<sup>th</sup> century idea of a two-tier society of ‘Patricians’ and ‘Plebs’ (Thompson, 1993), the evocative use of Jack Wills versus Primark is indicative of a sustained imaginary where the campus becomes a microcosm of the hierarchy of British society writ large. And this association is, again, not an isolated incident. One Durham student blog writes,

Durham is an extraordinary place. The architecture and surrounding scenery is certainly one to take your breath away. The academic reputation of the University is up there with the best in the country, and it would be difficult to argue against the claim that we are the best University in the North. We have a dedication to sport, a creative arts scene and an unquestionable passion for tradition. But there is one other characteristic which is unique to Durham, yet not nearly as appealing as the previous list. The ‘rah culture’ which is engrained into a large portion of the student population is, I believe, an unfortunate black mark against an alumni which excels in so many areas of University life.

I live in blind hope to see the day when Durham wakes up and Jack Wills closes down. Let us count the days till the ‘anti-rah’ revolution.... (“A ‘rant’ about Durham’s beloved Rah culture”, *Durham 21*, March 2009)

Publicity works upon the identity symbols that is most indicative of perceived status divide and Jack Wills is crucial to such a form of status stratification. This is highly centralised to the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, institutions where Jack Wills utilise students for patronage (Skiing, Polo & Rugby clubs) and also use their locales to film some of their

advertising material. In reaction to the Jack Wills autumn 2011 video which was filmed in Oxford, notably featuring the Radcliffe Camera and Balliol library and current Oxford students employed by Jack Wills as Seasonairres, the Oxford student press ran the story “JW ad and Oxford: spot the difference”, detailing humorous criticisms to Jack Wills’ use of Oxford for its promotional material. The comments from students of the University of Oxford were overwhelmingly negative about the use of Oxford in the advert. The problem, clear from their comments, is that the logo *university outfitters* means *this* university, Oxford, quite explicitly and the use of *Oxford students as Jack Wills* models creates a conceptual problem in the valuing practices which were appropriate for the campus culture. For instance we read that the advertising was:

[*serious*] “...misleading, especially the use of models. People have to realise that even Oxford is not perfect; it doesn’t help the image that we’re all posh twats”.

[*serious*] “Balliol College rejected a Jack Wills sponsorship deal for the rugby team because they felt like we’d be selling out. This would have saved college a couple of grand each year. Just weeks after rejecting this, college let Jack Wills do a modelling shoot in our library during 9th week (presumably college got paid for this) when many first years were revising before prelims/mods.’

[*mocking, ironical*] “OMG, this advertising campaign is increds. It speaks to me on so many levels. I love it even more than my fave Gilet. Still can’t believe there were real life Wills models in my college. This is like the best day ever. The adverts

are just so realistic. It's literally like they've taken an average day in my life at Oxford and got some JW models to act it out!"

*(The Oxford Student, 27<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2011)*





Figure 5 Jack Wills Autumn 2011 advert, filmed at Oxford University

([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDH6D\\_j0mbw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDH6D_j0mbw))

If we single out three aspects here – “the image that we’re all posh twats”, “Balliol College rejected a Jack Wills sponsorship ...felt like we’d be selling out” and the mockery that “the adverts are just so realistic” – I want to identify not the blanket rejection of Jack Wills but the ambivalence of the responses. The brand can and does induce the imaginary of the British social hierarchy through publicity, patronage and “image”, i.e. its ability to utilise the ornaments of the aristocratic-vision of British society through the brand-name. ‘Jack Wills’ exists within the imagination as part of the customary acceptance of the aristocratic-vision of Britain, of a society defined from monarchy down to labouring poor. In doing so, publicity allows this to figure in people’s imaginations as referring to a gentry’s idyll through utilising the persons who are the continuation of this ideal. No wonder, then, these Oxford students react with such an ambivalent sense of flippant mockery and ‘shrugging it off’ to emphasising and highlighting the ornamental rather than the realities. Yet the annoyance arises from the fact that the imagery *is* in fact accurate (to a degree). That is, it took students from Oxford and dramatized student life as distilled into a name ‘Jack Wills’.

But it is with this reality of living in-between an imagined England of old through brand aesthetics that allows certain personages to become members of a *branded-gentry*, by which I mean bearers of the ideals of gentry – of first ignoble nobility and second those who guard against the national identity of elite Britain through being the personages most apt to personify the brand-name. The consultancy agency, *Added Value*, have recently singled out Jack Wills out as utilising this aesthetic appeal in such a regard:

Jack Wills ... pull no punches with their ‘University Outfitters’ claim and sponsorship of the Varsity Polo match ... Does this give us an indication of what kind of education experience students are now expecting? ... University appears to have become aspirational and even stylish. Perhaps, with fees of £9000 a year, young people are now demanding the fully-fledged Brideshead experience. And if you were paying that much wouldn’t you be expecting the ‘real thing’ too?

(<http://culturalinsight.com/tag/jack-wills/> Nov. 23. 2011

(accessed: 8/5/2012)

Indeed, university-life as an aspirational entity is, in fact, nothing new. In 1967 John Windsor wrote of “Oxbridge and Redbrick: the great divide”, comparing the Cambridge student customs – academic, leisure and attitude. But it was clearly on *status* that students were divided between elite schools (Oxford & Cambridge) and the second tier ‘redbricks’ (e.g. Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Bristol) (Windsor, 1967:57). Windsor’s assertion that it was the social status of the undergraduate that was indicative of entry into Oxbridge, or what this status brought in terms of cultural virtues or institutionally specific ‘tastes’ (Bourdieu, 1986), also shows the reality of the dominant culture: “The ‘Cambridge manner’ is distinctly upper-class and distinctly public-school” (Windsor,



1967:61). Such a dominant idea brings to light Windsor's claim that "by the end of the first year, the grammar-school undergraduate has usually got used to the bumptiousness of his public-school colleagues and adopted their mannerisms" (Windsor, 1967:59), as one of not mere emulation but the *only* legitimate means of expression. With a branded gentry, a mode of dress is established as the pre-dominant ideal of deportment and adornment to such an extent that it, too, becomes seen as complimentary to what it opposes (Jack Wills vs. Primark as has been suggested above). It is no longer a public-school ethic but rather a public-school look, image, 'scene' that becomes the continuation of this gentrified ideal of the elite institutions. Jack Wills sponsorship, patronage and selection of those intimately associated with their lifestyle is geared toward utilising this gentry ideal. The gentry ethic is the source of the look: in acting as patrons to the customs of the public-schools (i.e. their sports, rugby and polo), Jack Wills further the persons under patronage as the personnel basis of gentry status. Against this corporate process, the brand exclude those who have to either adopt or out rightly reject the name and personages 'Jack Wills' as having significance.

## 2.6 Concluding remark

My claim, then, is this: if the 'Gentry' is a category of persons in the imaginary that is known as the British social hierarchy and has become an *idée fixe* of such a social imaginary, then Jack Wills acting as *Outfitters to the Gentry* is also maintaining this hierarchical position in contemporary society. This is, in fact, obvious. What is less obvious, however, is that when everything they do is in-line with a gentrified outlook on the world, this cannot be seen as a mere ornamental facet of evoking an 'England of Old', where "[t]he idea that the past is a plaything of the present ...a leitmotiv in commodity marketing and design..." (Samuel, 1994:429) and the Jack Wills brand is *only* commodity advertising. Rather, a gentry is an ideology that is, in part, institutionalised. Through the conscious projection of how the gentry past resembles the present through 'branding' symbols depicting a gentry existence, we

realise that it is the British who delude themselves by shaking this off as irrelevant, not the 'brand' that deludes them. For when Jack Wills is used as the *name* of the aspirant but also the name Jack Wills being the name that denotes having *arrived*, then it is precisely this which sustains the British notion of 'gentry' (as a personage) in their social imaginary. That (some) people are aspirational is an obvious empirical observation, but it is not obvious from empirical observations that it is *because* Jack Wills is utilised as both the name of the aspirant but also the name of the already arrived that it is granted elite status. By being aspirational, one is recognising their social position as subservient and encompassed by that above but, by aspiring, one is rendering laudable the means by which they do it (purchase named clothing). And one may go further: as 'Gentry' is anachronistic, one realises that by latching onto existing realities of gentry national identity and its institutional matrix, Jack Wills is able to fix their corporation as a contributing producer of existing gentry reality. As the corporation claim to outfit a gentry, the corporation has to ingratiate with the gentrified past of titled gentleman but also, through patronage and lifestyle monopoly, *fits and fixes* gentry as a social status as the brand becomes a beacon – a genteel light guiding the ungentle station of gentry. They cultivate a noble past as much as they sell it back to persons so as to forge a vision of national identity through the dialectic of include some people, exclusion of others.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Fabulously British*

#### 3. Introduction

Often globalisation is a term synonymous with consumerisation of nations either through the rubric of *McDonalised*, *Coca-Cola-isation* or *Disney-isation* (Ritzer, 1999). For others, consumption has become a central topic to the study of how modern nations have come to grips with the realities of globalisation (e.g. Miller, 1995; Appadurai, 1996; Foster, 1999; Mazzarella, 2003; Friedman, 2004; Goodrum, 2006). One stand out suggestion in to how to study consumption and globalising processes has come from Arjun Appadurai (1996). Consumer goods, with all their aesthetic and symbolic qualities, should be studied in their capacity to fit into a society's history and their implications within wider socio-historical changes. Appadurai's approach attends to so-called 'consumer revolutions' that arise with certain processes associated with consumer durables. He argues consumption is only ever "conspicuous" in so far as it pertains to shifts in a society's self-conception and how these societies come to terms with them. What is conspicuous with regard to my understanding of Jack Wills' '(would-be) gentry group' pertains to our understanding of them as *the* national identity group. The revolution that has occurred is that this distinctly British group has, for some reason, adopted an American, Ivy League, preppy "look" or style. The question is, how could a product intimately associated with *the* national class of elite stature, accessible to certain persons and closed to others (Jack Wills), be steeped in a style that is distinctly American? Jack Wills is often described as "preppy" by commentators and it is an understanding of preppy that is not the 'prep' of British prep or public schools *per se* but rather a distinctly Ivy League American 'look' as it placed alongside other American brand-names: Abercrombie & Fitch, Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, Hollister, J. Crew (Goodman,

2009; Williams, 2011; Hurley, 2011; Vernon, 2010). On this understanding, it is an irony, on first glance, that Jack Wills would label itself as *Fabulously British*.

To gain a meaningful understanding of how a social group specially placed in the self-conception of British identity, with highly limited membership, could have adopted a clothing style distinctly American, I follow a methodological suggestion of Appadurai's and place this clothing style in a two-fold gaze. On the one hand I will outline a partial history of British society and how the social group is affected and implicated in historical exigencies and, on the other, keep an eye to genealogy to see how consumption styles fit into the identity complex of the social group and their sustaining their distinctive identity as such (Appadurai, 1996:74). The purpose of this two-fold perspective is to understand the one with the other, history and cultural genealogy.

In this chapter I tell the story of origins for the Jack Wills brand in the context of recent British history (c.1980-2010s) and in relation to globalising processes, economic shifts and cultural sentiments. Outlining how the adoption of an Americanised style of preppy – its colourful attire, its smart chic etc. – for Jack Wills was arrived at, I then turn toward the cultural genealogy of preppy: how does this look fit into the wider, enduring notions of British society? I find the answer in the aesthetics of heraldry. Having previously, in sec. 2.3, shown the importance of the gentry dialectic – of exclusivity and openness – I explore the rationale for Jack Wills' logos and colour schemes in relation to heraldry as a facet of the Jack Wills brand ideology. This is illustrated with ethnographic examples and historical sources on heraldic insignia.

Following Appadurai's method, I argue what originally appears to be allegedly 'foreign', i.e. American Prep, could in fact be intimately associated with a longstanding appeal to British gentry-identity by Jack Wills' core-customer. The historical problem I shall

trace is the impact that the rapid commercialisation has had on nearly all areas of British society since the 1980s to the present. Commercialisation has threatened ‘classed’ areas of British society as it has reshaped dominant areas of once exclusive class association, from the working class totem of football (King, 2002; 2003) to the upper-class totem of horse racing (Ascot) and polo (Queens Cup).

What I will trace in this thesis, with Jack Wills’ invention of a new, branded season, the use of commercialised spaces may offer a new area for status group monopolisation (see chapter 4). Before I do this, however, what interests me in this chapter is how commercialisation has been dealt with by the upper echelons of British society. By tracing the thread of recent social history, I shall investigate how the preppy look of Jack Wills was, historically speaking, arrived at in the process. But, I hasten to add, that commercialisation *in itself* did *not* lead to the preppy attire being adopted for Jack Wills’ core-customer. Commercialisation of British society is not to be confused with what is termed the ‘Americanisation of society’, as used in the popular press (below). Americanisation is *not* synonymous with commercialisation but rather the Americanisation of the clothing style that Jack Wills employs for British consumers is only able to be fully understood if we treat it as appealing and fitting to the identity-complex of Jack Wills’ “gentry” core-customer. As Appadurai notes, analysts must locate consumer goods within the cultural genealogy of the social group employing them. I do this by seeing how “cultural dispositions and styles” are “stubbornly embedded both in local institutions and the history of the local habitus.” (Appadurai, 1996:74) While Jack Wills’ preppy look is part of the rapid commercialisation of British society since mid-century, *preppy itself has deeper socio-cultural origins*. As an aesthetic it appeals to how social groups are being *consolidated*, not merely in commercialisation as a historical trend. By first recounting a potted history of the gentry group in British society from c.1980 to the present, I argue that “preppy” is as much a

solution to coming to terms with the historical realities of a globalising British society as it is an adequate style, fitting with well-established notions of group identity for the British upper-middle classes. This shall be demonstrated by showing how preppy, while a style, resonates with deeper socio-cultural values of heraldry, manifest in the shared use of insignia and colour schemes. From the 1980s to the turn of the century, which saw the arrival of Jack Wills (c.1999), British society has had to come to terms with rapid commercialisation alongside globalising processes that have undermined old notions of elite British identity based around the conservative ideals of tradition and aristocracy worship. By tracing how our social group has dealt with commercialism, we see the piecemeal process that allowed American preppy to compliment British ‘gentry’ ideals.

## Part One: social history

### 3.1 Deindustrialisation and consumerisation: 1980s

The political economic situation of Britain in the late 1970s-early 1980s was dire straits: rising unemployment; stagflation; a deindustrialising economy. Britain had become the ‘sick man of Europe’. “Unless we change our ways” stated Thatcher in her 1979 campaign, “our glories as a nation will soon be a footnote in the history books, a distant memory of an offshore island, lost in the mists of time ...remembered kindly for its *noble past*.” (in Cannadine, 2002:38, emphasis added) Thatcher sought to reverse economic decline by appealing to the petite bourgeois individualist enterprising ethic, undermining the class hierarchies at both ends; by dethatching the Tories from aristocrats and working-class from trade unions. Amidst this political-economic climate, diplomat and then British Ambassador to the United States, Sir Nicholas Henderson wrote a policy paper entitled “British decline:

its causes and consequences.”<sup>12</sup> The cause of this economic decline was the lack of prestige granted to Britain manufacturing and industry, itself stunting technological innovation and economic advance (Vinen, 2009:187; Jenkins, 2007:37). This lack of knowledge predicated upon industry and the public school network found in the cabinet and professional enclaves, notably the City, became a source of party contention (Vinen, 2009:190-191). By 1981 Martin Weiner’s *English Culture and the decline of the industrial spirit* (1981) had elaborated the Henderson policy piece into a critical cultural history of Britain. Weiner’ critiqued English culture as one based on aristocracy worship and a gentrification ethic behind industry. This had caused economic collapse as the *janus-face* of English culture was premised upon modernity, on the one hand, and stifled by gentry ideals, on the other. While critiqued by professional historians (esp. Mandler, 1997; 2006), the Weiner thesis was a critical statement on the ‘state’ of British culture.

In the midst of this culture of decline, the UK witnessed the use of “England” or “Britain” as a short-hand way of talking about of the life of the upper/ upper-middle classes and their values (Scruton, 2000). Alongside economic decline, British society saw the concomitant break up of its nations and principalities into distinct national cultures of their own (Nairn, 1981). ‘The English’ or “Britain” became less a way of establishing the overarching idea of a unified Britain but a national identity that was an elite culture (cf. Colley, 1992). British identity became increasingly a way to refer to an idealised Britain of old, one based upon aristocracy and lifestyle events. By the 1980s, this ideal Britain found a source in the parents of the generation that the subsequent ethnography deal with. Parents of those associated with the Jack Wills brand (ch. 6-8) were known as “Sloane Rangers” c.1980s (now aged ~50-70).

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<sup>12</sup> March. 1979. A digital version can be found *The Economist* archive: <http://www.economist.com/node/13315108>.

The Sloane Ranger filled an ideological space both in terms of *reaction* to the decline and *extension* of “establishment” or gentry society. The Sloane Ranger, I suggest, was an ideological solution to a de-industrialising British society. The Sloane Ranger arose in the face of the innovations of the 1980s era of ‘postmodern consumer culture’ (Featherstone, 1991; Jameson, 1991; Maffesoli, 1996 [1988]; Baudrillard, 1981; 1993; 1996; 1998). And it arose so as to reform the gentry group to the realities of increasing commercialisation. Against this backdrop of economic decline and lack of national advance, popular culture was awash with what Michel Maffesoli (1988) dubbed postmodern tribes, a series of heterogeneous groups who share a life-style. A dress-sense and ideology to go with it: Punks and anarchy, Goths and existentialism, New Romantics and a mix of Byronic hedonism with Futurology (cf. Hebdige, 1979). Maffesoli’s (1996) point was to stress these life-style enclaves were *choices* people adopted in a mode of affiliation he called “affective sociality.” Commercial tribes asserted identity through affectation:

The kaleidoscope of our streets must not allow us to forget that there is a subtle dialectic between display and concealment .... The mask may be an elaborate or colourful hairstyle, an original tattoo, the recycling of retro fashions or even the conformity of the ‘preppy’ style. (Maffesoli, 1996:91)

Sloane Ranger’s were part of this ‘kaleidoscope of our streets’ but in a way that was radically different to other consumer tribes. Namely, they were not a consumer tribe at all. They were not a commercial venture but became a nameable group that was able to adapt to this culture of ‘tribes’. Sloane became a name *as if* it was part of the general cultural epoch of “tribes.” As Melvyn Bragg put it: “with the upper-classes, you could be *born* into a *readymade* tribe” (2012). The series of affectations that come with consumer tribes allowed for a social group to figure in the cultural landscape of consumer tribes as now a ‘brand-name’.



This was able to occur because of Peter York & Ann Barr's genius in writing *The Sloane Ranger Handbook* (1982) and *The Sloane Ranger Diary* (1983). York & Barr's high society journalism, as editors at *Harper's & Queens*, was able to document a series of elaborate 'seasonal' and cultural practices of the gentry class and distil it into the language of brand-names. They came up with the names for Sloanes and depicted their lifestyle in these books. York & Barr write of Sloane activities around the fictional characters 'Henry' and 'Caroline'. Giving members of this gentry group a fictional identity means they could stand alongside other brand-name invented *personae*: 'Johnny Rotten', 'Sid Vicious', 'Steve Strange', 'Midge Ure' etc.

By the 1980s the 'Sloane' took over the 'Gentry' as the personage depicting the dialectic of achievement and ascription central to the gentry class. As Peter York said in an interview in 1987: "The books sold like hot cakes because the whole notion of Sloanes hit a nerve. They are a little metaphor for England. ... Ask people about Sloanes and they often come out with a blanket condemnation, but beneath that is a much more complex feeling, usually a feeling of inferiority..." (Feinstein, 1987) As metaphors for England within the general climate of 'tribes', Peter York could report in 1992 that *Sloane Ranger* was "simply a fascinating bit of anthropology" in two senses (Dundas et. al., 1992). First the tribe metaphor demonstrates the 'otherness' and 'set apart'-ness of the social hierarchy which Sloane's occupied, a tribe in the anthropological sense of 'otherness' who's "odd" behaviour is akin to a colonial encounter. Second it also discloses the upper-echelons hierarchical otherness into the climate of consumerised 'otherness' of style tribes. It re-figured the gentry dialectic of ascription and achievement in the consumer milieu of 'brand-name' identity purchase. In brief, 'The Sloane' was made to *look* like a commercialised vision of the upper-middle classes but in many ways it was entrenched within a non-commercial outlook – as found in

Fig. 6-7 where Harpers & Queens puts on a Sloane Ranger Evening at Ascot Racecourse in the wake of the book's success.

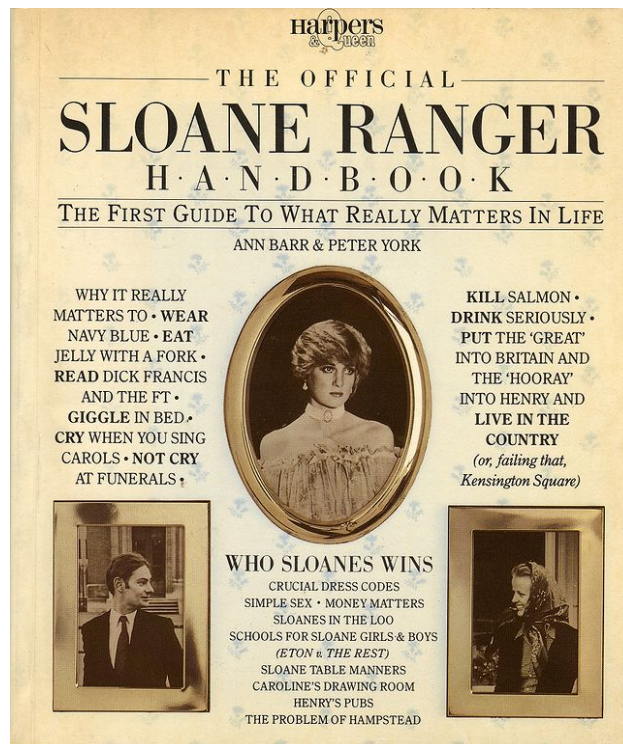


Figure 6 The Sloane Ranger Handbook (1982)





Figure 7 “Henry” and “Caroline” at Ascot (c.1980s) – Sloane Ranger 'Evening' - Ascot Racecourse, Berkshire – Melvyn Bragg on Class and Culture (BBC Two, March, 2012)

Despite being situated within a milieu of commercialism forging the tribes of a postmodern consumer culture, the Sloane Ranger phenomenon was anything but commercial. Sloane’s outlook on life was defined more by *not choosing* and *continuing patterns of practice* (despite the Handbook giving one a how-to guide for aspirants). It was from these observations that they came to embody the phantasms of national identity:

In 1982, after you’ve been in shock, in dialysis, in to and out of all kinds of foreign rubbish from modern design to Earth Shoes, the disciplined commonsensical Sloane Life looks comfortable and reassuring. Good manners, nursery food, the same shirts for five year it *must* be right, mustn’t it. ...This is the handbook of the Sloane Style, the eternal stream of English life, an invaluable reference for a lifetime of decisions about what really matters in life. (York & Barr, 1982:6)

York & Barr's phrasing is telling of tumultuous period, with the 'Sloane Life' acting as mean to acquiesce to national values. To have the 'Sloane' as the figure of the nation, they present existential acquiescence as a central disposition to the Sloane-as-English life. The "same shirts for five years" (*op. cit.*) articulates a traditionalism and enduring type of Englishness, notable in York & Barr's phrase, "it must be right, mustn't it."

All that was new with Sloane Rangers was articulated around a conservative ideology of 'the old ways are the best ways'. The Sloane phenomena embodied and made concrete the social figure of which Weiner's (1981) critique of Englishness asserted: an aristocracy worshipping sense of backwardness and an inward looking ideal of England pitted against modernity. This can be exemplified in York & Barr's 1983 publication, *The Official Sloane Ranger Diary*:

to you, time is not rolling away like a digital watch; it is circling around like a watch with hands, and will not return undiminished next year at the start of the next Season ... The Season! This is what Sloane's believe in. [...] The ancient festivals demand attention: it could be 1880 or 1920. The physical world, and with it the Sloane world, is still turning at the same pace. (York & Barr, 1983:4, brackets added)

Or, "The Good Stuff is already here and always has been. ... you certainly don't want to live in the Video Age." (York & Barr, 1982:12)<sup>13</sup> In an apt metaphor of the digital revolution of the 1980s, the use of the analogue watch hands as eternal circles links the Sloane to their cultural pursuits, namely their calendrical rites of "The Season." The Season consisted of events which can be easily seen as a continuation of the elite-practice and institutions which

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<sup>13</sup> Contrast this national identity view of time as 'future-less' (conservative utopia) and the punk movement of *no-future* (nihilist dystopia): "God Save the Queen / She ain't no human being / There is no future / In England's dreamland ... No Future! / No Future for you! / No Future for me!" (*Sex Pistols*, 'God Save the Queen' (1977)).

Linda Colley (1992) identified in the origins of national consciousness in the eighteenth century. More than this, the Sloane is seen as eighteenth century Britons direct descendants: “you can’t have background without lashings of the past. ... The Rangers favourite bit of the past is the English eighteenth century. Then everything was right.” (York & Barr, 1982:10). For the 18<sup>th</sup> century gave birth to the Season (Colley, 1992) and with ‘the Season’ – the Royal Academy Exhibition, Henley Regatta, Royal Ascot, Oxbridge Boat Race, Lords, Chelsea Flower Show – York & Barr pin-pointed the temporal experience of calendrical recurrence with the existential attitude of ‘the Sloane’.

A Sloane became an imaginary personage of British identity elevated in their fictional characters Henry and Caroline who were depicted in the Sloane Ranger handbook as drawings; i.e. archetypes of the social caste in the era of tribes [Fig. 7]. The use of fictional characters become a new way of asserting enduring myths of national identity and the continuance of the gentry group under a new rubric. In the ‘nostalgia mode’ of the consumer society, the gentry now speak “through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum.” (Jameson, 1998:7) The nostalgia mode of consumer society is the – counter-intuitive – ideology of the gentry in explicitly brand-name form. Situated in a society moving evermore towards commercialisation, the Sloane Ranger phenomena utilised journalistic techniques to ‘brand’ a totalised vision of a gentrified Britain through the closest approximating class of persons *living* a gentry life.

### 3.2 Jack Wills and Brand-name Britain: c.1990-present

By the 1990s the Sloane phenomena had dwindled and the shift was toward something else – the problem of a globalising Britain. The 1970s-1980s was run through with what Harold Perkins dubbed ‘the backlash against professional society’ (1989:472ff). In the wake of the economic strife of the 1970s-1980s with its de-industrialisation and stagflation,

the professional hierarchies in the public and private sector came under increasing attack from its esoteric position against ‘the laity’. Most notably in this assault on the professions was the public sector professions – government, Civil Service, academia, teachers and social workers – and with this critique two ideologies came to prominence: ‘rolling back the state’ and ‘free market ideology’ (Perkin, 1989:483-506). The professions – which housed the upper-middle classes – came to be viewed with suspicions of inefficiency, over-pay and unwillingness to reform itself on several, institutionally specific, grounds. The public sector professions received the biggest brunt on the assault, itself manifesting into an attack on corporatism and central planning. All this came to a head in advance of ‘free market ideology’ (Perkin, 1989:495-506).

The free market ideology that ran through the 1980s and 1990s saw entrenched hierarchies of professions, however, not so much diminished but reformed. Free-markets favoured the private sector and the notion of choice. The services provided to the public, that is, were not to be taken on custom but rather shopped around for. In the case of the vision of national identity in this milieu, it came under radical attack also. It was a problem distinctly of the free market; ‘an image’ problem. The problem of “image” in discourse had set in to become a problem of performance in all areas of British life for the country in the run up to the millennium. The rapid commercialisation and telecommunications boom in the 1980s-1990s brought with it something of a national identity crisis witnessed in many diatribes on the “national question” in the face of Americanisation or globalisation (e.g. Aslet, 1997; Paxman, 1999; Scruton, 2000; Fox, 2004).

In 1997, after the arrival of New Labour, think-tank DEMOS published a report entitled *Britain: Renewing our identity* which ran in *The Independent* as ‘Britain needs a new brand image’ (Leonard, 1997). Couched in a period of national flux and confusion of national identity as Britain’s “image” abroad became less stable and cocksure as it once had, Leonard

argued that Britain needed to select facets of its cultural identity to *sell* as an “image” – be it international commerce dating back to the East India Company, creativity and eccentricity, hybridity and multi-culturalism, entrepreneurship, fair-play and spirit of the underdog. Like all brand slogans these are abstractions, yet they speak to an era where specificity and absolutes are no longer viable. Leonard argued for less a totalised vision of the national identity but rather the ability to simulate what has already preceded the nation so as to welcome the millennium:

“We should create a Digital Britain web site which includes art and discussion groups alongside detailed listings and tourist information. Our government buildings around the world should be designed to act as a showcase for Britain ...We could also review stamps, letterheads and official documents to achieve a better mix between old and new. ...we should build a living museum of the future or Millennium City to act as a showcase for the future of health, learning, retailing and democracy.”

(Leonard, 1997)

The Millennium suggestion of a “living museum” – which became the Millennium Dome – is telling of the state of national identity as *simulated* but not in a nihilistic sense, rather as ushering in the underlying logic of a consumer society, “choice” (Davis, 2008:74ff; Slater, 1997:24; Varul, 2008:243). The eternity of the nation is a past fixed by museum’s displays; consummation of identity in nostalgia founded on consumerised purchase. This is where we situate the Jack Wills brand.

Jack Wills originated in 1999 in the run up to this living museum ethos of British national identity. A living museum is one in which the spectator is the spectacle. Taking up

Leonard's 'Brand name Britain' argument, Peter Mandler argues that "though people may not recognise themselves in any of these national characters, they may still hope one will come along that they do recognise" (2006:237) for in the present moment "people are now more likely to adopt 'the perspective of the external voyeur.'" (2006:237) As the new millennium is embarked upon, Mandler suggests that we are in a position where one can use "national identity as a 'toolkit' for a 're-branding' of Britain but, while people willingly display 'brand loyalty', who today wishes to be 'branded' themselves?" (2006:238) National identity myths are no longer *binding* or totalising in the era of globalisation but it does allow nationhood to be evoked on occasion, through practice or emotions (see Rojek, 2007:14-16). Relegating nationhood – and national personages – to the level of mythic persons evoked in brand-name retail is able to define these national characters as *imaginary entities* of identification.

In this regard, the Jack Wills brand inherited a new problem of national identity continuation. No longer able to fully articulate enduring ideals, the brand had to appeal to a market – a commercial vehicle. In the mid-1990s, Peter Williams took a job at a strategy consultant firm in London and worked alongside the global brands of Nike, Virgin and Organe (Williams, 2011). It was something distinctly 'intellectual' that grasped hold of Williams's imagination. It was the intangible aspect of the "brand" where he got the impetus to start the Jack Wills company:

During my time at this [consultancy firm]... I quickly realised that I was totally fascinated by brands – not so much as a consumer but at an intellectual level, particularly premium brands. I constantly asked myself this question: why is it that everything we buy tangible and intangible, from lawnmowers through to fashion, there is this premium brand, mass market brand and budget brand? And there's more than just (ever the



economist) this direct correlation between price and quality, *there's this intangible thing called brand.* (Williams, 2011, emphasis added)

The intangible aspect of the brand is its ability to create imaginary ideals appealing. 'Jack Wills' was an idea forged in 1998 in the zeitgeist of 'branding Britain' where the intangible realities of the imagination become increasingly powerful as devices to articulate national identity. Not only this, the brand is linked to that other vanguard of postmodern 'consumer' society: "the gradual disappearance of the physical marketplace ...and the tendential identification of the commodity with its image (or brand name or logo)" which creates a situation where the image has a referent in *both* the media milieu *and* the marketplace (Jameson, 1991:275). Along this line of thought, we have to place Jack Wills origins further into the historical problems British society was experiencing with regard to its national identity.

Britain in the late twentieth century saw not only an attack upon the professions and the drive toward the free-market ideology; it also saw an attack on "poshness" in the cultural landscape:

CAST YOUR minds back to the mid Nineties. ... For a while, especially towards the end of John Major's Tory government, it seemed that if you couldn't produce some working class roots, you had no artistic credibility at all. Admitting to having gone to public school was social death and the ground was simply littered with aitches dropped by self-conscious middle-class teenagers attempting to appear "street". (Heal, 2011)

The 1990s was, culturally speaking, largely defined by a veneration of working class culture (see Beckett, 2009). Additionally, the populism of ‘Cool Britannia’, as the PR project behind Tony Blair’s New Labour, embraced that which made Britain a ‘global’ icon in a positive sense. This meant counter-culture 60s “cool.” Britain in the 1990s was forward looking and the retrospective veneration of the 60s was a way of aesthetically fashioning politics to make it ‘consumable’ – to give it a credible image in the present by retaining the nostalgia mode of consumer culture (Rojek, 2007). In the wake of Sloane Rangers and in the face of this positive outlook, “Jack Wills” gentry veneration in itself would have had not one iota of plausibility. Sloane Rangers was ‘too British’ and ‘too Establishment’ precisely because it wasn’t commercialised completely; it was the nascent form of what Jack Wills would become. To found a brand on Sloanery would have been tantamount to the political epoch regressing, culturally. As the marketing director of Mulberry – *the* middle England brand based upon Sloanery – put it: “that might have been great in the 1850s but this is, you know, the year 2000.” (in Goodrum, 2005:80) With regard to Mulberry’s (est. 1971) success in the decades of the 1970s-1980s, their challenge in the 1990s was to be the solution to “Jack Wills” aetiology: “our success was understanding Englishness from an international perspective, as opposed to understanding it from within England.” (Roger Saul cited in Goodrum, 2005:110) Jack Wills origins arises in reaction to a culture steeply opposed to archaic Sloanery. What Jack Wills took up, instead, was a more global perspective.

Williams states his idea for Jack Wills as brand evoking British prep was fostered during the summers he spent in Salcombe but as a ‘brand’ in the marketplace this vision of Britain is not the be all and the end all. Prior to Salcombe, Williams was in Nantucket and he states,

... when I looked around the world which had an appetite for  
the kind of aesthetic I was trying to sell, I also looked around

for the type of countries that had an appetite for British, and I figured it pretty much had global appeal . . . . So my concept was a global brand with a British preppy DNA. This idea had been co-opted by US brands but authentic British prep with a global footprint did not then and still does not exist. . . .for the 99% of you in this room who have never heard of Salcombe, I can tell you there is no place that I ever been more like Salcombe than Nantucket. (Williams, 2011)

Williams' insistence on *global* expansion and a "global" brand – as in keeping with Leonard's notion of a brand *image* for Britain – is telling of how the brand is not located parochially in British society but, overtly, global in scope. This has its aetiology in the national identity crisis of the 1990s. "I first started planning our expansion into the US eight years ago", Williams stated in 2010,

three years after I started Jack Wills in the UK, when my girlfriend (who is now my wife) and I went on a road trip to scout out possible locations. Eventually, we decided to open in Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard first – even though some other retailers might think we're mad to shun New York – because we think the New England locations best suit our preppy, relaxed brand. . . . We choose unusual buildings – our Martha's Vineyard store is an old speakeasy... (Williams, 2010)

The choice of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket is crucial to this period c.1990s. The brand had chosen to locate itself in, significantly, *New England* – that is, the thirteen ex-colonies of the British Empire. Nantucket is an ornamental equivalent to Salcombe (where Jack Wills

began in 1999 (see ch.4)). Jack Wills only chance of success was to embrace *New England*, by which I mean both the cultural landscape of British cultural-politics of the 1990s and also the geographic landscape of the ex-colonies in America. Pursing this line of argument I suggest below that ‘understanding Englishness from an international perspective’ was not so much geared toward *selling* to foreigners, it was reforming a gentry identity for the twenty-first global realities.

### 3.3 Preppy Pastiche

The 1990s was one of growing Americanisation seeing the influx of consumer products and the telecommunications developments. The national identity crisis of the 1990s found both academic and popular discourse dwelled upon commercialism and crucial to this was the Americanisation thesis (e.g. Billig, 1995; Aslet, 1997; Paxman, 1999; Fox, 2004:13-15). In the 1990s, this was expressed in the discourse of fear that American culture would take over the British cultural landscape. Indeed, “Americanisation” became the reactionary core at the heart of ‘Cool Britannia’. The culture of Cool Britannia – BritPop, notably – was as much a consumerised vision of national identity as Americanisation brought Britain new cultural flows of music, cinema and clothing styles. Jack Wills latched onto this proliferation of American culture, but it did so in a way to – paradoxically – reassert its British identity. Jack Wills arose during a period of vast commercialisation in Britain and it drew upon Americanisation in a manner that would adequately be able to reassert its British identity.

In the late 1980s/1990s, the world of upper-class sartorial suppliers was marked by a reactionary strand, a notably conservative critique of the general vapidness of what they saw in the Americanisation of society. A notable example being Clive Aslet’s *Anyone for England* (1997). As the editor of *Country Life*, Aslet bemoaned the rapid impact of American culture on British elite values. As Goodrum put it,

...the spectre of Americanization was couched in distinctly class-related terms, with aristocratic good taste being threatened by a 'levelling down process' ...which it was feared, would erode fundamental British values to do with morality and standards, as well as the boundaries between social classes.  
(Goodrum, 2005:130)

That being the case, the internal class hierarchies of the British could be re-imagined and salvaged if they embraced an *Americanised* version of their own social hierarchy or, more evocatively put, developed an *ornamental* strategy to salvaging their internal class hierarchy by basing their aesthetic on those 'equivalent' social groups overseas. America may have represented vapid consumerism that would erode the British conservative ideals but Jack Wills drew upon the American preppies of the Ivy Leagues as an *ornamentally equivalent* social group for their own reformation.

David Cannadine's *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (2002) argues that the British colonies relied upon analogies of hierarchies as strategies of colonial settlement:

... the English concluded that North American society closely resembled their own: a carefully graded hierarchy of status, extending in a seamless web from chiefs and princes at the top to less wealthy figures at the bottom. Moreover, these two essentially hierarchical societies were [page break] seen as co-existing, not in a relationship of (English) superiority and (North American) inferiority, but a relationship of equivalence and similarity: princes in one society were the analogues to

princes in the another, and so on and so on, all the way down  
these two parallel social ladder (Cannadine, 2002:6-8)

Updated to the 1990s-2000s, the ornamental equivalents of British Sloane's to American Preppies meant they could embrace their aesthetics, culturally. They could swap Oxbridge blues for Ivy League crimson and gold if only they were inclined to salvage their own internalised social distinction by matching it with an out-sourced aesthetic. In the era of Brand-Name Britain, the generation of Sloane's could not adopt the same methods of social distinction. In order to reassert their identity, they turned to the American preppies for a way to reimagine themselves in manner that draws upon similar methods of social distinction. In the mid-1990s the brands of gentry Britain were dubbed anachronistic and steeped in a romantic nostalgia of Empire: Burberry, Mulberry, Paul Smith, all sold antiquated popular Empire images to 'foreigners' (Goodrum, 2003; 2005). In America, the brands of the preppies (J. Crew, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, etc.) sell much the same romanticised image minus the imperial overtones. The values of traditionalism inherent in J. Crew, for instance, could be matched by Burberry and the polo aesthetic of Ralph Lauren could be found in Hackett. The ex-colony and nation founded on commerce, America, provided the means for "Jack Wills" to embrace the aesthetic of preppy so as to retrieve their plausibility in the contemporary era but, in doing so, had to make exceptions to this rule. Jack Wills had to reassert its British-ness in the face of a new style. The obvious comparison between Jack Wills and Abercrombie & Fitch is often cited and Williams' words on the parallel are telling of a need to reassert Britishness: "There is some overlap in product mix", admits Williams, but ultimately he states that Abercrombie & Fitch are "fundamentally ... a mass market, mall-based US brand built on Americana. We are explicitly an upmarket, niche British heritage brand." (in Goodman, 2009) Indeed, Abercrombie & Fitch is not at all preppy; it embraces a more "All American", "Star of the Football team", "Quarter Back hero" (as American

phrases that are distinctly un-aristocratic as they appeal to heroism of earned fame and patriotism, not inherited station and aristocratic ease). For Williams, embracing the free-market ideology to ‘sell a look’, meant Jack Wills had to protest how preppy-ness is additionally inherently British:

like everything we do it [“Jack Wills”] plays off tensions – old versus new, heritage versus contemporary, formal versus casual. The cool British preppy kid puts his or her look together in a slightly more eclectic way than the slightly more polished American preppy kid. He or she mixes heritage with contemporary, tweed with high-tops, riding coats with graphic tee’s and skinny jeans. It’s all styled together to make a very cool, very hip, very authentic British look. (Williams, 2011)

Jack Wills, it seems, wants to reclaim their precedence for ‘prep’. For as “Jack Wills” is spoken of here as standing between two worlds – the old and new, the heritage and contemporary – it is “Janus-faced, it looks backward and forwards in time.” (Samuel, 1994:83) The Janus-face is not only a heritage aesthetic mixed with contemporary preppy. Jack Wills looks forward to the America’s as their aesthetic leader but backwards to Britain as the basis for its origins. This is found in the cultural history of “preppy” itself.

In the 1980s, two years before *The Official Sloane Ranger Handbook* (York & Barr, 1982) the American publishers Workman realised *The Official Preppy Handbook* (Birnbach, 1980). Unlike the British equivalent, the American preppy handbook did not look backward in time for the origins of their social group’s values. Instead they looked toward the British. *Preppy* is suggested to rest, culturally, upon the British upper echelons:

*Anglophilia*: The British have a lot to answer for – Shetland sweaters, Harris tweeds, Burberrys, tartan, regimental ties ... primary colours and brilliant pastels are worn by men and women alike, in preposterous combinations. In some subcultures, hot pink might be considered a little peculiar; preppies take it for granted. (Birnbach, 1980:122)

American preppies adopted a style that has its origins in a British style because of a crucial aspect of their social group. Preppies are, principally, an aspirational group. They are a social group based upon the accumulation of wealth, of earned fortune. We see this in how Birnbach undertook the same sort of social commentary as York & Barr (1982). But with the *Preppy Handbook* there was a crucial difference. Unlike York & Barr who wrote their *Handbook* with a clear eye to their readers being very much aware of the subtleties of the commentary, at the heart of Birnbach's *Preppy Handbook* is an aspirational, lifestyle side:

In a true democracy anyone can be upper-class and live in Connecticut. It's only fair. ...stop thinking you're a lost cause simply because you've never been to either the Harvard-Yale game or Martha's Vineyard ... Preppies don't have to be rich, Caucasian, frequenters of Bermuda or ace tennis players. But they do have to read this book ...It's the preferred self-help. It's key. (Birnbach, 1980:11)

To British eyes, the suggestion that upper class is a matter of aspiration and achievement is anathema to a society based on a monarchy and aristocracy defined by blood and birth. What distinguishes the Americans is their ethos of the 'American Dream'. Underlying the 'rag to riches' founding myth of their society is a concern with one's persona, i.e. how they appear to



others. Notably, this status transformation is the legitimating core of American ideology. The *Preppy Handbook* is less a piece of anthropological description, as York & Barr (1982) attempt to make out; instead it is, quite simply, a handbook or ‘how to guide’. It details how one might aspire to social distinction based upon adequately constructing a persona or character type in line with the aesthetic ‘preppy’ and its accompanying lifestyle. This can be witnessed in many American novels and films, but one example stands out, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* (2011). In this novel, Fitzgerald’s social climber Amory Blaine attempts entry into the elite world of Ivy League clubs and moneyed circles. What he notices is that this is a highly performative effort. It requires combining an ethic to life alongside cultivating one’s persona through their outward appearance:

...he had appeared; shy but inwardly glowing, in his first long trousers, set off by a purple accordion tie and a ‘Belmont’ collar with the edges unassailably meeting, purple socks, and a handkerchief with a purple border peeping through from his breast pocket. But more than that he had formulated his first philosophy, a code to live by, which, as near as it can be named, was a sort of aristocratic egoism (2011:54-55)

Crucially, *Preppy* revolves around an ideology of open access if the “look” is adequately portrayed. The items are key to proof of self-made success, not the precedent of tradition or custom on enduring social position as *Sloane Rangers* outlined. In fact, we could say that the conservative ideals of *Sloane Rangers* are founded as *liberal* ideals of achievement. This is an upper-class that is aesthetically conceived as upper through self-made effort. Why American preppies’ appeal to Anglophilia (and its attempts to cultivate a persona) can be traced back to their society’s concern with wealth creation and a problem it leads to. The preppy handbook is a lifestyle guide to assisting with a question, ‘what to do with my

wealth?’ or ‘how can I use my wealth to create social distinction?’ Ironically Americans turned to the British upper-classes as models for social distinction. Without an aristocracy to speak of, they turned to their old colonial masters as a way to imagine themselves as an upper-class not based upon fortune but rather ascription.

One may notice that with respect to Jack Wills, the adoption of a commercial, preppy look is not only fitting for the cultural climate adverse to the old conservative vision of British society around the 1990s-2000s, but also fitting for the attempt to appeal to a social group who desire the same elite social station. Founded upon opposed principles of status legitimacy, the Sloane’s and Preppies have come to form a symbiotic exchange in which the opposition is utilised to resolve their contradictions. From this I went to suggest some cultural parallels between the wealthy New England communities and the generation of Sloane’s in British society that have adopted Jack Wills’ preppy attire [Figs 8-11] by turning inward and looking at the cultural genealogy of the social groups and their ‘local habitus’ (as Appadurai (*op. cit.*) called it). The preppy look was a viable option in commercialisation of British society, but underlying the preppy look is a deeper cultural, genealogical link.



Figure 8 Olly Finding, Jack Wills's head of marketing. source:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lieqr0OWi4>.



Figure 9 Above: Ralph in his JW pink V-neck in C4 sit-com *Fresh Meat*; Below: 'The Stoics' (ex-Stowe public school boys) in their Jack Wills attire on *Fresh Meat*. C4 comedy-drama (stills from episodes aired 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012 (above) 28th September, 2011 (below))

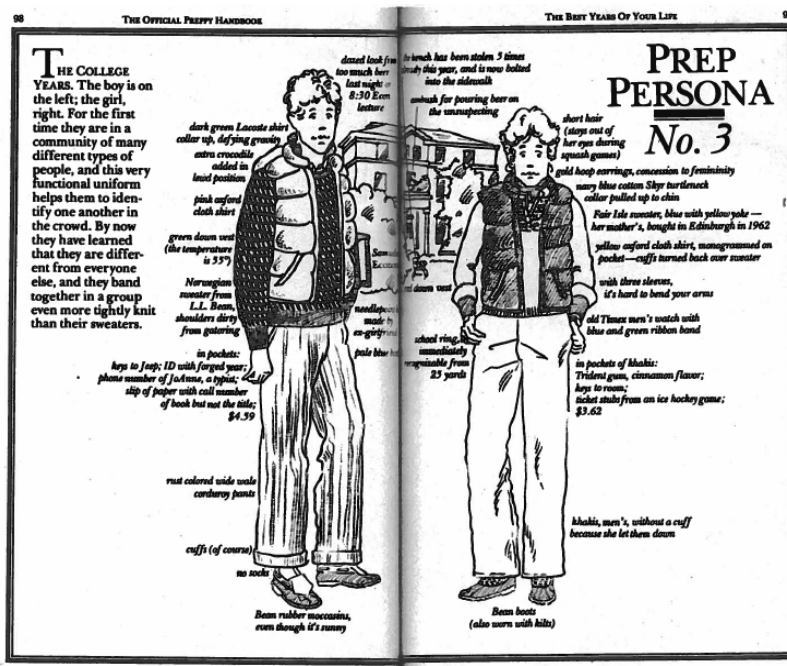


Figure 10 College years - from the Official Preppy Handbook (1980).



Figure 11 American preppies watch the Harvard-Yale game, Jack Wills Varsity Polo 2012

(authors photo)

## Part Two: Cultural genealogy

### 3.4 American ‘Old Money’ and the British ‘Gentry’

The central similarity between Jack Wills’ gentry group and the American wealthy preppies is this – they need something, above and beyond their affluence, to stand for their elite social station. Between the American preppies and Jack Wills’ gentry group, is a common concern to express group solidarity by an appeal to lineage and ancestry.

Our British ‘gentry group’ attempt acceptance through imitation lineage as they are encompassed by the aristocracy. Aristocratic social pedigree rests upon a series of ancestors who precede them and aspirants (gentry) attempt their social acceptance by hints at lineage – notably for us, the case of Peter Williams naming Jack Wills after his grandfather being itself a claim to patronymic distinction in a gentrified world. With the Americans, on the other

hand, their social aspirants attempt something similar. However, as they are not encompassed by an aristocratic group that stand above them on the social ladder, they attempt their lineage solely through commercial ventures. Elizabeth Hirschman (1990) has argued that American old money lineage revolves around a concern for what she calls 'secular immortality'. Whereas British ancestor worship arises through the aristocratic basis for elite identity, Hirschman suggests the impulse to lineage creation for American grand capitalists comes from the problem of capitalist accumulation. Once they've become extraordinarily wealthy, eventually they reach an impasse and have "nowhere left to rise." (Hirschman, 1990:33) With this, they begin instead not projects at money making but use their money to make a "name" for themselves:

the lower-upper and upper-middle ... *desire to found a family name, establish a socially prominent lineage, and embark on a socially appropriate pattern of consumption* ... the predominant ideological thrust of consumers in the upper middle and lower-upper classes is not toward merely accumulating wealth per se, but rather toward documenting their secular achievements ... by consuming in a particular way (Hirschman, 1990:34, emphasis added)

The use of vast money becomes invested in projects such as buying up real estate, the development of a family crest, the commissioning of charitable projects that emblazon the name as the patron, family portraits and so forth. And, with this, a projection to allow the sons and daughters to live on their family name as if it were a form of patrimony. In British cases, vast wealth may lead to entry into the aristocracy and examples include, most famously, the Rothschild's. With their vast (*vast*) banking fortune, the British branches of the Rothschild family were elevated into the British aristocracy with the granting of a baronage

in the 1800s and the title remains today. In contrast to the British case of capitalist achievement, the Americans have no aristocracy to be accepted into so, as consolation, make their commercial projects stand in for lineage with what they build: Hilton (hotels), Trump (resorts), Sloane (cars), Vanderbilt (railroads), Rockefeller (oil and banking). Imitation lineage through their fortunes, in the American case, demonstrates a similar process of social elevation that I traced in the previous chapter. Notably the coupling of wealth, achievement and ambition gives rise, in retrospect, to a pseudo-aristocracy. This pseudo-aristocracy of old money families, itself, becomes a means to develop systems of hierarchies and gradations; hierarchy of old and new money. And the “old” in ‘old money’ means: no lineage, no social acceptance. Keeping money is no longer a capitalist venture of accumulation but an attempt to maintain lineage. We may draw a parallel with the gentry here. At the aspirational heart of the British gentry was not its acceptance of lineage as a fact of station but underlying it was a need to maintain it. Survival, we saw, was the project they set for themselves as “only when the money... had been sorted out could attention be paid to questions of gentlemanliness.” (Nicolson, 2011:412) They were *not* a stable class easily maintained over time. As Nicholson put it: “every generation had to re-validate its place in the gentry universe. An ancestry and a coat of arms may have provided a young man with a set of examples; it did not guarantee a continuation of them,” (2011:412) Money, in the long term, remains crucial to the worship of lineage as the socially salient core of elite stature.

What we take from this is the central conceptual device that makes “preppy” as an aesthetic choice for the British *plausible*; the American preppies assert their social distinction in similar ways. Our Jack Wills ‘would be gentry group’ use Americanized and commercialised products in order ironically to re-assert their imagined identity as a new gentry which is nevertheless connected to the traditional English landholding nobility’s social distinction. While American preppy originally (and still today) use their preppy look to assert

a solidarity to the same old, British aristocracy that their society lacks. In this respect, the two cultures complement one another as the social groups adopt their attire for similar methods of group unification. The British so as to maintain an association with their national imaginary in an era that no longer makes viable an old aesthetic and the American's so as to assert the values their commercial society doesn't have. The suggestion made here is that the historical situation can only be illuminated fully in so far as we take into account the sociological facts of how group affiliation appeals to similar ideals, namely patronymic distinction alongside wealth. Commercialism does not in itself become the grounds of why preppy has been adopted for the British gentry group but rather it comes from similar methods in group identification and its cohesion. So what the 'Americanness' in the British preppy look means at the level of the group is not pure and simple commercialisation but an appeal to similar methods of social distinction. If I now pay closer attention to the symbols of elite distinction in Jack Wills branding, this will become evident.

### 3.5 Brand symbols & heraldic insignia

Appadurai's (1996:17) proposition, "if genealogy of cultural forms is about their circulation across regions, the history of these forms is about their on-going domestication into local practice," is being elaborated here. Preppy, as a style, is being embedded in historical processes of globalisation and situated in 'local practices' of branding for specific social groups. But, crucially, the style itself appeals to deeper socio-cultural values, which are elite social distinction manifest in appeals to patronymic figures and symbols standing for social station and rank. What the rest of the chapter argues is that the shared historical background and cultural values of the American preppies and the British (once Sloane's now) new 'gentry' is demonstrated by the fact that their brand's appeal to heraldic insignia for its brand-image. Heraldry, I suggest, provides the deeper socio-cultural values of patronymic



inheritance and elite rank for it is concerned with providing personages with a patronymic name whose symbols identify this person as a descendant of said name. For our purposes, this patronymic figure is the brand-name Jack Wills as this name explicitly outfits the targeted gentry group, either British Oxbridge and public school elites or American old-moneyed Ivy League prep-school elites.

A glance around the British and American brands that seek association with gentry lifestyle or old money distinction demonstrates use of specifically heraldic insignia. They make use of shields, e.g. British Hackett's H shield or American Tommy Hilfiger's armorial-like colour scheme (whose colours of red, white and blue are the colours of the British national *and* American flag). In Britain especially, brand's use animals that appear on coats of arms and depict them in what heraldry experts call 'attitudes', e.g. Jack Wills [pheasant vigilant], Joules [hare sejant], Aubin & Wills [fox passant guardant], Thomas Pink [fox sejant sinister]. What I am suggesting here is that behind the heraldic symbols use in branding is an appeal to the same purposes that herald's sought for their clients, that is, claims to elite social station.

Heralds are not fully sure on when or why heraldry was instituted and the most popular and prevalent theory is its origins in war or *mêlée* tournaments (Keen, 1984). Yet, over time, this has declined in significance and little of the supposed original purpose remains. Heraldry writer Arthur Charles Fox-Davies (1969 [1909]) suggests that heraldry should be viewed as part of a universal human phenomenon – vanity: “the son would naturally take pride in upholding the fame which had clustered round the pictured signs and emblems under which his father had warred.” (Fox-Davies, 1969:17) For the purposes of my argument, I suggest that this 'vanity' ideal is also present in Jack Wills' branding, satisfying an appeal to preppy as founded less upon the ephemera of commercialisation but rather *using*

commercial branding to design clothing and brand-imagery adequate and appropriate for a gentry group (either American (old money) preppy or British upper-middle class ((gentry)). That is, heraldic symbols are draw upon because, to those persons the product appeals to, they are understood and seen as connecting them to a world that is desirable, idealised and meaningful to their conduct and life. This is notable in the patronage supplied to the polo societies of Oxbridge and the Ivy League as these societies, themselves, are symbolised by heraldic insignia. What I will argue here is that Jack Wills' patronage of these university societies and seasonal pursuits not only put's in places imitation heraldry symbols but it also makes use of them to give rise to notions of a form of coat of arms inheritance with attendant problems of vanity and elite distinction. I begin with an interview with the captain of the Oxford Polo society so as to illustrate this claim.



Figure 12 Top left - Joules; Top right - Thomas Pink; Bottom left - Jack Wills; Bottom right - Aubin & Wills (all taken from google images)



Figure 13 Hackett logo - (from google images)

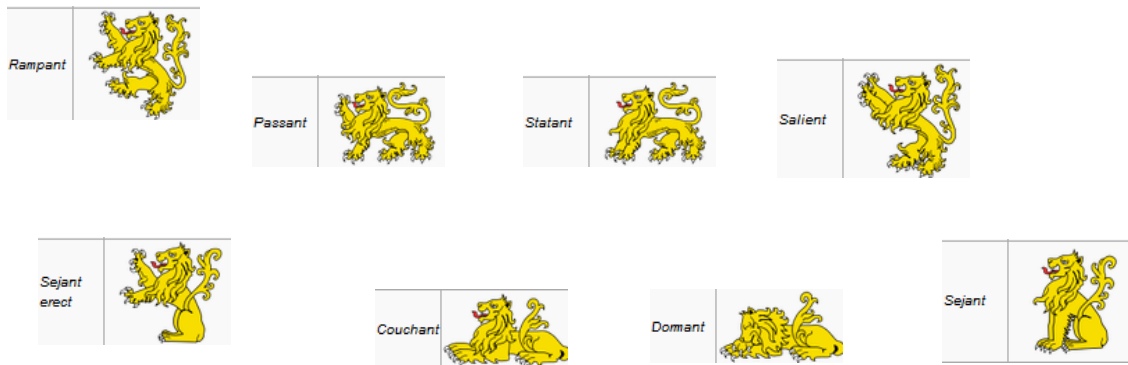


Figure 14 Heraldic 'attitudes' in lion charges – [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion\\_\(heraldry\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion_(heraldry))



Figure 15 House coats of arms for Jack Wills' patroned polo societies: from top left to bottom right, Eton, Harrow, Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard & Yale (scanned from Jack Wills Varsity Polo program)



Figure 16 Oxon shield / JW shield / Cantab shield (JW Varsity Polo program)

### 3.6 Logo's as inherited arms

Sitting upstairs in the Turl Kitchen, a coffee shop and hang out for Oxford students, Andrew sat in front of me in pink trousers, crossed legged and tapping his foot, showing off his classy brown loafers. I ask him what role Jack Wills plays as patron: “well, they make our stash”, he said picking up his Oxford University Polo Club hoody up from the table. “See, one side it has our logo [the OUPC logo] and then it has theirs [Jack Wills, University Outfitters]. Some of the team don’t like wearing it, because the bad image polo has. But as it’s got our society on it and Varsity is coming up, so I’m trying to wear it more, it’s like advertising for the university. I want as many people to come...” That said, the bad image that Andrew spoke about became clearer as we talked, even more so when his friend, the Etonian Oliver arrived. The bad image arises not only from the stigma of Jack Wills’ as elitist; it is also a problem of polo in Oxford and those associated with OUPC. It is an unwritten rule, I was told, that one shouldn’t be “too Oxford” as a way to say: Oxford’s reputation as the seat of incredibly posh, arcane P.G Wodehouse style England shouldn’t be indulged by the student body as it irritates many and can be deemed affectation. This is a problem, however, for the polo club – a place that attracts this association *par excellence*. “We have two types of people who join our society”, Andrew continued a little later on: “those who say they just really want to play polo, not come to drinks or socials or buy ‘stash’, they just want to play

polo; then we have people who just want to buy the stash and come out on socials”, where socials are night-time drinks or days out. “They just want to have that image” continued Andrew. The image of the OUPC logo, along with the Jack Wills logo, are inseparable thanks to Jack Wills’ patronage placing of both on the club’s member clothing (known as ‘stash’). Yet, as we continued to speak in the Kings Arms pub, this talk of the ‘bad image’ continued along the lines that what was slightly more abhorrent to the public is Jack Wills. “If I bought a shirt from Ede & Ravenscroft”, an elite British shirt maker, dating back to the seventeenth century when they were gown makers for Oxford graduation ceremonies, situated a few doors down from Jack Wills in Oxford, “people wouldn’t notice or care, but if I bought a similar shirt from Jack Wills, I’m a dick – just because it’s got their logo on it.” Oliver laughed at Andrew – remarking how he does have the attributes of the stereotype, telling me of a tale about Andrew attending a wedding reception that previous weekend in yellow trousers and tweed. Andrew defened himself: “but that’s my style. I couldn’t say anything about a ‘chav’, like ‘oh he looks shit’ but if people see me, I’m an elitst toff.” as he put his hands up in perplexion.

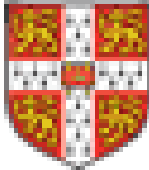



Given the account Andrew has supplied, my time with Cambridge suggested similar. Attending a Cambridge-Exeter match, Kate from Exeter told me: “They don’t want the day [Varsity Polo] to be about polo! They just want the name Cambridge and Oxford; they don’t want a good polo match. The thing about Jack Wills is they’re into the image, not the sport.” Speaking, later on, to an Old Etonian on the Exeter polo team I asked if this was the same when he was at Eton: “that sounds about right” he succinctly put it. Andrew voiced similar concerns, we saw, and pointed out many persons who attend Oxford’s polo society don’t attend these league matches but will attend the Jack Wills Varsity Polo in the summer, reason being, Andrew ventured: “there’s no one filming it, no pictures to be posted on facebook with a pink and purple bag on your arm.” That is, these persons are driven by a desire for the logo.

Indeed, after the 2012 Varsity, I frequented another Cambridge match in the dead of winter. The reaction was, as my informant Nick put it: “Guard’s don’t take us seriously; they think it’s more about Jack Wills.” (fieldnotes) Over and above the ostensibly prestigious use of Guards, the day is exalting the brand-name and thereby alienating the Oxbridge clubs from their desire to be recognised as worthy of polo prestige and instead are relegated as being conduits of brand-name heraldic insignia: a day of pink and purple Jack Wills that draws upon Oxbridge blues, Eton-Harrow blue and red as well as Harvard and Yale crimson and gold (respectively).

What I wish to point out from this is not so much why these concerns are voiced but demonstrate that the history of heraldic-based, elite distinction is being elaborated in local practices. Using polo societies as the basis for the of elite social distinction for *both* the brand name (Jack Wills) and the personages of the club (Oxbridge or Ivy League), the use of heraldic insignia is being employed for two purposes at once. The Jack Wills logo stands on their shirts as their patron; the polo club logos stand on their shirts as their membership to a university body and established club. Two houses stand for different things: Oxbridge clubs as honours for sports and Jack Wills as commercial body. But these two distinct rationales for assigning logos overlap – on the one hand, Jack Wills assigns its logo to the club as a way to achieve recognition for their role in financial assistance but also establish the right association for its branded products sold in its stores. Yet on the other, it attempts to establish itself as literal outfitter for the club’s members by supplying distinctive, exclusive clothing that is granted upon membership. Furthermore, those who play for Varsity at Oxford or Cambridge and earn “blues” (sporting distinction) are allocated entry into, additionally, the Hawks Club (Cambridge) or St. Vincent’s (Oxford) which Jack Wills also patrons and outfits with exclusive blazers with their own Jack Wills logo. The two logos of, on the one side, university club or society and, on the other, Jack Wills, have two purposes that are, in part,

mutually exclusive but are overlapping as they mix branding with heraldry, that is, marketable goods with the granting of armories. As Table 2 demonstrates, the clubs and university societies are acting as heralds as they supply their members with heraldic inspired insignia but Jack Wills *also* grants these same heraldic insignia despite being, ostensibly, a brand name commodity. Instead with Jack Wills’ role as “patron of the arts” (Mazzarella, 2003b:55) it also becomes the patron of these persons; it has a vested interest in their social circles: in using Varsity to bring together the people intimately associated with the Oxbridge club members.

Table 2: Elite club and their heraldic style (‘prerogative’) and logo (‘charge’)

Elite club	Prerogative / ‘stylistic attitude’	Charge /Logo
Cambridge university	Coat of Arms (Four Lions Passant)	
Cambridge Polo	Lion Passant	
Hawks Club	Hawk-Volant	
Jack Wills patronage	Pheasant Vigilant	

In being a patron, the Jack Wills logo is inherited to those who enter and those who inherit these logos are persons who also sustain elite networks through these sporting practices, linking the university’s polo societies together and making use of the same material insignia that bind the British aristocracy, hence its intimation of both elite image and stigma.

The point is that the clubs are using symbols for a purpose more akin to heraldry, to link persons together in a lineage of Oxbridge polo club members and Hawks or St. Vincent's members, whereas the Jack Wills brand to attempt solvency for their brand image but it also puts in place the means to sustain the social group in question. Every year, new persons enter Oxbridge clubs and as such inherit the symbols of membership; indeed, with the use of Old Boy games and the fact that members of Hawks or St. Vincent's are life-members, they become lasting symbols of identity and shared life-biographies. Jack Wills marshals itself onto this process. The use of a brand logo as imitating a heraldic charges is a masterful piece of aesthetic monopolisation of the life-world so that the 'brand-image' of its product and persons ('customer') become merged with the function that they enact to forge a "lineage" of 'Jack Wills' persons who *inherit their wealth, which in this case is through a surrogate form hereditary privilege, so as to naturalise their social position.*



Figure 17 Jack Wills Varsity Blazers

from Varsity Blazers | Collaborations. <http://vimeo.com/37189897>



### 3.7 Colours and their mythology

The colours of Jack Wills are not only based on heraldic colour schemes but they also follow their method of colouring, as well as being the colours that are recognised and, indeed, become an obligatory aspect of dress during seasonal activities. Heraldic colours are limited in their range (red, blue, black, green, purple/maroon, gold, silver) and are employed by the term “proper”, which means that a shield may be divided ‘per bend’ or ‘per pale’ (left or right, respectively) and colours may not overlap or blur (Fox-Davies, 1969; Woods-Woollaston, 1960). This is an institutional device to ‘differentiate’ and ‘marshal’ armories, which is the way heralds make coats of arms different to existing arms but also use graphic ways to bring arms together (marshal) so as to incorporate coats of arms inherited through dynastic marriages or succession of a title to a lineage previously distinct. Jack Wills imitates this; they marshal the use of heraldry onto their branded clothes. To visualise this with Jack Wills clothing, the images below demonstrate the selection of primary colours and the motifs of stripes to demonstrate what heraldry originally instituted in British elite circles on coats of arms: the horizontal stripe and the block choice of two or more colours follows the way heraldry limits colour choices and makes armories different to others but unifies each different arm by a common style. Each piece of Jack Wills clothing is different but they form a ‘set’ or ‘whole’ by being based upon a common way of designing them (indeed, Jack Wills marshal *all* elite colours in its branded product).<sup>14</sup> To make them different but unified, heraldry employs technical terms to demonstrate a proper way to design shields. One finds heraldic coats are often described in terms that sound incomprehensible to the modern ear, e.g.

“Parted per fess, argent and gules, with pheasant vigilant”

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<sup>14</sup> See Alfred Gell’s theory style in *Art and Agency* (1998:155ff).

Outside of this esoteric terminology, however, is an easy description. Translated it means, “parted diagonally, white and red with a pheasant standing sideways with a raised leg.” It is a description of the Jack Wills red and white, horizontal strip with the pheasant logo in Fig. 18.








Figure 18 Jack Wills stripped shirts - imitates the colour rules of heraldry

The heraldry way of designing the clothes is an aesthetic device that is recognised as meaningfully signifiant to the core demograhpic of Jack Wills customer and the colours and their way of being employed act as a collective representation. Colours are only meaningful when they are employed to activate social meanings significant to the group (see, Gell, 1975:310; Tambiah, 1968:194). As such, Fine et. al. (1998) argue “individuals situated in various social segments act as “color entrepreneurs,” actively pushing for particular interpretations and images of color, creating consensual meanings from cultural possibilities.” (Fine et. al., 1998:452). Jack Wills push for interpretations but they are not so much colour entrepreneurs in an innovative way: “We’re picking colours and fabrics” says Peter Williams of the Fox Brothers & Co flannel that makes the Hawks Clubs blazer’s, “from swatch books, the original swatch books, which the salesmen from these mills carried round London from the 1780s. Just absolutely exquisite and they came within ‘this’ close from disappearing forever.” (Williams, 2011) Jack Wills draw, then, upon a series of colours for their clothes that are replete with a mythology in the instutionalisation of elite group membership. Colour

becomes, in this way, a means to bridge past and present members of elite groups as colour itself becomes a constant source of identity despite individual members passing through and out of the group. As Table 3 demonstrates, Jack Wills clothing mirrors the heraldic colour schemes of the public school's 'house-colours'. The mimicry of colour schemes and their stylistic employment allows us to outline how these colours intimate cultural belonging just as much as heraldic insignia. We shall go into the history of these colour schemes to demonstrate how they resonate with the present.

Table 3: Clarendon school colours and Jack Wills clothes

“Clarendon” Schools	School Colours	Jack Wills items with same colour scheme (c. 2010)  (one example of each)
Eton	Blue	Forstal Rugby
Winchester	Blue, Brown, Red	Nye Nevis Shirt (partial match)
Westminster	Pink	Hinckley Oxford Shirt
Charterhouse	Pink, Blue, Maroon	Ibberton Stripped Rugby
St. Paul's	Black, 	Castleton Rugby
Merchant Taylors	Black, 	<i>Castleton Rugby</i>
Harrow	Blue, 	Yateley Rugby
Rugby	Blue,  , Green	Crakehill Rugby
Shrewsbury	Blue, 	Forstry Rugby

### 3.7.1 The mythology of public school colours

On seasonal occasions, the adoption of colours that are often lambasted by the general public become an almost obligatory form of dress. 'Dress codes' don't formally exist at Jack Wills events and it is taken on custom of 'knowing the code' that one finds the proper or appropriate attire. Other seasonal events require dress codes – Royal Ascot or Henley Regatta, for example – but with Jack Wills it relies upon custom. The eccentric colour schemes – colourful trousers, striped shirts; a preppy uniform, if you will – is bound up with mythology and historically founded customs. These customs have their origin in the public school history of colour formation for their respective houses and one can trace this to the origin of games (sports) at the public schools.



Figure 19 'Look at my red trousers' - Jack Wills Varsity Polo, June 2012 (photo by author)



Figure 20 Cordings/Jack Wills "dandy coloured cords" - from: [www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com)



Figure 21 Cambridge Hawks Club, c. 2012:

<http://lookatmyfuckingredtrousers.blogspot.co.uk/>



Figure 22 Etonian leads his horse out onto Guards Polo club for the Varsity Match, 2012

(source: [www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com))

School colours, a fact gleamed through ‘old boy’ histories (Brinsley-Richards, 1883; Webster, 1937) and sociological accounts of the ‘colour’-system (Wakeford, 1969), tend to have an almost heraldic significance. They can be seen as would-be battle field achievements of honourific distinction derived from sports. Sporting honours come to stand in for the battlefield of honour and tend to develop into school mythology that persons become steeped within. Yet this history is only relevant in so far it bears upon the present. This is certainly the case, for in Fig. 22 we see a young Etonian leading his horse out onto the pitch for the Varsity match in his match wear – white jeans and Eton blue shirt. The polo attire has its origins with the institutionalisation of sporting colours c. 1860s and feeds into the present in ritual dress at the polo, not just at Varsity but at every game.

This dress of ‘blue shirt and white chino’ is the standard Eton sporting attire as well as the standard Cambridge attire, with white chinos being standard trouser dress for polo in

general. In British society the “white trouser” has become synonymous with the elite circles of Oxbridge sportsman and also provincial university athletic union’s mirror this dress with their blue button-up shirts and chinos. The garb of white chinos and blue shirts has ritual significance to *enact* and *index* its history. James Brinsley-Richards’ *Seven Years at Eton* (1883) tells the origin story of ‘Eton blue’ in 1860, which saw the institutionalisation of formal sporting attire: “In that year, a parti-colour scarlet and Eton blue shirt with a pork-pie cap were adopted for the Field Eleven. In the following year, the pork-pie was suspended by a cap of the ordinary shape, and white flannel trousers with scarlet and light blue stripes were added to the costume. The Wall Eleven took a cap and shirt, dark blue and red bands.” (1883:228) According to F. A. M. Webster (1937:124), the history of school colours is too convoluted to be dealt with in much detail. What he goes on to discuss is certain mythologies, namely those aspects which have endured and are retold to present day students as part of motivation to achievement and forging a sense of tradition and descent from former students. Colours in the public school tradition have the quality of acting as a source of meritocratic heraldry where ‘colours’ rewarded on achievement (Wakeford, 1969:125). But, once achieved, it tends to naturalise the honorific qualities. Such is the power of getting ‘colours’ that F. A. M. Webster recounts the exploits of Richard Webster (1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Alverstone) who became Lord Chief Justice *as if* his subsequent career achievements resulted from his awards of colours at Charterhouse and Cambridge, or how this simply proves him destined for great things: “it is in memory of him that Alverstone colours were instituted at Cambridge ...” (Webster, 1937:67).

This aspect of colour as spoils of the sporting field as also naturalising the honorific distinction of persons comes out most saliently when we move away from white and blue and move onto pink. Pink in Jack Wills’ attire is often a key colour choice and is key to their signature logo of pink and purple. Indeed, Pink has similar status to that of blue-shirts and

white chinos in British society; a “pink shirt” on a man of elite stature is taken to be a sign of elite masculinity and belonging to this restricted circle (over the camp effete it signals to others not included in this circle). Yet this also allows pink to have a mythic history which plays into the history of blue in Eton-Cambridge. In the house-colours of the Clarendon Nine, pink figures in the colours of Charterhouse (pink, blue and maroon) and Westminster (pink). As noted, the heraldic tradition of differencing and marshalling feeds into the public school tradition and, thus, no school could have overlapping colour schemes at this time due to their institutionalisation being found upon inter-school games.<sup>15</sup> Charterhouse had adopted pink to play cricket in since 1849 and their football elevens wore blue and maroon from 1861 (Webster, 1937:66) so no conflict existed in their playing Eton. But Westminster wore analogous dress to Eton:

Tradition has it that in those days [1800s] Westminster cricketers wore straw hats with light blue ribbons, flannel jackets and white trousers; but, apparently, Eton also favoured light blue and there is a persistent tradition that Westminster rowed Eton for the choice of colour and, upon losing the race, adopted pink. In support of this legend it may be pointed out that Westminster have taken pink for their colours ever since they first sported them in their race against Eton in 1837. ...Nine races, however, were rowed between 1829 and 1847, of which Eton won five and Westminster four. The most memorable was that of 1837. Westminster then finally adopted pink for their colours... (Webster, 1937:345, 356, my parenthesis).

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<sup>15</sup> This is a historical point, for schools today *do* have overlapping colour schemes.



Pink becomes brought into the public school canon of colours. Pink is, then, not mere fancy but a crucial development in the formation of elite colour schemes as acting surrogates to heraldic insignia that passes down a lineage. Eminent rowing club Leander's uses a light pink in its jerseys and notably their iconic "pink hippo" logo is the same pink as Westminster school. This becomes more telling when one points out that Leander's Rowing Club was established by old Westminster pupils. In all, colours – while preppy – have a mythology behind them that establish the brand-image within a gentry framework and borrow the honour upon which these colours rest in the British imagination.

### 3.8 Concluding remark

This chapter has argued that in the wake of historical shifts, in both economy and culture, the British identity manifest in Jack Wills brand-image is bound up with, historically, a coming to terms with commercialism. I have explored how the gentry group have adapted to these processes. By appealing to the American strand of patronymic distinction I have been able to argue that, from a perspective cultural genealogy, this is perfectly fitted to a preppy style being grounded in a desire for ancestry and the rationale of heraldry in branding providing an imitation form of patrimonial inheritance.



### Part Three: Value of the brand name

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Fiduciarity*

#### 4. Introduction

Eponymous products have a central problem. Their name is a claim to two things: on the one hand a series of material products which exist in time and space and, on the other, symbolic qualities which espouse a series of assertions about the social world, namely the social identity, personality, character and life-style that the branded symbols (logos, colours, imagery) suggest about their customer. Brand-name corporations “attempt to link their products with people ...who will perform the brand, imbuing it with the personhood it lacks...” (Newell, 2013:150) Branded goods need to stand as symbols of membership to the group being depicted in either advertising, store displays or catalogues. Elite brands in particular require this and cases of liquidation of elite stature are evident: Burberry, Hackett, Ralph Lauren, for instance, all have suffered from appropriation by non-elites. The intended link corporations seek between persons lives and brand products, others suggest, is always somewhat lacking in efficacy (Newell, 2013; Crăciun, 2012; Lewis, 2010; cf. Baudrillard, 1981; 1994; 1998), especially if the eponymous figure of the brand is fictional (Hopper & Vallance, 2013:300).

The concern of linking persons with products arises from a concern with the *value of the brand*, namely the claim that brand-equity or its ability to be a viable economic entity resides in not only the material quality (durability, efficacy of use, etc.) of its products but their standing for more abstract values, notably social identity and group membership (Beil, 1993; McCracken, 1993; Arvidsson, 2005; 2008; 2013; Mazarella, 2003; Foster, 2005; 2007; 2008). The purported failure of fictional brand-names to link persons-to-products is due to the fact that their ability to conjure up the values and reputation espoused by said products

may lead to assumptions of inauthenticity, illusion and fakery (Newell, 2013); or an inability to take risks and responsibility for the proposed values espoused by products (Hopper & Vallance, 2013). As the goods may appear in disparate locations, the product's reputation, meanings and ability to signify group membership is made contentious as a living figure is not held responsible or no true author of its values exists. The intention of this chapter is to argue that, in the case of Jack Wills, neither the name's fictional status, nor the product placement, is able to be put down to fakery or illusion, nor an inability to commit to responsibility for the product. Through this I will detail how elite-standing is maintained.

This chapter argues that the value of branded goods may be characterised as 'fiduciary value'; because, I will argue, the value of the brand comes from its ability to be credibly embedded within the life-world of those persons for whom the material symbols, i.e. branded goods, act as devices of membership. Fiduciary value is the binding sense of trust invested in the public reception of the brand and the perceived ability of the brand-name to keep the promises it makes for itself; to have a reputation that is synonymous with the claims material symbols give intimation toward. The reputation and promises that eponymous products make is to be a definitive expression of an ethos or style of life (Arvidsson, 2013). Recall that (some) people associate the Wills name with the gentry Wills family of Bristol. For Peter Williams' brand-name Jack Wills, he states: "I always try to remain incognito whenever I am at a Jack Wills event. The brand is about the people who work for us and the people who wear our clothes, *it isn't about me.*" (Williams, 2010 added emphasis) To stay behind the scenes and allow the product to be a symbol of unity to those who work for and adopt the clothes, the brand-name Jack Wills is neither a fictional creation to imitate group values, nor a disavowal of responsibility to the name's reputation. Williams went on to state, "My aspiration is that we [the brand] hide from everybody. It doesn't feel comfortable being in the public domain. We have no interest in the mass." (Williams in

Greene, 2011) Jack Wills' brand ethos is to remain, and stay true to, its core customer and make sure that the brand-name is one that takes its meaning and value from being a direct expression of their social group.

Jack Wills seeks and aims to be synonymous with the social group. The concern for brand-name reputation, ironically, is a concern for the value or equity of the brand; i.e. that it remains profitable. But in the process of seeking out and securing the reputation of an elite premium brand-name existing to outfit the social group and demographic, I will argue here and throughout that it puts into practice social processes that consequently forge a unified elite around such a brand-name. What this chapter demonstrates is that the origins of the Jack Wills brand c.1999 to the present c.2013 is a story that seeks to remain as close to the original conception that the founders Peter Williams and Robert Shaw envisaged. The origins formed the basis for subsequent brand expansion and its way of conducting itself as corporate body. Sociologically, this has consequently led its corporate program to become a composite part of the reproduction. Its marketing ethos has, ironically, led to consolidation of a core-personnel behind the brand that allows for the 'gentry' group to network and sustain itself in light of commercialisation. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to argue that in order to remain valuable and viable, the brand must monopolise a series of enclaves of British society and appropriate key persons to maintain the equity of the brand. Ironically, the group Jack Wills targets has itself come to use commercialisation to consolidate themselves.

To tell this story means I will have to tell the story of 'Jack Wills' origins, wherein it founded its central brand ethos and how this works toward fiduciarity, trust in corporate products. Imitating the manner in which gentry persons have founding myths (Simmel, 1971:212), the name "Jack Wills" requires a founding myth of its own for the social group being coveted. As Zelenzick (1989:267-268) argues, mythology in corporate organisations is

how the actions of corporate founders are translated into founding stories which subsequently become the basis for continued conduct in the present. The mythology of Jack Wills is founded upon its central purpose – maintaining its core-customer (Williams, 2010) – and this is a myth which is found in the life-world of British society writ large, i.e. process of social closure and exclusion. Exclusionary measures are turned into a corporate ethos. The corporate policy to maintain equity of product by way of exclusion of a mass and restriction to a core-elite is how a corporation's "institutional myths are reflections of broader cultural wishes and values." (Zalenzik,1989:273). If we recall that the dialectic of the gentry position in British society is one between aspiration and closure to other parvenus, the use of Jack Wills as commercial vehicle to outfit a core elite group becomes a continuation of this sociological complex.

In order for the brand-name *not* to be associated with those whose person is *not* synonymous with the values espoused by the product, the closure of the group needs to be a process that consolidates a gentry position and maintains certain persons as representatives of this social position. Consolidating a core lifestyle group is not a *fait accompli* – a branded name, neither its image, nor its success is the result a spurious magic in a consumer society (cf. Baudrillard, 1998). My concern is with answer to the question, how are Jack Wills achieving 'fiduciarity'? As I am defining it, fiduciarity is a short hand term for the value of the brand and it refers to it being able to create trust in persons ('consumers') that it *keeps its promises*, i.e. *is seen to outfit a gentry, is fabulously British, is a university outfitter* and can maintain this ideal in the imaginations of persons. Like a fiduciary person who holds something in trust for another, so too is the brand a fiduciary entity as it holds these notions intact for a public and is concerned with maintaining sentiments of worth attributed to the branded commodities. Fiduciary value, I will argue, rests upon a series of social processes

Max Weber called ‘monopolisations’, i.e. appropriations of social spheres which allows the abstract term ‘fiduciarity’ to be applied to the goods sold.

#### 4.1. Fiduciarity: monopolisation of the life-world

The Jack Wills brand seeks to monopolise the style of life its commodities are contextualised within. The context into which Jack Wills fits within is ‘the Season’ that their core-customers or ideal personalities engage in. Alongside the seasonal dispensing of clothes in stores each winter, autumn, spring and summer there exists a series of seasonal activities in which Jack Wills makes their presence known, notably these are summer holidays in British seaside town (Rock, Salcombe, Abersoch, Aldeburgh, Burnhman Market), the alpine skiing trip alongside the British Universities Snowsports Council (BUSC) which the Jack Wills Seasonnaires co-hosts and, finally, the Jack Wills Varsity Polo (originally Varsity Polo c.1879). Through these events the central social values of the Jack Wills’ target group are made manifest. Notably, these pursuits are honourable and engaged in for their own sake and allow for the central value of *networks* to be coveted and practiced. An intricate network of social personages now under the nom-de-guerre ‘Jack Wills’ people’ arise out these activities. In doing so they forge themselves into a distinctive, exclusive set which recognise their special relationship to one another through their common style of life in ‘the Season’.

Elite contacts and ‘the Season’ go hand in hand. The upper-classes and upper-middle classes have long since been noted for their intricate social network (Bond, 2012; Savage et. al, 2008; Mandler, 2011). Universities are key sites for these to develop: Oxbridge and internally their societies (dining societies, Bullingdon Club (Oxford), The Pitt Club (Cambridge); sport societies, Hawks (Cambridge), St. Vincent’s (Oxford)) for the public school cognoscenti). However, commercialisation and the attack on professions in the 1980s-



1990s threatened these developments (ch.2). As Peter York and Olivia Stewart-Liberty put it in *The Return of the Sloane Ranger* (2007:xx):

NETWORKS: With the death of the Old Boy Network came the death of the Season. The fag-end of the Season went corporate and the Sloane no longer wanted to drive two hours into London to go to Ascot crammed with the common and corporately entertained, only to have to remain sober in order to drive back.

The seasonal activities are sites of conviviality but, also, a connected geography of ritual places to develop one's special relationship to others. Seasonal sites act as sites for monopolisation of status honour par excellence, for honour here is, quite simply, 'knowing one and other'. Nicolson's *The Gentry* pointed toward this as *the* salient theme of the gentry's social coherence throughout time –

The gentry as they appear in their letters in the late Middle Ages are astonishingly like the gentry as they slide on into the twenty-first century. ... if all this sounds like the introductory chat at an upper-middle class dinner party – how did you get here, who do you know, how is Aletheia – that is probably a true impression. At one level, this book is about networking (Nicolson, 2011:xiii)

Networking is crucial to elite consolidation and, as the above cited authors recognise, elite social networks rest upon forms of social closure via sites of conviviality and sociality (and are key entry points for younger members). These sites are threatened by 'the Season's' demise into widening commercial enclaves. In the new world, they suggest, the Season is put

in contention by more equal access (Ascot, Henley, for instance, is overrun with non-elite cognoscenti). But one crucial value remains in the new season: “New Sloane Networks demonstrate entirely vital Sloane family values (keeping others out).” (2007:xx) While commercialisation had an adverse effect upon the elite networks, we shall see they have been salvaged through commercial means which, quite explicitly, seek to covet networks of persons. As Jack Wills LTD declined my initial e-mail of request for interviews and discussions of research, they did so as such:

“We have built our business around a desire to *create fabulous products and bespoke experiences for highly specific audiences*. We believe it is this passionate desire to please that keeps us ahead.” (Jack Wills, personal communication. Jan. 2012. emphasis added)

In this correspondence we see a subtle hint toward the coveting of social networks, for bespoke experiences are – as the origin of the term from Savile Row tailoring suggests – ‘been spoken for’. The audience is predefined and the products are predicated upon a metaphor of inalienability from this social network (‘bespoke audience’). For what ‘keeps us (‘Jack Wills’) ahead’ is their ability to covert social contacts in upper-circles.

Peter Williams is fully aware of the significance of this and it is most notable in his famous words which I began the brand’s story with.<sup>16</sup> His commercial ethic of coveting social networks is crucial to how he conflates the authenticity of the brand (part of what I’m calling fiduciarity) with his very definition of a ‘life-style brand’:

... for the world of niche brands, which is the world that I operate in, the conventional advertising model is flawed.

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<sup>16</sup> “If you’re not our target customer we actively want you to have never have heard of us.” (Williams, 2011)

...authenticity and relationship building is absolutely key...

(Williams, 2011)

In the conflation of authenticity and networking, the term fiduciary encapsulates this process as it prioritises the trust that is placed into the brand. As mentioned above, the authenticity of Jack Wills' claims lies in its ability to verify the persons in its gentry group by its outfitting role. By stamping its products with claims of *Fabulously British* or *Outfitters to the Gentry*, actions need to be taken to achieve these notional terms into reality. This is the ultimate goal to claim fiduciarity. Continuing Williams states:

My view is that authentic life-style brands take time to build. By definition they can't be built overnight, the overnight sensation is yesterday's news very quickly. To be authentic you have to be true in everything you do, everything you do, everything that you do. *What your brand stands for has to be absolutely consistent – and to be a lifestyle you can't just be a nod to lifestyle, you have to fit seamlessly into your customers lives...* (Williams, 2011, emphasis added)

The duration of a life-style brand is, in effect, an endurance of its significance to the lives of its core-constituents. What this seamless 'fitting in' consists of is making sure the "Jack Wills" name is continually associated with 'the Season' and adequately secures the passing through of personages via transmission of the goods in *seasonal acquisition*, this being *their proper providence*. Season after season the transfer of goods is also the monopolisation of a life-stage that, over and over, is securing fiduciary value for the commodities. It demonstrates the inalienability of the brand-name commodities as, specifically, dependent upon the social coherence of the elite group. This is the central purpose of fiduciarity. Fiduciary value refers

to the trust and security the brand-name commodities have meaningfully placed upon them as able to register the lifestyle. Not only this, but developing fiduciarity provides the confidence in the products' acceptability in guaranteeing 'the Season' to forge elite networks. "We don't like friends who don't listen to us", says Williams (2011), "why should brand's think they're any different." 'Jack Wills' arises as the name of the group as it becomes a source of providing access and security to the activities to those who bear this name. In the process, the products refer to a distinctive style of life which, in brand-name form, gives the persons engaged in life-style back their social identity in a form that is distinctly concerned with their wishes, and stands for their own purposes.

Jack Wills secures fiduciary value for its products by way of a series of monopolisations. While 'the Season' they engage in (summering, skiing, sporting events etc.) have in varying degrees existed for some time, – notably the Varsity polo (c. 1879), – 'the Season' as it exists at present is the result of key acts of appropriation on the part of the brand. These acts of monopolistic appropriation of life-style activities secure not only the economic interests of the brand-name corporation but, critically, by appropriating the life-style activities as commercial sites for the co-opting of relationships into a network of persons, these persons are now defined as personages epitomised by the nom-de-guerre 'Jack Wills'. Following this, it also means the Jack Wills brand is able locate its presence in this life-world and charge their products up with the meaningful activities that 'the Season' consists in. Only insofar as really existing people in the Season enact a lifestyle appropriate for the goods do the tweeds, polo shirts or floral skirts, achieve marketable status. Fiduciary value arises as these lifestyle networks behind the product make them marketable as commodities to a (–, this is pertinent, – non-seasonally admitted and restricted) 'public'. What Jack Wills puts in place is not just clothes sale but rather life-style whose clothes gain their fiduciary value by way of the professionalised implementation of life-style networks and

maintenance of these social relations. Fiduciarity is a product of professionalization. As Harold Perkins said of the professional expertise that underlines professional activity:

[professions] existed to provide services which were esoteric, evanescent and *fiduciary* – beyond the knowledge of the laity, not ...productive of concrete objects, and thus having to be taken on trust – they could not accept a market valuation of their skill but demanded that society should accept their own valuation... (1989:16, emphasis and brackets added)

Monopolisation of the life-style is an act of convincing the ‘laity’ of the value of the goods as worth the price tag. And the monopoly allows for public-school networks to be extended into the university sphere through a life-style *nom-de-guerre*. For having coveted a series of elite networks, Jack Wills are able to gather prestige in the eyes of those who stand outside the networked life-world but, on top of this, convince them that the material products which ‘exist’ in their ‘proper place’ in these lifestyle activities are also tantamount to access. Brand-name corporations, in effect, act as professional bodies where they, “rightly or wrongly, see themselves above the main economic battle, at once privileged observers and benevolent neutrals since, whichever side wins, they believe that their services will still be necessary and properly rewarded.” (Perkins, 1989:117)

Following this corporate mandate with regard to maintaining life-style specific persons for the commodities on general sale, we may bring attention to Max Weber’s critique of the market as defined by abstract ‘life-chances’ of capital sale. Weber’s observation on status groups was that they exist as a plurality of persons who share a common form of honourable activity (‘lifestyle’). This followed closely his vision of economic activity as a series of monopolisations and appropriations which secure social and economic opportunities

for an exclusive social set. Economic monopoly was predicated upon arbitrary grounds or characteristics and sought to exclude non-honourable groups through their not fitting the arbitrary criteria (Weber, 1968:341-343). By seizing upon the arbitrarily aspect of a ‘the Season’, the Jack Wills brand seeks to appropriate this life-style as the basis of economic opportunities in charging up and coveting fiduciary value for their goods which sell for monies in stores or website sales.<sup>17</sup> While it may seem paradoxical to suggest that a marketable series of named-commodities (i.e. not polo shirts but *Jack Wills’ polo shirts*) gather their fiduciarity this way, it is only because the sheer market position or formal economic facts fail to act as a unifying device for name-corporations *and/or* their mandate to covert social networks. In a pure market position, “anyone could theoretically be included in a group and, similarly, anyone could be excluded. The rise of specifically collective interests – even if these are purely economic – has to be explained by reference to non-economic processes.” (King, 2004:124) Fiduciarity, linked as it is to exclusivity, is sought as the company are acting with the explicit purpose to forge an elite network and, thereby, charge the goods up with an abundance of inalienable sentiments (particularly, that they’re *Outfitters to the Gentry*). The monopolisation of non-economic process of ‘the Season’ allows a coherent status group to be co-opted by an economic activity (but not for economic activity):

Status-group organisation (*which we may widen here to include consciousness of a particular life-style as an occupational group, especially an exclusionary profession*) is the natural form in which economic interests can act socially. This model of stratification, then, cannot be determined by mere relationship to the means of production; the actual form of that

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<sup>17</sup> Weber’s argument stresses the *arbitrary* criteria of status groups and their economic motives which is always ancillary to said arbitrary criteria (e.g. language, race, etc.); here I am stressing a more Durkheimian argument as to life-style being the collective totem that unifies the group and is picked upon to secure Jack Wills’ corporate interests.

relationship is itself *the result of specific social processes*.

(Collins, 1990:129, emphasis added)

The story of ‘Jack Wills’ origins which I shall now plot out, here and subsequently, is an elaboration of the key social processes of monopolisation that require the commodities to be fiduciary, taken on trust and security that their ‘origin’ is the social groups whose ‘proper place’ is with them, not others. A concern with fiduciary value, then, is a concern with monopolisation because “[i]f the appropriated monopolistic opportunities are released for exchange outside the group, thus becoming completely ‘free’ property, the old monopolistic association is doomed.” (Weber, 1968:343)

#### 4.2 The founding mythology and ethos of Jack Wills: 1999-2007

The founding mythology of a corporation is integral to the continued ethos or ‘spirit’ of the corporation when it comes to achieving its goals (Appelbaum, 2000; Zaleznik, 1989). Appelbaum (2000) likens this to a charter vision of myths whereby corporate origins become scriptures handed down from the past to influence present activities by way of imitation. This is the case with Jack Wills. What we shall follow here is the founding story of the company and how this story is repeated from the company’s origins in 1999 up to the present period. The beginning of this founding mythology, as an ethos to follow, starts with Peter Williams’ conception of the brand at the age of 23 and continues as Williams initial founding myth becomes a modelled imitated by those who take over his original actions, notably those persons who become his replacements – The Seasonnaires.

Giving a conference talk at the Women’s Wear Daily CEO summit entitled “Creating an authentic British brand” (2011), Williams (b. 1974) claimed “in order to do that [talk about an authentic British brand] I thought I’d share some anecdotes of the journey I’ve taken over the last twelve years or so.” This journey becomes the charter myth that acts as a

corporate example as it forged the success of future corporate policy. Biography is the basis for authenticity in creating a British ‘gentry’ brand. For Peter Williams, in 1999, he stated –

I was on the downhill slope, aged 23, my idea was a clothing brand that embodied the spirit of being 18 to 21; a brand which oozed the arrogance and naivety of youth, the freedom of sexual adventure, and the belief that you could take over the world. Targeted at an up-market demographic and all the privilege that goes with that... (Williams, 2011)

Giving realisation to this idea, his vision of a privileged world fastened upon Salcombe, a sailing and yachting holidaying town in South Devon. Salcombe perfectly encapsulated this vision of what the Jack Wills brand could be:

“I’d been once in summer and it really just registered something. When I started thinking about a premium brand I dredged up this vision of what I remembered in Salcombe. I thought, ‘What if you could create a brand that could bottle what being at a British university was all about and all the cool amazing stuff that goes with that?’ It’s such a uniquely cherished part of your life. I thought if you could create a brand that epitomised that it would be very compelling.” (Williams, in Greene, 2011)



Salcombe formed the imaginative basis for the origin of Jack Wills. Over and above the product Jack Wills, Williams vision of the brand is distinctly *life-style* and, moreover, part of the gentry life-style Season. The university life-style was not to be located precisely in universities *per se* but rather in the holidaying resorts that seasonally attract certain individuals of the ‘premium’ quality that Jack Wills sought to encapsulate. The rationale for this, one finds from Williams himself, is from biography. Williams (in Greene, 2011) states the demographic and localities were chosen “for the person who has an aspirational response to that 18-to-21 British university thing.” The aspirational response to the British university life-stage refers less to the campus one attends but rather the seasonal aspects, notably Salcombe being a place attended *en petit masse* by ex-public-school university students during the height of the summer months (June-August). Williams’s aspirational reference is, in fact, an aspect of his own experience. Educated at King Edwards School (Birmingham), a second-tier public school, at age 18 Williams was set for high expectations. In a school news article that summarises Williams’ talk given in 2013 to current KES students about his rise to success, the report reads:

Leaving KES in 1992, Williams was both the rugby and school captain, and the youngest of three brothers. He studied Economics, Maths, Geography and General Studies at A-level, and had an offer from Cambridge to do Geography if he achieved the required grades. He recalls going into school to collect his results that would determine his future, and before he had even opened his envelope, one of the chief masters told him that he was the first school captain not to be going to an Oxbridge university. Instead, he took a gap year and travelled to America where he joined a school in Connecticut, he swiftly

realised that this was not something he wanted to do, to finish school, and then return was not his idea of progressing with his life. Attending the school in Connecticut for one term, Williams then ‘hoboed’ around America trying to do something with his gap year. The next year he attended University College London where he studied Economics.<sup>18</sup>

As school-captain and soon-to-be Oxbridge entrant, Williams was set for a journey into the spheres of well-connected Oxbridge elite but failing to do this, this journey was cut off from him. Going away to a Connecticut university and travelling around New England, he moved into economics. This biographical setback would have left a formative influence in his aspirations. And setting up a preppy brand based around exclusive life-style was the result. Holidaying in Salcombe and spending time in Connecticut forged the imaginative vision of Jack Wills as a brand associated with key lifestyle seasonal resorts. Salcombe is an exclusive, high end seaside town in Britain and Connecticut, which also sees its university population holiday in exclusive gated communities, that of Nantucket Island and Martha’s Vineyard on the coast of Massachusetts Bay.

Salcombe exists primarily as a hub of activity during the summer months as it attracts sailing and yachting holiday makers. This life-style activity and those associated with high-end, expensive pursuits has made Salcombe an especially prominent destination for second-home ownership and led to high rent rates during the seasonal period. Homes are on the market for around £1/2 million and rent reach £12,000 p/w (*Charles Head*, Estate Agent website (2013)). With this high-level professional salary and the primary activity of boating, its clothing aesthetic has developed around this. As one Salcombe informant stated, speaking in 2011,

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<sup>18</sup> <http://economics.kehsblogs.net/2013/03/26/peter-williams-the-founder-and-ceo-of-jack-wills-the-university-outfitters/> (Accessed May, 2013)

In terms of Salcombe, the only time you look relaxed is when you're out on your boat. Otherwise you make an effort. In terms of relaxed you go out rowing, or just out on the boat then you make a statement that you own a boat, so you walk around wearing the life-jacket, because if you're wearing a life-jacket it shows you own a boat. And then underneath the life-jacket you have your Henri Lloyd, and then underneath that you've got your Jack Wills.

... It's the Salcombe uniform. It's Crewe, Jools for the sort of middle aged women, and then the Jack Wills for the younger crowd, and then the life-jacket ...in Salcombe, there isn't much to do except beach, shop, go on the boat. It's a holiday of: beach, boat, shop. So it doesn't take long to get into the Salcombe uniform.

(Lizzie, interview – Dec. 2011)

Speaking in 2011, Lizzie observes that Jack Wills is fully embedded in the life-style attire and its key passions, boating and beaches. But, in 1999, this was not the case; yet this life-style element became a key source of inspiration for Williams' original strategy. Pitching up in Salcombe in 1999, Williams and Shaw moved into 22 Fore Street – a retail space of a meagre 160 square foot of store (but, because of this, 'authentic' to what Williams would subsequently latch onto) [Fig. 13]. In Salcombe, only one high-street exists and this leads down to the Pontoon area where the boating and ferries courier people back and forth. It is a prime spot and it was purchased through £40,000 Williams inherited from his great aunt and maxed out credit cards (as he found his bank would only supply £1,000 (Goodman, 2009)).

With a small family inheritance and bank debt, Williams managed to implement his dream with the help of university friend Robert Shaw, a fellow beer drinker and rugby player (Williams, 2011). Williams and Shaw, however, had absolutely no spare capital; the road to their success was in this respect severely limited as no one had heard of the brand and neither did they have the means to spread the name “Jack Wills” around. Nor did they have any way of giving a semblance of having been worn by people as they had no money for advertising it on billboards, television or magazine ads or even the limited capacity of the internet in the late 1990s (with its dial-up modems). Williams says,

in 1999 Rob and I slept in bunk beds in the roof [of the store], which people seem to find ever so romantic, but we didn’t have any money, it was very squalid, and we were sleeping amongst mountains of depressingly unsold stock. Romantic to this day, I can assure you it wasn’t. But authentic in a very raw sense, I can assure you it was. We had no money, if we had –and if it was someone else’s money- it would have been willingly fritted on advertising. (Williams, 2011)



Figure 23 Jack Wills, 22 Fore Street, Salcombe, Devon (est.1999). Photo from author (Oct. 2011)

Williams claims to the authenticity assured is that, as Spooner points out (1986:225), it requires gatekeepers. For Williams and Shaw in a squalid retail loft, the outside of Salcombe high street is rather different. As Williams admits, his summer in Salcombe registered the hedonism of youth that would become the imagery of Jack Wills. Authenticity, in this respect, is how the clothes – “depressingly unsold” – may become ‘seen and known’ to the people living out these ideals. How does one try to get a pile of t-shirts sold in the holiday town of Salcombe when people only visit for two weeks, or even less than that, with very little on offer to *stand* for that holiday group? In 1999 – and even up until 2007/8 – Jack Wills sold little more than t-shirts. In order for these clothes to be ‘thought of’ as worth acquiring, and therefore for Williams to be able to sell them, is to make the name central to *group of people who are wearing them*. The crowd who holiday in Salcombe, and are seen wearing the clothes in close association with the store itself, become key to the value of the clothes themselves. Williams noticed this with great clarity when, frustrated with unsold stock and an inability to call upon the magical miracles of advertising, he claims:

Instead we found the opinion formers in the town – the cool guys who worked on the ferry that took people to the beaches, and the cool guys who worked behind the bar in the town. ... We begged them, we persuaded them, bribed them to wear our stuff- we didn’t really know what this was called at the time, but it’s obviously what we call viral marketing. Like Nantucket, Salcombe is a very expensive, beautiful place, and also like Nantucket, the people who go to Salcombe are also very beautiful and very expensive people. Our whole philosophy was word of mouth. I say was, it still is word of mouth. (Williams, 2011)

These persons working in the bars and ferries are central, so much so that they come to forge Williams' key ethos of the brand – *word of mouth* but not just word of mouth but rather words from *specific people who are chosen to spread the word*, or “be” the word as they wear it on their bodies. *The “cool guys who worked behind the bar in the town” are not just anyone; they’re “opinion formers in the town” for a specific audience – “bespoke”* as our ‘Jack Wills’ correspondence put it above.

In the holidaying town of Salcombe – much like Rock in Cornwall, or Burnham Market in Norfolk, or Hayling Island in Hampshire – the locale has centralised places of sociality. For Rock it is The Mariner’s pub, for Hayling Island it is the Sailing Club, and for Salcombe the Pontoon and ferry is a key spot for summer season work as the ferry becomes an estuary courier from the mainland to beaches on the islands surrounding the coast. Those who work on these ferry motorboats are in constant interaction with the young holiday makers and are those who one will often speak to as they’re a daily source of conversation: beach, drinking, sleep, repeat, being the pattern of the holiday, is able to allow those on the ferry to be a constant source of gossip and go to persons for “what’s on”. As my informant from Rock puts it, those who work in the holidaying town for the season allow them to become “recognisable faces.” As they become recognisable, interacting with many disparate friendship groups as they courier people to the beach, they’re able to be incredibly powerful in keeping this group of holiday makers unified as they are recognised by many and become in many ways people who are able to move *between* friendship groups in order to become a common “weak tie” (Granovetter, 1973) in the complex knot of holidaying persons.

As these recognisable persons become opinion formers, the propensity for them to recommend clothes – either explicitly or even just by observation of the name on their chests or backs – and seeing these persons interact with (or be linked to) the name of the store on the high-street allows the *name to be homologous to worth (in both price and valuable object)*

because the name “Jack Wills” is now associated with a person worth hanging around with. Peter Williams and Robert Shaw – aged 23 – would also have been engaged with these opinion formers, drinking with them and developing friendships. As such, the brand-name is now becoming a synonym of the group. But it is more than a marketing scheme; these gifts of t-shirts to seasonal young undergraduates on holiday are building social relations with a vast number of persons and giving them a generic name (“Jack Wills”) as a way of “bottling” the summer experience. T-shirt, hoody, and so forth, become ways of showing the importance of the social relationships that develop and how wearing these clothes are key to being “part of it” – this observation comes from a rather perceptive informant that I got talking to while attending a Jack Wills night at an Exeter nightclub during campus tour of 2011.

Francis, my informant, had been going out with a girl whose parents owned a second home in Salcombe during his school days boarding at Warwick School. Stating that during his school days no shop actually existed in Warwickshire, this did not change the fact: “you had to have a [Jack Wills] hoody, *had to have it*.” With this he pointed out that, despite the lack of a store in his home town,

“I have quite a lot [of Jack Wills clothes], but it’s all been bought for me, from friends and my girlfriend. Everyone at my school had it. ... the fact that its Salcombe is import. It’s got an important message behind that, they want to convey the place as Jack Wills. It’s a fashionable place. They use that a lot.”

[He goes on tell me]: “...my friends family have a house down there and I spend time with them there, I started to know about it through this... there’s no store in Warwick but there’s one down there, and people would buy it from there. At our school,

you had to have the hoody. If you didn't, you weren't cool.”

(field notes)

After chatting for a while, he made the observation that, given his upbringing he is of course seen as “public school” to other people and feels that Jack Wills’ pricing strategy makes the brand “cliché”, only to acknowledge that his attendance to these parties (namely the night we spoke) is due to friendships made around the university and how Jack Wills is “part of this.” This observation only entrenches the claim I am making as to the monopolisation of the lifestyle: “Jack Wills” figures quite heavily in these persons’ worlds and is key to unifying them as a group of persons with the same interests and social calendar. Francis’ pointing out the prestige attached to the hoody and the oddity that, despite having a shop in the vicinity of Warwick school, these clothes become somewhat mandatory is indicative of a wider sociological truth. In a social group which privileges the outward expression of social belonging, both the clothes and their name are key to maintaining relationships during his school days, through going to Salcombe for a holiday during his school years (c. 2006-2010) but also attending Jack Wills events during his university days (c.2010-2013).

The development of a monopoly on the life-style enclaves and viral, word-of-mouth exchanges is a crucial development to fiduciarity. But it was not so much a conscious intention. In retrospect it secures the value of the brand but, at the time of Williams’s genesis of the brand, it was part of a series of setbacks. After Salcombe 1999, the £40,000 of capital in their first summer was made into £59,000, after which Williams’ £19k profit was used as an impetus to move from their seaside resort to the Fulham Road where their friend had a shop. This, however, was less successful as Williams’s states, “we got ram-raided on millennium night. We got done three nights out of the first four of the year. That store closed a couple of weeks later.” (in Goodman, 2009) Williams was persuaded to set up in Salcombe in the summer again with another store in Aldeburgh, on the Suffolk coast. Instead of



persisting with London's fashionable elite high streets such as the Fulham or Kings Road, Williams opted for less adventurous, leaping strategies. Williams built up an incremental following through their "Handbook" – a catalogue of photographs and product range – and the use of the internet as a means of not only ordering clothes but rather, [www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com) was called in the early 2000s "Jack's Place" and was in fact a social networking site, some even claiming it was a dating site (Humberstone, 2007). Williams' use of the Handbook as a mail order strategy as well as 'Jack's Place' as a social networking/ dating site for those who had heard of Jack Wills was coupled with an incremental opening of stores not so much in the fashionable cities but rather the university towns of his core-customer. These smaller incremental developments in the coveting of a core network allowed the period between 2000-2005 to be a process of developing a life-style monopolisation through more subtle strategies. The use of Handbooks became a key factor. These were developed with store staff in the Oxbridge universities and utilised the locales of Salcombe and Oxford campuses for the photography. Speaking in retrospect, one key Seasonnaire – who headed the US expansion in 2009/2010 – stated that when he started for Jack Wills in 2006,

"It was great – there were only 12 stores in the UK. It was a really nice family business. I knew Rob and Pete really well; it was a small head office. ...I was at Oxford at the time and Peter and Rob got in touch saying they wanted to do a shoot in Oxford [for a handbook], can you help us ...Social media was a lot smaller then [c.2006]. Facebook only came to Oxford and Cambridge in 2005. It was a completely different world from now."

This restricted, "family business" with a low level of stores and investment in a series of Handbooks allows for a similar process that was witnessed in Salcombe in the early,

founding years: the handbook follows the same logic of spatial-temporal specificity of circulation to unite person/product. The “handbook” becomes the silent partner in the fiduciary practice. These Handbooks become mail order and are only available to those who have already heard of the brand and seen it in locations specific to the lifestyle imagery. In addition, the houses they’re dropped off at are *student* residences. These are residences, as one informant pointed out, occupied by multiple people at different times and it only takes one person to sign up to the catalogue for it to become seen by a host of occupants in the future. Just as post piles up from previous occupants who, as students, never bother to change their address, so do Jack Wills catalogues. As one informant put it:

They’re using them to their advantage, because they just come through the door, and then I’d look at it, people would buy it, look at it and it’s just a catalogue, you’re going to open it, you’re not going to send it on, they’ve done quite well. (Emma)

The centrality of exclusive social relationships – in holiday season, on “Jack’s Place” and in the university campuses – allows for, as commentator Fiona Humberstone (2007) states, Jack Wills to become a ‘walking, living, breathing brand’. Rather than monopolise high-streets and prominent, fashionable locations and increase the pricing of the brand to a level that only guarantees extraordinarily wealthy persons, Jack Wills maintained fidelity to a core demographic of the soon-to-be professional middle classes (their gentry). Located within a public-school, Oxbridge network, the clothing is part of group identity and permeates the vicinities associated with this restricted demographic:

My law school was a mix of solicitors in training for their City firms, and those of us on the bar course aspiring to be self-employed. The solicitors went around in close-bunched groups,

clutching the Companies act, dressed as if they were contractually obliged to shop at Jack Wills. (Myers, 2009)

Or as Gemma Soames of *The Sunday Times* observed in Hunstanton on the Norfolk Coast:

“They are wearing brightly coloured polo shirts (mostly pink, collars up) with low-slung tacky bums, shorts or jeans. They too are wearing hoodies and bright, Wayfarer style sunglasses. It looks almost like a uniform. ...head to Jack Wills.” (Soames, 2010)

Developing from life-style specific locales, the obligation to adopt a uniformed attire rests upon not commodity choice but, moreover, status honour – it marks social position. As Keith MacDonald writes of the British upper-middle classes: “There is probably no modern society in which the economic elite has more successfully held on to the trappings of traditionalism and used them to achieve social as well as moneyed exclusiveness” (MacDonald, 2004:122).

This core group, developed over a period of eight years from Salcombe in 1999 to monopolising campuses in the 2000-2007 periods, allowed the Jack Wills brand to gather equity. Investments in the business start around 2007. These investments stress a central aspect of fiduciarity; that is, the *trust in the promises of the named personage*, that the eponymous brand-name retains profit potential; a confidence in the community of exchange relations. Prior to the first major investment by Inflexion in 2007, the veteran retailer Will Hobhouse (Whittard of Chelsea (turned national tea & coffee chain)) had a stake in the company and became chairman. With the Inflexion venture, Peter Saunders, former Body Shop boss, took over Hobhouse’s position, with Inflexion taking a 21% (minority) stake in the company. In 2007 their profits stood at £2.6m on sales of £42m and profits have grown steadily since, to £4.6m in 2008, £6.2m in 2009 and £10.2m in 2010 with 2011 seeing sales

of £92.2m (Sunday Times, 18/04/2011 & 06/02/2011; Goodman, 2009). In 2009 Jack Wills appointed former Burberry chief Rose Marie Bravo in as a non-executive director with stated aims at expanding their management with top level appointments to steer growth (Retail Week, 04/02/2011) with Williams focusing upon American expansion (Williams, 2010). And it was in 2007 when Jack Wills was able – along with Smile Creative, an events management company – to patron the Oxbridge Varsity Polo match at Windsor Guards club, moving onto the Varsity Rugby in 2010 and, in addition to this, able to invest in “heritage” industry: In 2007 they invested in Fox Brother & Co, the historic tweed makers (c.1776) and in 2011 began working alongside Cordings of Piccadilly (c.1839) as well as NPS Shoes, the historic shoe makers (c.1881). Without money-capital founded upon an incremental economy of gifts and their social relations which arose from these, Jack Wills would have had little chance of being a *fiduciary entity worthy or even seen to be trusted with such sacred entities of British “tradition” and national significance.*

But, that said, this widening profit margin and the increase in sales demonstrates wider appropriation and, with this, co-option by the non-target demographic. This, of course, is a problem of eponymous products and the development of fiduciary value. As of the late 2000s, Jack Wills needed to develop more innovative strategies to retain its core, consolidated elite. Our Seasonnaires who headed up the America’s expansion stated:

“It was [c.2005/6] very exclusive. And, with brands, people love to have ownership of brands, don’t they, and as soon as a brand becomes too big it obviously loses its exclusivity and people lose their ownership of it. Everyone’s got it. ... if you’re hitting your target market and receiving criticism, that’s fine. But when it starts to fall down, when it was associated with

really young girls, this was one of the big problems. Then the university kids stop being interested; then you're in trouble. That's where Jack Wills had to make its mind up: was it after really taking care of the brand and making sure its target customer was served or was it more about making money...?"

As of 2009/2010, Jack Wills had burst its banks. It was moving increasingly outside of the secreted economy of word-of-mouth, inter-group exchanges through holidaying towns and the honoured 'look' for those coming out of the public-schools and Oxbridge and Russell Group universities. Instead, it required a motive of re-connecting with the core-customer. As our Seasonnaire says above, 'was it [the corporate body] after really taking care of the brand?' and we may state that, here, taking care of the brand is taking care of the reputation of the name as a *nom-de-guerre* of the social group. The solution utilised was to imitate, through commercialisation, the Seasonal economy of the upper-middle (gentry) network through the use of brand Seasonnaires. This policy, I will now demonstrate, saw with it a repetition of Peter Williams's early strategy in Salcombe in 1999.

#### 4.3 Seasonnaires and the regeneration of 'The Season': 2007-2013

The origins in Salcombe are crucial to the brand-name acting within a networked sphere of elites. This was a key source of success in the early days of the brand. Owing to its holiday destination of second home owners and small, tight-knit relations, it was able to act in an *ad hoc* manner akin to professional enclaves (such as the public school, the law firm, the military barracks), developing, as we've seen, a certain form of life-style membership through appropriate attire.

In the late 2000s, the Jack Wills brand sought to utilise this aesthetic monopoly on life-style enclaves *and* utilise the brand-name, through their increased financial capital, to mirror the early years of being fully integrated into the community of life-style, seasonal holiday makers. As the locale became a key source of success in the early years, the real source, we've seen, was the ability to covet a network of persons through the season.

Peter Williams, now in his thirties in 2009/2010, was too old to sleep in a bunk bed and party with the university, public-school crowd. What was developed by the late 2000s was the Seasonnaires program and with it a self-conscious reworking of the early Salcombe days of befriending and gifting to (proper) persons he and Shaw sought out. As Williams and Shaw gave away free clothing to those who are prominent in the locale, and with this, a subsequent expansion into these person's wider public-school and university friendship groups, the locale itself was crucial in restricting this exchange. Salcombe became not only the basis of Williams' original vision of the Jack Wills brand but also a prime site of its success in consolidating a network of proper-persons connected to the product. As a seasonal locale that is only prominent in the summer season, the remaining 9 months of the year does not lead to the store becoming co-opted by anyone other than key seasonal residents. The locale of Salcombe was a key life-style space and was an exemplar to what the Seasonnaires program developed. Around 2010, Jack Wills began the Seasonnaire program proper. It monopolised in c.2010 in the UK (Rock, Aldeburgh, Burnham Market & Abersoch) and began an expansion in the US to two key locales, two gated island communities in the Massachusetts Bay: Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. These Seasonal expansions were crucial to the development of monopolisation of key life-style enclaves, mirroring Salcombe in their demographic, and crucial to consolidation of the core group. Speaking to the *Financial Times* in May 2010, Peter Williams said,

Last night, while sitting in a bar, I watched a video on my iPhone of some of our staff cycling to work. The five British shop assistants share a big house two miles from the new store we opened last month in Nantucket Island, off the coast of Massachusetts. They have posted online a video of themselves riding pink and blue Jack Wills bicycles, promoting the shop as they commute. Jack Wills, which is targeted at university students, thrives on word of mouth and viral marketing. I founded the business when I was 23, so I guess I know what the staff are capable of. (Williams, 2010)



Figure 24 Peter Williams, 2010: photographed by the *Financial Times*:

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c9a43bc8-6cdb-11df-91c8-00144feab49a.html>

He states that he founded the brand at 23, a similar age to his Seasonnaires, and sees these persons as inheriting his original project. When he claims to “know what the staff are capable

of” he intimates a notion of descent; as if they were his heirs (and Seasonnaires’ speak of Jack Wills as a ‘family business’). Speaking to the Head Seasonnaire for the US expansion on Nantucket Island, he described the America’s expansion as a “back to basics of what Jack Wills wanted to do and really target those we wanted.” This back to basics was a direct mirror the Williams early strategy in the processes of monopolisation and followed a uniform pattern from the Americas to the other British seaside towns. Furthermore there is a direct parallel association between the American and British seasonal enclaves, as suggested in the previous chapter. This has been drawn out in the national press in relation to Cornwall and the Hamptons: “Just as smart New Yorkers don’t go to the Hamptons – they to East Hampton, or Westhampton, or Southampton – the seasoned Cornish holidaymaker goes to Polzeath, or the Lizard, or St. Ives.” (Low, 2010)

Primarily, the expansion to the American and other British sea-side resorts, to paraphrase Collins (1990), allowed the Jack Wills’ brand’s economic interests to ‘act socially’. The monopolisation of further spaces of exclusive lifestyle enclaves is a consolidation of the core-customer as not so much a commercial client but rather *a network of obligations through the medium of the brand*. The Seasonnaires become less in the business of economic clientele but, using the viability of a brand-name to stand for a series of personages, develop further life-style networks in a commercial guise. As such, these new locales have to share qualities that Salcombe does as this laid the basis for success. Describing the localities of Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket, our Seasonnaire stated:

“They are...unbelievably wealthy but they’re not very flashy about it, which is quite nice, which is why the Hamptons is very different, the Hamptons are very wealthy but very flashy, whereas Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard are very old money ... quite a lot of old families, I think 80% of the island is



uninhabited for nine months of the year, it's a pretty incredible place. Yeah, Salcombe obviously shares a lot of similarities with that as well; and it's a really beautiful place.”

The compliments of the American old money preppy communities – non-flashy, the aristocratic precedent of the ‘old’ in old money – to the gentrified localities of the British enclaves is a two way process. The American old money communities allow Jack Wills to enter a restrictive space to further its economic interest but instead of being a venture that is for pure profit, the effort to consolidate a core elite allows the group to compliment the restrictive practices back in Britain. As our Seasonnaire put it:

“Jack Wills started there because the two islands [Nantucket & Martha's Vineyard] are very...protectionist against big-name brands; they won't let any brands that exist in America on the island. So by Jack Wills starting there ...they weren't known in America and they have a complete advantage over their competitors, such as Ralph Lauren, Abercrombie & Fitch, whoever; because they wouldn't be able to move to Nantucket. ...they have an island committee and council and they just don't want commercialism.”

Anti-commercial sentiments, as Nicolson (2008:2) argues for British gentry rejection of commercial values, instead relies “instead on mutuality of communal relationships.” The mutuality of community in the case of American prep and British gentry – that one shares a likeness with the other – is found in not only a rejection of commercialism but also in respect to community based around principles of shared heritage. As our Seasonnaire explained:

The Britishness was massively played up. They love it. I think a lot of Americans like to feel some relation to Britain so you get a lot of people saying ‘they’re Scottish’, ‘they’re Irish’, and you kind of say, ‘Well how are you Scottish?’ and they say, ‘Oh my grand-mother’s dog walker was Scottish, you know.’ It’s kind of tenuous links. So, yeah, but they love everything that is British. They love the accents; hence why all the store managers were British; a lot of the Seasonnaires were British. The accents went a long way. They really plug the Britishness as much as possible.

One compliments the other. The mutual qualities of a British accent and claims to descent from British in the ex-colonies also accentuate the purported anti-commercial sentiments. In a gated community, the restriction of commercial enclaves priorities relationships of obligation that rest upon more lasting sentiments, one that seek to serve the locality. What serving the locality does, however, is shut others out and maintain the closed, harmonious communal sentiment through acts of exclusion:

They sorted us out. 4 went to Martha’s Vineyard and 4 went to Nantucket. We got seriously nice houses, like, it was incredible. Like when Rob [Shaw] came to stay he said ‘Right so you’re going to organise a party then?’, he was quite keen – they [the brand] really wanted us to integrate with the community and the island community is very, very strong and because we were there before the summer the islands saw us more as part of the community rather than just summer fun. We moved over in

March and it was still pretty much deserted; and it's important to show to that community that the store isn't just open to take in the summer crowds, its employing locals and here to support the community.

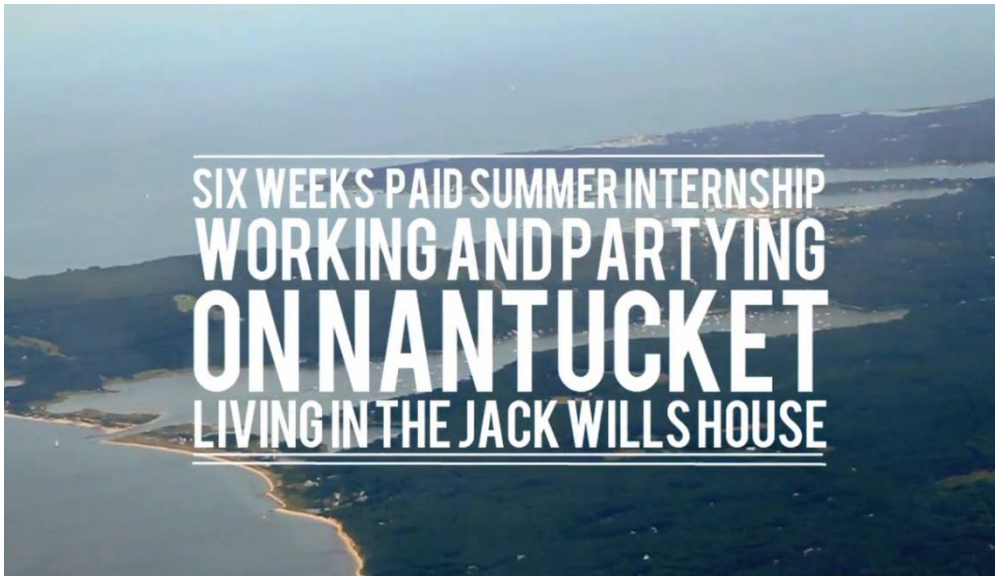


Figure 25 Jack Wills expands into New England, c.2011 - taken from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPGGE5mtoa8>

The store is less in the business of money making, or bringing in new persons. Instead, to ‘serve the community’, it is in the business of monopolising existing persons and bringing them into the vicinity of Jack Wills – the parties in the mansions; the taking in of communal crowds, not those who *only* exist for the summer. Yet these acts of communal integration found the basis of fiduciary value for the products: they *are* trustworthy items within the community and, as an outward appearance, become the symbol of belonging and mutual integration. Jack Wills’ monopoly on islands only 10-15 miles in length and based around primarily second home owning millionaires guarantee’s the ‘back to basics’ that developed from Williams’ and Shaw’s early experiences. As such, this process of island monopoly was an act of exclusion for those *not* synonymous with the *brand-name*.

The Seasonnaires use of the island was, therefore, networking and this is evident in how expansion into the US saw a ‘softly-softly’ approach to commercialism. In order to do this, the Seasonnaires utilised the islands as a means to covet a network of old moneyed elite persons through which expansion into the university towns was to thrive on. As our Seasonnaire stated:

...you’d meet a lot of people in Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard, so we’d actually met them before the stores opened ... so we knew about a lot of kids already. The Seasonnaire program actually started the year before they’d opened the stores so we had, basically, a contact network of people. ... So you have someone at the university, inside, he or she can get it all done – people in fraternities or a sorority. And then they can host an event there, a party...

The seasonal monopoly provides a network of persons whose social identity and lifestyle – preppy, old moneyed elites – is able to establish the brand-name with a reputation and aura of

exclusivity to those universities campuses it will then become established within. Yale, Harvard, the North East private universities (Trinity College; Fairfield; etc.) subsequently have persons, 'big men on campuses', sporting a new brand-name that secures and further exemplifies their elite stature through the island networks. As such, the anti-commercial value expressed in the islands is anti-modern in sentiment, prioritising a mutual likeness of community for the name to integrate with the sentiments found there: community is emphasised so as to secure the viability of named-clothing as having an elite perception or conferred quality of trust as to the elite-stature of the named goods: "We would kit them out in as much free clothing as they wanted, really", said our Seasonnaire, "and they could give some to their friends, and then some would work in the stores as well. The idea was to make it a genuine relationship." Anti-commercial networking is a means to destroy competitors and outfit the core-customer as not a customer but gifted partner. This also allows 'a contact network of people' to be the result of a successful act of monopolisation of life-style, 'a genuine relationship'. The Seasonnaire program restricts the reputation and sentiments of the brand and, in the process, seeks to consolidate through such a process an elite network around key sites and outfitting practices.

The elite network thrives on the anti-commercial sentiments found in key localities that, itself, is key to allowing a mutuality of communal relations to flourish: people see themselves as, in some way, moulded by the locality itself. When it came to Jack Wills establishment in Rock (Cornwall) in 2011, the choice of location and its seasonal constituents came as no surprise as a choice of location, however, it was a surprise that the brand needed promotion. The store did not open 'cold', but rather, as it was peopled with staff it was more importantly accompanied by the Seasonnaires – equipped with their uniform outfit from Jack Wills' store they also were tasked to 'make friends' and promote the lifestyle by way of generating interest in the store. This was, to my informants, a strange occurrence for the

promotion of the store was not in fact necessary – those who holiday in Rock have a strong awareness of the brand, along with those to whom holiday in the vicinity as it is a locale that is heavily frequented by the ideal, target customer of Jack Wills. That said, the retail prospects of Rock are somewhat open to transitory tenure and limited success. In order to hammer home how successful the Jack Wills store become since the summer 2011, my informant James said: “I’ve never seen a shop two summers in a row. Jack Wills has really tapped into something; I believe the average take from the shop each day was 9k, the highest day 12k.”

As said, the success of the store relies upon the embedding economic relations in non-economic processes, emphasising communal mutuality between brand and seasonal residents. The store, in its cold callous commodity character, is in-itself not enough. Jack Wills needs a network, not a boutique. This was instigated by the collaboration between the Jack Wills Seasonnaires and the Camel Ski School, where my informants work as water-ski instructors. They live in Rock for the season (June to August) and the Jack Wills Seasonnaires live there from July to August. It was these two overlapping meetings that brought together the season. As another seasonal participant at Rock, William, stated:

“I was there for the duration of the season, for three months teaching water skiing, they showed up July 1<sup>st</sup> and stayed until the end of August; they showed up not knowing anyone, so they met us lot and said, ‘can you help us put together events, because Jack Wills had no presence in Rock but, not to sound too stereotypical, a lot of the tourist people in Rock would be considered Jack Wills’ people.” (fieldnotes)

The use of Rock as Jack Wills’ locale is crucial to the brand-image, but without integration with the Seasonnaires who work at the Camel Ski School no group, in reality, would come

into existence so as for Jack Wills to claim his elite station. Jack Wills, as a brand-name, requires “Jack Will people”, as William put it. Another Rock informant, Camilla, explained it thusly:

‘There are two sides to Jack Wills. There’s the clothes and then there’s the lifestyle. ...I have thought a bit about it, after spending the summer there and the status of Jack Wills on campus as, you know, very public school and that sort of thing.’

(Camilla, paraphrased from field note conversation)

Camilla had been spending her summer holidays in Rock for a considerable period of her adolescent life and, as such, has reflected upon what this brand means and is “about.” Having holidayed in Rock for most her teens, the lifestyle came first and after Jack Wills established themselves in Rock in the summer 2011, its presence rose but previously it was not as pervasive – in fact it was sold only in a boutique by the beach side but not in a full-fledged outlet. What the seasonal arrival of Jack Wills’ Seasonnaires established, moreover, was not corporate commerce but instead the developing of a consolidated network of persons associated with the seasonal, ‘real Seasonnaires’ in Rock. The Jack Wills Seasonnaires, as with the island communities of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard, relies upon the constituent members of the locality and, with this, securing reputation for the brand-name that adequately conceptualises the product in ‘proper space’.



Figure 26 Jack Wills UK Seasonal enclaves: from [www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com)

Rock has come to prominence as an upper-middle class holidaying playground, something my informants were very conscious of, but through Jack Wills' activities it has become ever more codified and self-conscious. Prior to the presence of Jack Wills the organisation of the summer season was *ad hoc* and life-style activities of frequenting the Mariners Arms pub, the beach and surf, was organised by a series of friendship groups from the public schools whose parents had second-homes in the area. As such, Rock has come to be defined by its second-home residences and overshadows the localities full-time residences. This was documented in the Channel4 series *Posh Rock* and as the narrator (the west-country native Stephen Merchant) stated:

For ten months of the year, Rock is a small, sleepy sea-side village in Cornwall. Then, every July and August, the place goes a bit mental. Rock becomes 'Chelsea-on-Sea' as the dormitories of the public schools empty and loads of posh teenagers arrive for a summer of sun, surf and speed boats. (Narrator, *Posh Rock*, Channel 4).



As one interviewee put in *Posh Rock*: “Its tradition to come here. Our parents used to come here.” (Episode 1) Now the use of the nom-de-guerre “Jack Wills people” is an extension of this tradition in novel, *commercialised* form, but they have maintained organisation through these holidaymakers who take it on custom to frequent Rock. The vicinity of Rock is encompassed by the Jack Wills name and, with it, so the people become personifications of its “image.” This process is crucial to the group coherence and the activities of the season as a whole. Localities come into being by way of the collective identification persons make to their environment; Rock is not a distinctive locale in and of itself but rather requires significant activities to give it form and make it meaningful to the purposes of those who inhabit it. As Anthony King puts it,

space only becomes a meaningful locale which informs action when individuals in particular social networks invest that locale with significance. The ‘locale’ becomes the symbol of the social network [...] employed by members of the group to maintain and regulate their relations with each other and to denote appropriate forms of conduct. (2000:422)

The social networks and conduct appropriate for Rock is not only appropriate for the upper-middle class seasonal lifestyle but increasingly it is given an extra ‘gentry’ twist as it is now intimately associated with the exacting nature of a brand-name: Jack Wills. Cornwall, from the perspective of mainstream society, is a largely holidaying space in British society and become broken up by lifestyle and class distinction. The locality of Rock, as it is defined by its transient holiday-makers (cf. Lash & Urry, 1994:268), means that its local residents are defined as residual to the second-home residents in clear class terms. As Jane Nadel-Klein

(1994; 1990) has argued, the fringes of British society contain the ‘occidental others’ (those who fall out of the classifications of main-stream British society):<sup>19</sup>

a village may contain both upper- and lower-class residents, the former are often referred to as ‘*country*’ or ‘*gentry*’, and it is clear that they do not count as ‘local’. Their social networks and interests transcend the immediate community. They are connected to their *peers all over the nation through their schools, military service, family ties ...and travel.*” (Nadel-Klein, 1994:114-115, emphasis added)

The Jack Wills monopolisation of Rock, along with its other seasonal enclaves, therefore, is an extension of the gentry project of codified networks upon which their prominence rests – and it is extended to Jack Wills’ Seasonnaire program. The sociological result is consolidation of a distinct, elite social group.

#### 4.4 Eponymous products and the Jack Wills business model

The consolidation of the elite, core group of Jack Wills’s personages around the Seasonal activities obscures the fact that – before anything else – Jack Wills operates as a brand, a commercial enterprise. In the introduction I claimed that the seasonal activities of the Jack Wills Seasonnaires acted as a synoptic device, as Bourdieu (1977) would put it, to obscure the practical logic of seasonal distribution and networked connectedness. Obscured by the fact that the seasonal activities of the Jack Wills season is then re-presented in the stores that make up its commercial face, the result is that the brand-name becomes a signifier of the lifestyle that is presented in brand imagery, and the persons who buy the product

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<sup>19</sup> Nadel-Klein’s occidental other refers specifically to non-modern industries (fishing, farming, crofting, etc.) that remains part of local, village or community life on the outskirts of British society: highland Scotland, West Country, etc.

become measured *against this brand image, narrative and symbolism* in so far as how they ‘measure up’.

When it comes to discussing ‘who buys the product and from where’, persons will invariably be caught up in this discursive chain of meaning the Jack Wills name conjures up. This further obscures the identity of the product. Is it a heritage item or is it a generic consumer durable manufactured cheaply in the developing world? And does who buys the product become an extension of this phantasmagoria of the world economy? As Jack Wills exists in the high-streets of Britain’s provincial, middle class cities and towns – from Eton high street, to Oxford and Cambridge, from Canterbury to Edinburgh, and the Cotswolds and all around the Home Counties – the product is steeped in a map of ‘middle England’. This map, however politically charged with a classed identity to the buyer, doesn’t necessary mirror itself in the customer of Jack Wills: the various denizens of the middle-England map are *not* the gentrified figures that I am discussing in this thesis, yet they may desire to become one. A walk up or down one of these middle England high streets is quotidian evidence that the brand has a customer base that moves beyond the university campus set, and beyond the elite provinces it seasonally locates itself within.

The rationale for this is clear. The brand is – of course, as stated earlier – in the business of making money and to do this their product range must be viable to a ‘consumer public’, a generic high-street customer who is willing to pay ‘a little more’ for a branded good than a non-named product. The goods Jack Wills sells are not exceptional: they are items that are ‘on trend’ with the general fashion climate: Jeans, t-shirts, polo shirts, floral skirts, hoodies, tracksuit trousers (dubbed ‘sweat pants’), gilet’s (a staple ‘middle class item’) – and these items are androgynous. While these items – as discussed in chapter 3 – are aesthetically bound to a gentry/preppy identity, the generic high-street customer may mix and match items which do not necessary figure into a ‘Jack Wills look’. A walk down any of the

aforementioned high street's will illustrate this; and the global dimension of this may be generalised: those customers in Asia or the America's will also be liable to this trickling down. And the trickle down is due to the product range being of generic fashionableness, not it's inherently gentry aesthetic as such.

While I do not have sales figures or customer information – as this is all closed off to the public due to the brand being a private limited company – it may be suggested that the store becomes less a place or province for those people discussed in this thesis, our gentry group, but rather the generic middling-British customer base. And also the added criteria of age and gender may be included within this. If the reader types into YouTube 'Jack Wills haul', a series of videos will appear which sees British teenage girls, from middling to upper-middle class backgrounds (judged from the performative aspects of the video-blog), unpack Jack Wills clothes from a bag and show them to their viewers. This is largely a female and teenage pursuit is not solely restricted to Jack Wills clothing but extends to other, albeit aesthetically similar, brands in the same price-bracket such as Hollister, Abercrombie & Fitch, etc. In terms of 'who buys the product', the generic public image would be the young, teenage, often female and often middling sort, customer. As such, other persons will purchase their products from the online store, this being a means to distance themselves from the store's image and also the age-gender-class aspect of the store (see chapter 8). These other persons will often be university students, or male customers of the ages 18-24 (see chapter 8).

Ultimately the activity of the Jack Wills brand is divided between a commercial season of fashion supported, in general, by the middle-class teenage girl; and a gift season supported by the Seasonnaires and the patronage of the brand to university societies.

As such, the business model of Jack Wills is inherently ambivalent. The store is the commercial face of the brand; a brand which seeks to be non-commercial in its ethos. This begs the question: how does the brand's name retain itself eponymous position as a standing

for a gentry group, while the name also is adopted as a consumer durable. This inherent tension and ambivalence could in fact be distilled into our understanding of the Jack Wills brand name. Michael Holquist's (2002) discussion of eponymy is useful here. Speaking of eponymous heroes of the classical world, we could say something similar pertains to brand-names (an argument I have pursued elsewhere, (Smith, 2014b)): "eponyms are the names of individual people—the kind who have biographies—that are translated into the names of collective, extra-personal entities, the kind that have histories." (Holquist, 2002:128) As such, "the careers of eponymous heroes", i.e. the career of Jack Wills outlined in this chapter,

are of a special kind. They are foundational, always associated with origins, and thus the transformation of a name into an eponym is always fraught with political implications. ...Eponyms are spectacular reminders that the name of every person is first of all a sign, something standing for something else that it, in itself, is not. (Holquist, 2002:128)

The problem of eponymy for Jack Wills is that the foundational origins – Salcombe in 1999 – are now fraught with the politics of a business model, a model that belies the essence of its corporate message of monopolisation and exclusion of non-desired persons.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Hence the special role of the Seasonnaires. The Seasonnaires, by coveting networks of mutual, communal friends and establishing the brand-name around these lifestyles, establish a confidence for the product – their social group becomes, in short, epitomised by the products on display. Ironically, this strategy is in the name of making the goods on sale worthy of a high, profitable price for sale *and* equitable for the corporation. That said, in order to do this, it puts in place the means for an aristocracy of Jack Wills persons that isn't subservient to economic interest, as Weber would have put it.

This network of lifestyle spaces monopolised by the Jack Wills brand allows the name to have the reputation and prestige it seeks out. But what we see here is the *professionalization* of this reputation seeking practice for corporate solvency. As such, the fiduciarity sought for products is founded in the fiduciary enterprise of professions. As Anthony King suggest of the professionalization of society more generally, they contribute to solidarity in a society that has witnessed the decline of communities of sentiment:

In a diverse and complex globalizing society, there are naturally multiple forms of solidarity suspending the individual in overlapping, interconnected and increasingly transnational social networks. The professional status group constitutes only one stratum of this highly complex geography and associations. ...the professional group, no longer limited to the traditional professions, seems to be an increasingly prominent feature in this globalizing landscape. In particular, the principle of professionalism seems to be an increasingly important means of collective definition. (King, 2013:441)

The collective definition of the Jack Wills core customer is manifest as the name stands for the wrought consequences of monopolisation on their life-style. The next chapter details these processes further, it asks: If the prestige of the valuable branded objects arises from the social network, how are branded symbols functioning as part of the network and how are these networks sustained? What are the consequences of the aesthetic developed? How may the goods be further monopolised outside of the framework of commercial acquisition?



## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Brand-Name Heraldry*

#### 5. Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter, branded goods are divided because their names have a reputation that is liable to circumvention from the symbolic qualities of the goods. Jack Wills' concern with monopolisation of the life-world, we saw, institutionalises a process of coveting a network of persons that keeps the brand solvent, economically, while ironically creating a sociological network that maintain the gentrified, elite lifestyle the goods symbolise. This chapter continues this argument to suggest that branded goods, as others have noted (Foster, 2007; 2008; Mazzarella, 2003), are a species of a special type of wealth. Jack Wills has the status of what anthropologists' call "inalienable" possessions or valuables (Weiner, 1985; 1993; Munn, 1986; Godelier, 1999; Graeber, 2001).

Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* (1990) discusses such inalienable possessions and designates them as the highest form of valuable – they are Kwakiutl copper plates, Maori cloaks, Trobriand bracelets and necklaces. These goods "remain attached to their original owners even when circulated among other people" (Weiner, 1985:210) and, as such, stand for the social identity of the group itself. As Weiner (1985; 1993) describes these goods, they are not utility items, nor are they merely ornamental and therefore insignificant. Inalienable items, on the contrary, are held within a social group for long periods, generations even, and over time their value increases as they become a historical source of continuity between past and present possessors. Indeed, they are so effectively combined with the group's identity that past possessors live on as myths and ancestors become part of the current possession, defining the identity of the present members. As Weiner (1985:210) notes, they are "more



than an economic resource and more than an affirmation of social relations.” Moreover, they are crucial to social regimes that are hierarchical as the ranking and differencing of people occurs through these material objects, items which themselves are doing the work of social distinction. These valuables indicate the enduring ancestral, mythologically infused, inherited status of social prestige.

Brand-name commodities seek to be similar in their effects but encounter the problem of alienability – they are produced as commodities, may be appropriated by others and are also disposable. They are not sacred relics or ancestral heirlooms but, in a manner of speaking, they do nevertheless take on similar qualities. As William Mazzarella (2003b:194) points out, brand identity is the crucial aspect of inalienability – “Brands ...are the inalienable source of value that enables a corporation to keep its identity while simultaneously appearing to give of itself every time one of its products is sold.”<sup>20</sup> And brand-names over state their case on this point.<sup>21</sup> As I have documented previously, Jack Wills’ origins and seasonal monopoly demonstrates anti-commercial ideals for the maintenance of its socially exclusive network. For my purposes with the Jack Wills brand, this is crucial to it acting as an inalienable valuable in the sense Mauss and others documented them – aristocratic, ancestral inheritances that are resonant with mythological qualities. Since its beginnings (c.1999) to now (c.2013), the Jack Wills brand has instituted an inalienable means of access and transmission; it is maintaining its economic prowess and social prestige through instituting the means to establish a series of inheritances through ‘the Season’. This chapter continues this line of argument to suggest that the Season and its Seasonnaires engage in a form of surrogate-heraldry, heraldic insignia being itself an

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<sup>20</sup> The analysis of trademarks often cites similar arguments (Lury, 2004; Moor, 2007; Lash & Lury, 2007; Lash, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> As Hopper & Vallance (2013:306) note: “it seems that only the name over the door stays constant; everything else being in a state of flux...”: the age of capital is ephemera, as Marx’s famous aphorism (‘all that’s solid melts into air’) designated it, and over stating the case is important to the commitment to inalienable sentiments of named products.

inalienable form of wealth and also concerned with social distinction and hierarchical ranking. What I document is the use of Jack Wills branded goods as being infused with not only the similar aesthetic qualities of heraldry, as we saw in chapter 3, but also similar concerns of honouring and distinguishing persons that heraldry is and how this is institutionalised. My argument in this chapter is that Jack Wills' branded symbols take on a surrogate form of heraldry and act as intimations of ancestral inheritance as the Seasonnaires distribute goods and, by implication, also the symbols of the Jack Wills brand, to worthy recipients.

The purpose of this is to demonstrate how the social networks and monopolisation of personages is *maintained*. What this material demonstrates is the central aspect of inalienable possessions, what Annette Weiner (1985; 1993) calls the paradox of 'keeping while giving': once given away, items still retain their association with the giver *yet* giving away itself becomes a means to keep one's social prestige. The solution to this paradox is restricting exchange-spheres and instituting a way for this to occur through lineage and inheritance:

a lineage, or actually the person who controls lineage activities, gives up part of its resources, creating through the giving the sociability inherent in exchange, while simultaneously assuring the *replacement* for lineage members of those resources once given. ... the processes of replacement are directly tied to the life cycle of individuals, for most things are reclaimed by the original giver or his descendants when the receiver dies. ...replacement is central to attaining some measure of keeping-while-giving. (Weiner, 1985:211)

Heraldry, I argue, is the drawn upon device to achieve a ‘measure of ‘keeping while giving’’. While Jack Wills’ Seasonnaires and the details supplied in this chapter cannot be said to be heraldry ‘proper’ in any sense of the term, I use it as a heuristic device so as to demonstrate parallels to heraldic practice in order to (a) make sense of material gathered from the field and (b) to frame this material within Jack Wills’ overall project of maintaining their core-customer and, with this, consequently aiding group reformation and consolidation. This chapter deals with the Seasonnaires’ role as imitation-heralds and demonstrates their sociological role to be that of sustaining a lineage of persons under the Jack Wills brand-name.

I shall do this by introducing who the Seasonnaires are in ethnographic context: where they come from, their role in the company and their relation to the brand overall; then provide an account and analysis of their practice in a wider cultural context. Before this, however, I shall evaluate the usefulness of treating the Seasonnaires as imitation heralds.

### 5.1 Why Heraldry? Elite re-appropriations and ambivalence

Heraldry, as part of my thesis of the gentry qualities and identity of our group, is of course *not* the most obvious or apparent interpretation to give to the culture that the Seasonnaires evoke. Elsewhere I expressed hesitation as to heraldry being the best interpretation of Seasonnaire practice (Smith, 2014:86). What I shall do in this section is adjudicate between alternative interpretations and then suggest the rationale for heraldry as the most apposite.

The most obvious, and therefore most likely, interpretations to give the Seasonnaires’ practices are (a) their place in the 2000s development of youth tourism around holiday reps and (b) its links to 1990s rave culture. In addition, Jack Wills’ patronage (or sponsorship) of sporting practices, notably skiing and polo, evokes not exclusively a ‘gentry identity’ but

could suggest that an interpretation made from the Bourdieuan (1986) perspective of class tastes may be more appropriate. That said, for the reasons given in the methodology and the developments in popular culture which I will illustrate here, I am going to favour an interpretation from the perspective of a re-emergence of gentry group based around heraldic practices. Recalling my methodology, I stated that the multi-sited perspective I have developed is where I based my unifying theme of gentry identity for it is by following the persons identified by the Jack Wills corporation that the mandate to *outfit a gentry* suggests itself. This is the overarching aspect of Jack Wills' corporate invention of the Seasonairres. And it is an account of this corporate programme that a gentry identity may be said to manifest itself. Even if the gentry ideals – here heraldry – may not be the most obvious line of investigation it is, I maintain, valid when we take into account the exclusivity sought by the corporation, the developments of popular youth culture and also its ambivalences to these developments.

The argument I wish to make to consolidate my take on the Seasonairres as imitation heralds is twofold: the first is that their use of youth culture practices such as holiday-reps, raving and drug taking, and the place of sports (polo and skiing most notably) in the season, are in fact *re-appropriations of elite practices*. The second is that popular culture representation of these practices undertaken by my gentry group is manifestly parodic of these gentry aspects; we live, today, in a society which no longer favours or takes as read this group's privileged position in the social hierarchy. The ambivalence of this parodic representation is itself proof of the practices being originally the preserve of the elite and now undertaken by a larger segment of British society.

The practices of repping, raving, drug taking and associated sporting practices where they took root, are in fact associated with the working classes and the democratisation of travel, holidaying and commercialisation of sports in the 1990s. Notable sociological works in this

respect are Urry's (1990) *Tourist Gaze* and Lash & Urry's *Economies of Signs and Space* (1994), two works which develop the argument that the post-Fordist economy saw the development of the tourist economy and service industries which liberated travel, granting holidaying to the many, not the few. In addition, King's *The End of the Terraces* (1998) and *The European Ritual* (2003) gives an ethnographically informed account of the developments of working class youth culture around said practices of rave, drinking, drug taking and the unifying aspect of sport, in this case football which provides a sporting 'season' of travel around Europe.

In addition, popular culture has entrenched such classed notions around holiday repping and youth raving/drug culture. In the 1990s this was associated with working class culture: songs such as Blur's 'Girls and Boys' (1994) sings of sun, sex and drug indulgence on Ibiza and the 'Second Summer of Love', pioneered by music group The Stone Roses, also incorporated aspects of working class holidaying culture. The Stone Roses' legendary shows at Spike Island (Widnes) and the Empress Ballroom (Blackpool) combined these elements: the Northern, working-class holidaying practice of taking an en masse coach trip to Blackpool and the rave culture that followed at these concerts, encapsulates this. More recently, the documentary series on the BBC's youth channel BBC Three *Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents* furthers the audacious aspects of youth holidaying culture, repping and the drug and alcohol indulgences that revolve around a working class culture of youth, or at least a manifestly unpretentious practice. Another example that extends this is, of course, the hugely successful channel 4 show *The Inbetweeners* whose film *The Inbetweeners Movie* saw the group take to a trip to a cheap Greek island resort for such indulgences.

Against such popular images, the Jack Wills Seasonnaires map of travel is expressly less 'cheap and cheerful' than the dominant features of youth tourism, favouring the French or Austrian alps, the prestigious Guards Polo Club located in the Royal Ascot end of Windsor

Great Park and up-market seaside towns, notably Rock and Salcombe whose exclusivity I documented in the previous chapter. So first, the Jack Wills season is much more ‘gentrified’ in its destinations than its other youth peers. Yet moreover *travel, youthful indulgences and tourist adventure was originally an elite youth prerogative*. The democratisation of travel witnessed in the 1990s-2000s and the holidaying culture that it has spawned hides its aristocratic inheritances, notable among this is the recent development in British culture of a ‘gap year’.

A gap year is an aristocratic inheritance. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a gap year would be called a ‘Grand Tour’ and was an exclusive practice for the sons of the aristocracy. It was a finishing school in culture. Jeremy Black’s *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (2003) documents this aristocratic youth’s rite of passage. Looking at travel correspondence between aristocratic youths, what Black’s history of the Grand Tour in fact highlights is less the cultivation of tastes (for architecture, art and the civility of the Italian, French or Swiss sensibilities) advocated by aristocratic parents but rather the indulgences, and hazards, of travel by the progeny of Britain’s aristocracy: sexually transmitted diseases, running out of monies, incarnation by foreign authorities, drugs, drink and more. The gap year shares the same features: ostensibly it is a practice for the cultivation of cultural capital, tastes and sensibilities to improve one’s ‘human capital’. Yet the realities are somewhat different: for gap years, too, involve similar indulgences of sun, sex and spendthriftery and trouble with foreign police.

The gap year has become a source of youth parody for its inheritances of its aristocratic predecessor, the Grand Tour, via the viral video ‘Gap Yah’ released in 2010. The sketch sees one stereotypically posh boy on his ‘Gap Yah’ (posh argot of gap year), incarcerated in a Burmese prison, on the phone to his friend retelling of his travels and his drinking exploits. The sketch originated from an Oxford University sketch troop but after it was uploaded to

YouTube it saw over ten million hits within its first two weeks. *The Guardian* quoted creator Matt Lacey, who plays the posh-boy gap year aficionado Orlando, stating the sketch is "... a satire on the great number of people who seem to be leaving these shores to vomit all over the developing world." (in Meltzer, 2010) The sketch is a parody of the upper-middle class trope of a gap-year-taking-individual whose indulgences see him completely miss the point of the practice's professed cultural aspects. The gentry aspects of the Gap year are notable to the social group I am documenting in this thesis. Meltzer states,

The private-school equivalent of Little Britain's Vicky Pollard, Orlando is a parody of the pashmina-wearing, point-missing upper-middle-class idiot known as the Rah. Indigenous residents of older universities and public schools, Rahs are known for their ostentatiously unkempt hair, expensive clothes and tediously drawn-out vowels. If you have not been to Durham, Bristol or St Andrews, however, you may never have encountered the gap-year Rah ... (Meltzer, 2010)

The Gap year, in the context of gentrified spaces of Oxbridge and Russell Group universities, becomes an upper-middle class self-parody. Lacey, himself a self-confessed Gap year taker and upper-middle class, has captured a feature of contemporary youth experience and demonstrated, through such parody, the enduring features of its gentry heritage.

The link between Jack Wills and the posh side of the gap year is evident. One entry on the Urban Dictionary<sup>22</sup> defines Jack Wills thusly: "Shit clothing brand with a name on it, worn by kids who everone knows and hates, pretty crap stuff (trackies, hoodies, catalogue includes middle class gap-year pics of posh nobs in camp vans)." Clearly written from the perspective

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<sup>22</sup> 'Jack Wills': Urban Dictionary: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Jack%20Wills> (accessed 10/03/14) (spelling errors in original).

of a Jack Wills detractor, such a vitriolic definition highlights the privileged side of Jack Wills and the gap year representations in tandem. Furthermore, the link between Jack Wills and the gap year is evoked not only by symbolic association but in further Orlando sketches where Lacey performs in a Jack Wills gilet. While Gap Yah is a parody, Jack Wills' association with this culture clearly demonstrates its lingering elite features. Not only do the Seasonnaires epitomize such figures who are employed to engage in such 'gap yah' indulgences but their image in popular culture turns their youth culture into an aristocratic vision of them. Seasonnaires are less practicing a rave drug culture and holiday rep aspects of the Post-Fordist service industry; rather they evoke the gentry heritage and the upper-middle class *re-appropriation of the culture of travel, tourism and holidaying as an elite preserve*.

Yet this re-appropriation does have its ambivalences. This ambivalence comes out in one more example of Lacey's character Orlando when he is brought back for a series of adverts promoting the channel *Comedy Central* during the Royal Wedding furor. In one sketch he plays off the contemporary upper-middle youth's ambivalence toward their poshness – (a feature of popular culture more generally, notably in Channel 4's representation of Jack Whitehall's character JP in *Fresh Meat* and found in Jack Will's brand image in general (see Smith, 2014a)). In one Royal Wedding sketch, Orlando is on the phone again to Tarquin. Tarquin asks him if has been invited to the Royal Wedding. Orlando confirms he has and then extols the virtues of the event:

“The nation coming together and unifying under one mutual good wish for the young couple, probably a once in a lifetime opportunity to be present at a marriage of a future King and Queen who will act as a crucible to bring together the variant strands of modern British identity. [pause] Am I going? Nah, can't be bothered. Sounds shit. Probs just go raving instead...”



Pronouncing raving ‘rarving’ to typify his public-school accent and argot, this sketch demonstrates the upper-middle class youth’s appropriation of an aspect of youth culture, the working class rave scene, which is not historically theirs and their twists on it. As more members of the young population now engage in such grand-tour like activities, this creates competing notions of legitimacy which, for our gentry group, have to be ambivalently incorporated into their practices to exist in the present.

This ambivalence is furthered in terms of the sporting identity Jack Wills has also drawn upon, notably skiing and polo. In Britain, skiing and especially polo are preserves of the upper-middle and upper-classes. The 2011 film *Chalet Girl*, which sees a working class snowboarding champion become a chalet girl, i.e. housemaid by day, party/raver by night, to an upper-middle class family and their home-from-home in the Alps, consolidates this representation of the youth holiday/rep culture amongst the gentry group. A ‘chalet girl’ is typically a form of finishing school requiring knowledge of etiquette and hospitality. Yet the chalet girl, much like Orlando on his Gap Yah, will typically feature engaging in raving (‘rarving’) and further convivial indulgences: the parties in the chalet’s town, après skis and homes of other holiday makers. As with the ambivalence of the gap year as part gentry inheritance, part appropriation of working class culture, the chalet girl is a figure of gentry manners with a party girl edge. The same may be said of polo. The Jack Wills Varsity Polo is a gentry tradition, dating back to 1879 and taking place at the prestigious Guards Club in Windsor Great Park. Speaking of the Varsity Polo, Peter Williams stated: “Apparently, Henry VIII used to shoot here, and we’re making way for the new guard with silent discos, live bands, and lots of big hair.” (Williams in Sparks, 2011) Here the ambivalence is evident; the shooting party of a Royal court is replaced by the silent disco raving party of the ‘new guard’ of the gentry group. And notice that it is a ‘silent disco’, a feature that is less a fad of modern technology and rave culture but more likely a necessity due to noise pollution regulations in

the genteel space of Windsor Great Park. To engage in the practice of ‘raving’, the gentry have to compete also with the legitimacy of gentry space, that is, genteel British lawn polo in the Crown Estate.

What these features of the Jack Wills Seasonnaires program demonstrate is the re-appropriation of an elite preserve – travel, the grand tour and its indulgences – and its ambivalent latching onto novel developments in youth (working class) culture. This ambivalence and re-appropriation is, however, best exemplified by the Seasonnaires employment of the term ‘stash’, a slang term which in the 1990s rave scene referred to ‘a stash of drugs’ (usually ecstasy pills kept in cellophane bags easily ‘stashed away’ in ones socks or other such places to avoid detection). Amongst the Seasonnaires and their travelling activities, ‘stash’ refers to their haul of exclusive Jack Wills goods which are furtively distributed to participants they befriend in seasonal locations, seaside towns, ski resorts or polo matches. Stash, in this guise, loses its association with its rave/drug culture of the working class youth of the 1990s and becomes a feature of the economy of Jack Wills. Jack Wills has skilfully latched onto developments in youth culture from the 1990s/2000s and given it a ‘gentry twist’ which, with regard to ‘stash’ in the hands of the Seasonnaires, refers to what I want to develop as their heraldic role of divvying out goods to a select few. Here heraldry becomes the secret logic of stash, rave culture and holidaying pursuits: stash is, as I will argue in more ethnographic detail in chapters 6 and 7, an embedded economy of distribution for the few not the many. With this in mind, I will favour the view of the Seasonnaires as a special branch of youth culture’s relationship to travel, holidaying and raving practice. Through an analysis of their practice as a whole, I argue that it shows itself to be an imaginative extension of heraldry in the face of these developments.

## 5.2 Heraldry & Brand Heraldry

Historically conceived, heraldry is a species of patrimonial authority. In patrimonial domination, the authority of ruler depends upon custom and tradition and, in its administration, it works via a series of ‘favourites’ or ‘courtiers’ who, on claim of loyalty to the potentate, carry on obligations and gain accolades and retain high-social station through this service. Heraldry, as an institution, is a rationalisation of this process. The inheritance of arms became the custom upon which the loyalty to the authority of the potentate rested (Weber, 1968:1021; cf. Keen, 1984). The right to a coat of arms, and the obligations that flow from heraldic prerogatives, specifically, refer to a personal dependency that noble persons derived from personal service to the sovereign (Wagner, 1956:65ff). As medieval kings called upon the high born (gentry) in their service, the prerogative to grant them ‘arms’ – a coat displaying their lineage and descent – was under his discretion. Over time, the monarch relinquished this duty and put his or her trust in the College of Arms, a corporation which engage in the distinguishing, surveying and science of blazoning armories (Grant, 1937:1-5; Woods-Woollaston, 1960:2-5). Heralds/Heraldry becomes, on the one hand, a way to distinguish a monarch’s peers on the basis of material, beautified symbols (coats of arms) and, on the other, the personage who proclaims the nobility or honours of the monarch.

With that in mind, brands have been suggested as heraldic in certain respects. Mazzarella (2003a/b) argues brands are “paternalistic”; as they draw upon connotations of an idealised world, this obliges persons to inhabit these imagined universes in product use. Idealised worlds express and contextualise aspirations and enact identity in heraldic guise of eponymous obligation: “visual signs (logos, trademarks) operate like nothing so much as royal insignia: consumers who wear these signs on their bodies are thus literally incorporated as loyal vassals. And, indeed, one of the EMW Mobile focus-group respondents...had explained that he expected to be looked after by EMW “as a father looks after a child.””

(Mazzarella, 2003b:55). Mazzarella emphasises the patrimonial domination side of heraldry as the father-to-child outlook is steeped in the insignia of the quasi-Royal body.<sup>23</sup> Celia Lury (2003) makes a similar argument by stating that branded logos (colours, graphics, etc) act as surrogates to kinship and group membership. These surrogate kin-devices function as metaphors for the longevity of ‘brand’ as key to its economic prowess. Heraldic insignia branded onto bodies is indicative of the ‘time’ of global capitalism. As heraldry refers to traditional authority based upon custom, it seeks to make the personage under such insignia immortal. Immortality in brand-name guise rests upon the fact that “the durability of the brand is ...independent of the durability of the products which are its effects.” (Lury, 2003:393) Brands, like heraldry, seek “to displace the temporality of fashion altogether.” (Lury, 2003:393) Heraldic insignia passing down generations are the perfect parallel imitation to the immortality that branded corporations seek for themselves, e.g. product insignia of “Est. 1776” etc. The immortality of the brand may be linked to the patrimonial aspect of heraldry: it obliges persons to take on an eponymous character (‘the brand-name’) just as coats of arms oblige individuals to take on the name of ancestors.

Mazzarella (2003a/b) and Lury (2003) draw upon the paternalistic and immortal status of the brand in order to suggest ways the brand may relinquish its alienable, market status as ‘open from a price and appropriable by anyone’. Branding shares similarities: to adequately conceive of proper notions of identity, obligation and uses, one has to ‘live up’ to a branded good – one must perform as Nike shoes suggest in adverts; one must ‘look’ as Ralph Lauren suggests, and so on. Brands, in their products, are aesthetically designed to distinguish consumers and share similar qualities to heraldry as a form of patrimonial authority – they ask for loyalty based upon personal devotion. But, as Mazzarella (2003b:55) points out, brands are also servile – they obey a democracy of populism as one choices

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<sup>23</sup> cf. Harold Perkin’s theory of neo-feudal hierarchies in multinational capital (1996).

affinity and allegiance. For Jack Wills, however, this popular purchase is what is most abhorrent; the brand requires a more patrimonial authority status. This is found in the role of their Seasonnaires. Not all ‘consumers’ of Jack Wills can be seen as under a form of patrimonial authority; indeed, one may pick and choose their clothes in store purchase and let commodity acquisition be the end of the relationship. But with the Seasonnaires, they are a special case of brand ambassadors and I suggest their role is more like a herald and argue Jack Wills’ patronage of symbols of elite British identity, which mirrors heraldic design, takes on a more patrimonial function.

Distinguished heraldry scholar and once King of Arms at the College of Arms, Sir Anthony Richard Wagner’s work (e.g. 1956; 1978) on heraldry gives a fitting example of a medieval heraldic practice that I wish to use as an illustration of the work the Seasonnaires conduct in their role in the monopolisation of life-style and how it mimics heraldry. Wagner’s *Heraldry and Heraldry in the middle ages* (1956) opens with an observation that two facets, heralds and heraldry, combine in the role of “heralds”: on the one hand they are “the crier, the proclaimer, the sacrosanct ambassador” and on the other “the expert in armorial bearings and pedigrees” (1965:1). This strange, dual role, Wagner distils into a medieval practice known as ‘the Herald’s Visitation’. The purpose of this visitation to certain provincial towns was, Wagner states,

to correct arms unlawfully borne and to enter those borne lawfully with the descendants of those who bore them, and directing the said authorities to give him all the assistance in their power. The King of Arms would then proceed to the several counties of his province and either visit the gentry (and reputed gentry) in their houses, or summon them to attend him at a neighbouring town. (Wagner, 1956:2)

Wagner gives a historical document of this process, quoted in full, out of which I single out two aspects. On his visitation, the King of Arms would seek

*To obtain from ... each County the name and place of [habitation] of every person who [makes] use of [Arms], or [styles] himself Gentleman, Esquire, Knight or Baronet ...If no such Title can be made out, then the person is to subscribe a disclaimer of any pretence he hath to [Arms], or to the title of Gentleman, a Form whereof the K. of [Arms] is to prepare ...*

*That a [Catalogue] of Names of all such who assume the Title of Gentleman, or a superior Title, and cannot [exhibit] such proof their right to the bearing of [Arms], as is by the law of [arms] required with the names of such ...*

*In registering the descents of all such who have just right to bear Arms, the person's [entering] the descent to [expresses] the Christian names of his Ancestors, as far as his own [Certain] Knowledge.*

(The Visitation Instructions given to his deputies in 1681 by Sir Henry St. George, Clarenceux King of Arms, cited in Wagner, 1956:3-4, ellipses and brackets denote updated modern spelling of phonetic early-modern English)

This outline – with a hint of caution – can be seen as a procedure that, if we keep in mind Jack Wills' concern for *Outfitting a Gentry*, is imitated in the Seasonnaires program. The heraldic visitation can be distilled into three qualities outlined below which I demonstrate can

be applied to the role of Seasonnaires in their capacity as brand ambassadors. These qualities are

(1) persons make claim to gentry in the taking of a title (gentleman, etc.) from a named ancestor

(2) these persons who claim this descent are catalogued as names for consideration, while

(3) certain persons are asked to supply ancestors so as to corroborate their current claim.

We see heraldry visitations are a way to check who's who among patrimonial favourites. Recalling the argument of chapter two that the dialectic of the gentry was a mix of aspirational openness with pockets of ascribed social closure, we see this source is, in effect, an instruction on how to deal with the dialectic of gentry: of those who claim nobility and those who have means to prove it. The role of herald is divided (as one side proclaimer of the King's message and surveying peers and another side expert in insignia) because their role assists a social structure that is hierarchical yet open to pockets of aspiration. The arrival of a herald was a way to survey and limit arms in an effort to curtail aspirant's entrance into noble circles.

I will now demonstrate how these aspects are imitated in the corporate strategy of the Seasonnaires. First by way of elaboration on the ethnographic position of the Seasonnaires in relation to British society more generally, and second by way developing homologies practice of heralds in relation to the Seasonnaires activities.

### 5.3 Meet the Seasonnaires: The elite dispersion thesis

The Seasonnaires, in the language of business and marketing, are ‘brand ambassadors’. A brand ambassador is someone whose personality, demeanour and ethos adequately embodies and articulates the more abstract, general values of the brand’s image. By embodying such notions that the brand conjures up, such as, for Jack Wills, ‘gentry’, ‘Britishness’, ‘privilege’, as well as more generic aspects such as age, class, gender, race, ethnicity and the normative relations therein, they seek to strengthen the brand’s identity, authenticity and also its profitability. As such they ultimately embody such abstractions in their person to aid the strength of the product-customer relationship.

In the case of Jack Wills, the Seasonnaires are a special type of ambassador for the company does no formal advertising that one usually associates with brands; television adverts, billboards, posters, magazine inlays, etc. are all absent from the Jack Wills business model. Instead, all ‘advertising’ comes from the events the brand puts on and the Seasonnaires, themselves, take the active role in forging the customer-product links. Ultimately, this is what is behind the success of the Jack Wills brand because, as Lucie Greene (2011) of the *Financial Times* calls it, it is a “non-marketing strategy”: the Seasonnaires are ambassadors of the brand, technically speaking, but in reality – i.e. ‘how things get done’ – they are friends, or establish friendships, with people through the corporate name. As Greene (2011) says, “Events in the real world make the brand, which even sounds like a friend, into a companion for the good times.” This non-public, almost guerilla strategy in the world of brands where all is publicity (cf. Arvidsson, 2013; also Berger, 1972), to marketing begs the question: *who are they? And why this covert strategy?*

The answer to the first question is simple: the Seasonnaires are university students, recruited through either working ‘in store’ or through friends of other, already working, Seasonnaires. During the research upon which this thesis is based, the Seasonnaires I interviewed were all either university students or had worked in store, or both. Ben, the eldest



and now no longer with the company, first entered into Jack Wills as a sales assistant in the store while at Oxford University. He later became a key player in the organisation of the production of the Jack Wills Handbooks, using his collegiate links with Oxford to establish photo-shoots in colleges, and then head up the American expansion in 2010/11. Indie, however, was not a university student but at the Wimbledon College of Art, studying a foundation degree, while working in the store and later decided to become a full-time Jack Wills Seasonairre. While Robo, the head Seasonnaire and head of UK Marketing at the time of research, was a student at Henley College (a sixth form college) who was spotted to model for the brand's Handbooks and then later headed up the marketing at head office. All the other Seasonairres are current university students at provincial universities and have previously worked 'in store'.

The answer to the second question – why this covert strategy? – is trickier to answer. The fact that the Seasonnaires are all, or have been, store workers is not the crucial part; the most salient aspect is their being university students, notably non-Oxbridge students. The Seasonnaires, at an ethnographic level, are nodes in a network of elites who are recruited by the Jack Wills brand to adequately reflect and unify the gentry group sought by the Jack Wills brand. As such, they go beyond Oxbridge as a site to recruit a so-called ambassador. Oxbridge consists of approximately 12,000 undergraduates at any one time, of which there are 4,000 in each year group (2,000 at Oxford, 2,000 at Cambridge). Of these 12,000 students, around 50% are from non-public schools or are international students and the remaining 6,000 privately educated students are either of inappropriate background or are nonplussed by Jack Wills. While precision here is difficult, the remaining group at Oxbridge who would demonstrate an affinity to the Jack Wills brand is a very slim number. Not enough to forge a core group significantly proficient to secure a national and inter-national brand. A

wider pool of participants is required; this is where the Seasonnaires come in and also the inherent ambivalence of the gentry dialectic this thesis is tracing.

Recall that Ben, in the previous chapter, stated that when he first began to organise marketing activities for Jack Wills, he did so in Oxford (c.2005/2006) where the brand had a clearly elite stature amongst the student body. By the time I arrived in Oxford in 2012 to interview some members of the OUPC, this had disappeared. Previously, my informants stated, you could ‘tell a person’s class’ through the use of the named attire but this was five to six years ago (i.e. 2006/7). Change had been so dramatic that my informants stated, instead, that I should go to Oxford Brookes, the old polytechnic, to find the Jack Wills fanatics: “They have the Jack Wills look – peroxide hair, gilet’s and strenuous vowels” (fieldnotes), i.e. an exaggerated gentry figure that the Oxford students, we recall, consider ‘too Oxford’. What these facts establish is the inherent ambivalence of the Jack Wills brand strategy and the push-and-pull of the core group it targets. While it patrons the Oxbridge sports clubs, strengthening its elite association, it also goes beyond the Oxbridge circle to recruit a series of personages to embody its look, image and build a network of individuals under the brand’s name: the Seasonnaires. Note that the Oxbridge students *purportedly* cast their elite colours off, stating it is “too Oxford”, but use the very name of the elite institution *to which they belong* to articulate the character disposition of their (purportedly) *less elite counterparts* at Oxford Brookes.

This push-and-pull of the gentry dialectic of elite naming versus not wishing to take the name on as a positive identifier is, I would argue, due to the Jack Wills Seasonnaire programme exposing what is or was a secret of gentry conduct: networking and the establishment of pockets of social closure to an aspirational station (the essence of the gentry dialectic). The Seasonnaires may, on the face of it, be corporate appendages to the Jack Wills brand. But sociologically speaking, they are in fact engaging in the networking activities that

(as noted in the previous chapter) the upper-middle classes have long been known for engaging in; be it professionally or informally in convivial activities and often *both*. Amongst upper circles, the necessity of business success and contacts and friendship are one and the same. This is what the Seasonnaires are, in truth: professionally convivial, friends and business colleagues. As such we must note the generational significance Jack Wills has had in this regard. In the 1980s, the network of public-school elites manifested through Oxbridge was built around the conviviality of the colleges – dinning together in the evenings, formals and, also, general parties. Furthermore contacts of public-school elites would further develop *after* university through dinner parties in London where early career professionals would share Oxbridge contacts and widen the public-school network through the core of the Oxbridge group. Today the Jack Wills Seasonnaires engage in convivial networking activities through working for the brand as such. Therein the Jack Wills brand has *corporately exposed, through its publicity as a named corporation which works via the logic of publicity, the logic of gentry circles*. Yet the brand, as we'll see in this chapter, tries to keep this corporate process of the Seasonnaires as secret as possible, as only for those who 'discover' the brand.

In terms of motivation to become a Seasonnaire, however, it is the very allure that the 'job' has ostensibly. Of course Seasonnaires don't join in order to network; this is a consequence which the job has. For the job is alluring on the face of it: it is a permanent round of parties and the very life of privilege that the Jack Wills brand seeks to set as its image. Gemma Soames interview with one Seasonnaire summed this up. The life of a Seasonnaire is

...sort of like Skins, but with nicer houses and pleases and thank-yous. As Lizzie tries to explain to me on the last night: "I can't imagine many other people who basically get you to go out and say, 'This is my life. I love my life. Why don't you join in?'" She's right. And it's probably why so many teenagers want to. (Soames, 2010)

The partying mixed with the pleasant, polite gentility of upper-middle class sensibilities, itself part of the ambivalence of Jack Wills appropriation of youth tourism (see below), is the public (that have heard of the brand) face that the Jack Wills brand employs as an *aspirational* entity: ‘why don’t you join in?’ The reality is much more restricted in terms of who gets in and what the job’s role is subject to. A Seasonnaire does not become a Seasonnaire as a career choice: those Seasonnaires this thesis documents are all no longer Seasonnaires at the time of writing (March 2014). Ben, who worked with Jack Wills for some six years, engaged in a more business role as head of US marketing in the company’s Boston office and by the end of his time there spoke to me about how Jack Wills set him in good stead for his current position in a similar role for an exclusive yachting holiday company. And, Robo, who worked in head office in London as head of UK marketing for a similar amount of time with the brand, was also heading off from the brand to move onto another role in marketing. Unlike these two Seasonnaires, however, the others documented in this thesis are no longer with the brand and did not necessarily see their time with the company as a career direction; rather it is a limited, enjoyable time with a company that would provide access to a life-style desirable to them between the ages of 18 to 24. The time as a Seasonnaire is a ‘paid to party’ era; a job that is enjoyable and pays around £10,000 p.a. It offers the applicant the means to engage in the highest expression of student, elite conviviality in the desired, aspirational places *and* gain access to the elite denizens they house.

This is the crucial ambivalence of the Seasonnaires and their place in British society: mostly, the Seasonnaire recruits in the period covered are, plainly speaking, ‘not as posh’ as those with whose localities and institutions they engage. For instance, in the case of Rock 2011 – which I will give an ethnographic account of in chapter 7 – the two Seasonnaires were

Independent School educated, one also a student at Oxford Brookes, whereas their hosts in Rock were largely from Eton and Rugby Group public schools and more prominent Russell Group universities. Here is a clear empirical example of the gentry dialectic which the Seasonnaires corporate program demonstrates: it provides a nodal network of elites through the brand name Jack Wills that captures both aspiration and social closure. While allowing pockets of aspiration to take place through the Seasonnaire program itself, the localities and their limited scope of the seasonal network itself maintains an aura of exclusivity.

#### 5.4 The Seasonnaires as heralds & their heraldic visitation

To gain a title is to successfully claim descent from an ancestor that was once a peer, courtier or favourite of the potentate. The name of the ancestor is the source of access to genteel station and, as Wagner points out (1978:41-42), many cases in history see people claiming descent from persons who are completely invented or “there can be problems of identity between persons of the same name.” (Wagner, 1978:48) The problem arises because noble names are not always from originally noble stock – names such as Smith, he observes, arise in the peerage because of wealth, office, politics, or vocation or profession – and often “the herald has to assess gentility and the Court of Chivalry at times to decide on social criteria” (Wagner, 1978:50) as final resorts.<sup>24</sup> As stated in chapter 2, the dialectic of gentry is the oxymoron of British genteel station – non-nobles may be noble. The name is less a name than it is the legend that precedes it.

In the case of Jack Wills, this brand-name is – as discussed previously – an imitation ancestor-name. This, however, is not a purely decorative, ironic or meaningless piece of

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<sup>24</sup> “When a man called John Smith was proposed as a member [to the Historic Buildings Committee, an early organisation in the development of the National Trust], the chairman, Viscount Esher, said ‘I suppose it is a good thing to have a proletarian name on the Committee – anybody know him?’ ‘Yes’, said the Earl of Euston, ‘he is my brother-in-law’. (Nicolson, 2009:42)

trivia. In fact it has an institutionalised function among the Seasonnaires. Our Seasonnaire who oversaw the American expansion in 2010/11, stated:

We were all told to tell a story that ‘he’ was Pete’s granddad: John Williams shorted to Jack Wills. ... I always thought it was [true] but I have heard some people say it’s not. Perhaps his granddad was named Jack Williams, I don’t know. I can’t remember the exact time that I heard rumours that it wasn’t true but the story seemed pretty simple enough to be real. It’s a pretty harmless story. I guess I’ll never really know, unless I do some family tree digging.

While ‘he’ may be an invention, the brand-name is imitating ancestor veneration although it is veneration for no real practical purpose. But as a piece of PR, the naming after a grandfather has allowed it to become part of how we come to conceive of people (as I demonstrated in chapter 2). But even more than this, with the establishment of Seasonnaires, the use of imitation ancestors in a collective (brand-)name is an institutionalised means of establishing a way to imitate the same claims to honour that are associated with patrimonial authority, notably court favour. The use of the brand-name Jack Wills as signifying an imitation form of descent has a practical, sociological purpose to it. This may not be an intentional feature on the part of the brand; it *is* my interpretation of it.

Instead of being a name, as Lury (2004) argues for brands, unifying a series of products or commodities in time-space, the name Jack Wills is being used to unify a series of personages who act under this name and allows the name to come to stand for their sociological coherence in time-space. Gemma Soames, journalist for *The Sunday Times*, said of the Jack Wills Seasonnaires, after spending time with them in Norfolk, 2010:

The Seasonnaires are a living advert and a conscious one, too. Constantly referring to people and places as "on-brand" (if they're not, we're not allowed to go there), they rarely stray from the party line. ... Theirs seems like a life of permanent beach parties and games, one in which girls with clean hair look sexy in cricket jumpers and beautiful boys mess around in pink shorts. (Soames, 2010)

The Seasonnaires act under the Jack Wills brand-name and in visiting, as a heraldic visitation, the seasonal spaces that are 'on-brand' their effort furthers the meaning of the locale as defined by their social network. What we are witnessing is, in effect, an embedded series of peers through the use of acting seasonal would-be heralds. The people and places they visit are people and places claiming, in effect, a genteel lifestyle. As we saw previously, this seasonal monopoly established by Jack Wills gives communal confidence to the product. It also gives coherence to the social group. Kate Walsh of *The Times* interviewed Peter Williams in Oxford in 2012 and said of the Seasonnaires:

Jack Wills has teams of "Seasonnaires" who roam beaches, ski resorts and campuses to spread the word. "They are the mouthpieces of the brand," said Williams. "They have often worked in the stores and their job for the summer is to make friends, throw parties and be in the right places seeding the brand." They never sell directly - "that would piss people off" - but they do give stuff away. (Walsh, 2012)

They roam the corporation's suggested spaces of gentry lifestyle (beaches, ski resorts and campuses) as 'criers' or 'sacrosanct ambassadors'. In their visitations, the Jack Wills Seasonnaires are coveting persons into a network and cataloguing names and contacts on site.

“In return for the glasses” said James, my informant from Rock who worked closely with the Seasonnaires, “the ‘customer’ filled in a little form with their contact details for further publicity/ mailing. In branded uniform; there’s a uniform they wear. There is a list of items they are able to get from the catalogue. They get given 3-6 items then get anything at cost; 18 quid for one the 70 quid hoodies.” The Seasonnaires are collecting and soliciting networks with people who are being considered for interaction on-site locations; these names are catalogued for future invitation to parties. In order to conduct this, walking along Daymer Bay collecting names, the Rock Seasonnaires are dressed in attire they have, in effect, inherited from a brand-name and demonstrate its proper, expert way of being uniformly worn (an imitation of heralds wearing the insignia of their master on ceremony (Wagner, 1978:68-85)). Of course, I am not saying this is an exact point-for-point comparison but rather suggesting that, in an effort to outfit a gentry group, the use of seasonal visitation enacts in practice that mirror heralds’ visitation: to survey a series of persons that the Jack Wills brand deem worthy as their appropriate customer. In the process, it develops practices that dispense with heraldic insignia as goods are given away and names of possible peers supplied that are more loyal than a purchase through commodity acquisition. As Peter Williams says, it ‘would piss people off’ to be sold directly to and the alternative option that suggests itself is gift giving in a visitation:

face-to-face recommendation and location specific customer acquisition is much more powerful and lasting than what I call the promiscuousness of advertising acquired relationships. So every time you put on a t-shirt that you bought from Jack Wills in Nantucket this summer, the brand’s associated with the great time you had on the beach with your friends that summer – it’s



not just another t-shirt, there is a deep emotional attachment with the brand. (Williams, 2011)

Claims to the lasting relationships of face-to-face interaction, as heralds visit, is conducted to create affective sentiments of obligation, the claim being the brand is a way to create more than a series of purchases. This section has demonstrated that taking the name of an ancestor and circulating the name in a series of locations through the mouths of ‘heralds’ (Seasonnaires) [Figure 27]. The Jack Wills brand is in a manner of speaking conducting what Wagner claimed of medieval heralds: correcting the distribution of arms. What I shall detail in the next section is how this use of Seasonnaires is also, through distribution, a way to create a series of dense, social ties which limit group expansion and consolidation a core-group. That is, it furthers the heralds concern with judging gentility.

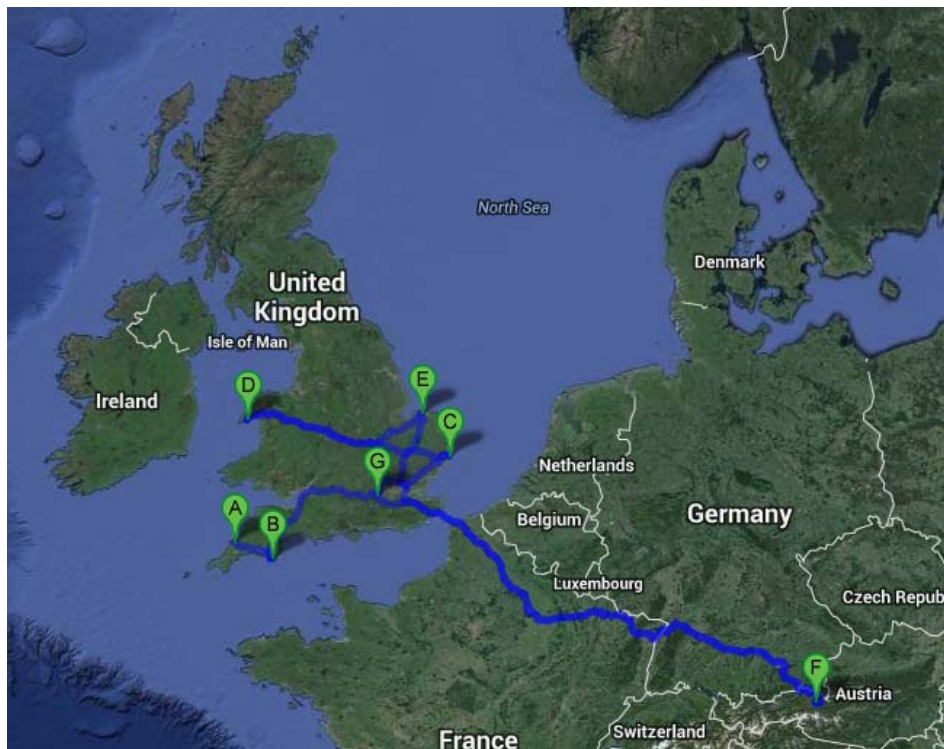


Figure 27 Network of Seasonnaire "Heraldic" Visitations, Season 2012: (A) Rock, (B) Salcombe, (C) Aldeburgh, (D) Abersoch, (E) Burnham Market, (F) Saalbach-Hinterglemm, (G) Windsor. Google maps.

## 5.5 Names and number: Seasonnaires and the weakness of strong ties

Jack Wills' Seasonnaires are all extremely personable. According to my informants and observations of them, they're seen as 'great personalities', 'fun loving', 'up beat' and, in general, well-liked by those with whom they interact. This personable quality is crucial to their success in acting as peers to an ancestor they imitate descent from. When Peter Williams and Robert Shaw, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, initiated a monopoly on the life-style locale of Salcombe, they did so through personality – engaging in the lifestyle so as to befriend those who forged what was deemed honourable in the vicinity. This role is extended to the current Seasonnaires who rely upon the same personable characteristics. We may say that Seasonnaire descent is traced from Williams and Shaw's days as founding heralds and the household coat of Jack Wills' insignia (i.e. brand image, symbols, etc of the clothes). "We call them micro-celebrities" says Williams on the Seasonnaires, "Hugely opinion forming in small opinion forming groups; we don't macro-celebrity endorsement because macro is, in its very nature, mass. What we're into is *very deep relationships with very small numbers of customers*, rather than shallow relationships with lots and lots of people." (Williams, 2011) Williams singles out their ability to (a) forge opinion in small groups and (b) establish deep relationships from this. Drawing upon the metaphor of celebrity, Williams intimates what I develop in terms of the economics of this sort of status group practice as a form of heraldry in an effort to control dispensing with armories as inalienable possessions. The criteria for granting arms are "gentility" and, as explored in chapter 2, this is not easy to ascertain. Wagner supplies a 1530 herald's account on what he considers one of the earliest, concise sources for the criteria of gentility and its ability to grant armoires:

According to the [ordinances] and [customs] therefore provided  
and [had] which use and [custom] was that [every] person  
[being] of good name and fame and good [renown] And not

[vile born] or [rebels] [might] be [admitted] to be [ennobled] to have [arms] (cited in Wagner, 1956:79, brackets denote modern spelling of phonetic early-modern English)

Not ‘vile born’ and with good name, fame and renown. In their excellent character, the Seasonnaires can be said to be engaged in a similar activity; for the distribution of the branded goods goes hand-in-hand (or hand-from-hand) with Seasonnaire reputation or fame. As such the names of the Seasonnaires become crucial to forming a consolidated elite as the gift economy, conducted through the Season, and their ability to develop a celebrity-like form of fame and repute.

During the season, the economy of gift exchanges is a way to establish the personalities of the Seasonnaires in the locales. What the gift establishes is, as anthropologists note (e.g. Mauss, 1990; Strathern, 1979; Weiner, 1985; Munn, 1986; Gell, 1993), the name of the giver. Since the gift retains the identity (name) of the donor, the giving away of the name via the gift (bearing this name) requires the appropriate recipients. The giver dispenses with the goods to make a name for him/herself in the vicinity of the seasonal locations – Rock, Salcombe, Aldeburgh, Burnham Market, Abersoch, Nantucket & Martha’s Vineyard, BUSC Main Event, and Varsity Polo. This establishes the name of the giver with those persons the Jack Wills brand wishes to covet.

As Gell notes, “there would be no increment of glory to the ‘name’ which clings to the object after it has been given away, *unless the giving-away of the object were a genuine sacrifice or ‘loss’ to the giver...*” (1993:145, added emphasis) The name of the donor needs to find people to whom they wish to give the prestige to, otherwise the value and honour is lost for the group. This is the logic behind Williams’ strategy of celebrity endorsement. The Seasonnaires aren’t celebrities in the full sense of the term; they’re not personalities that help

shift goods from shelves (cf. McCracken, 2005). What Peter Williams refers to as ‘celebrity’ is, rather, the Seasonnaires as well-known person within the social group. The exchanges – of glasses for contacts, of free clothes to aid marketing – are a way to establish name-recognition in a life-style specific place and construct an ensemble of social relations around the brand-name.

As they stood in 2012 the Seasonnaires did not exceed ten persons in the UK and they were dispersed around UK universities:

1. Georgie Palmer (University of Warwick)
2. Florence Huntington-Whitely (University of Leeds)
3. Stefan Schroder (University of Manchester)
4. Ed Vetham (Loughborough University)
5. Ed Barrow (Oxford Brookes University)
6. Georgie Cade (University of Bristol)
7. Frankie Taylor (University of Edinburgh)
8. Theodore Rodrigues Da Costa (University of Nottingham)
9. Thomas Du Luart (University of the West of England)
10. Abby Officer (Nottingham Trent University)
11. *(honorary: Robert ‘Robo’ McCallum, head of UK marketing)*
12. *Daisy Hill (2012 ‘Best Summer Job in the UK’ winner)*
13. *Patrick Weiss (2012 ‘Best Summer Job in the UK’ winner)*



Figure 28 Florence Huntington-Whitely (of the Huntington-Whitely baronetage),  
Seasonnaire for Summer 2012. [www.dailymail.com](http://www.dailymail.com) (accessed: 20/08/2012).

These individuals form an intricate network dotted up and down Britain [Figure 27] and, in their activities, they keep the image of the brand intact. Indie, our Seasonnaire from Rock (2011) summed up duties as follows:

‘university Seasonnaires’ are on full time salary, work around one day a week in the store, are given a clothing allowance to wear on campus and around the university town. They’re ‘go to people’ on campus. They’re able to be the people in the know so, like when the brand show up, they can tell them where is good to go or what is a good student night. (paraphrase from field notes)

These efforts of establishing a nexus of relations up and down the UK was part of an initiative to establish a more university age-set relationship and embed the brand around the

grass roots of the core-customer. As such their ‘celebrity’ is a form of repute on campus. Indie explained that, during her time as a Seasonnaire 2009/2011, this network was conducted in a manner less intimately connected to the university itself. During the establishment of the Seasonnaire program in 2010, the university Seasonnaires were not fully established but rather relied upon 5 persons – herself, Robo, Freddie, Olly and Rosie – and the university network was sought-after by a Campus Tour where Robo would pick them up in the signature Jack Wills Defender and, during the period of March-April, they’d visit campuses (Durham, Nottingham, Exeter, Leeds, Manchester, Cambridge, Oxford & Edinburgh). There they would dispense with gifts and gain contacts through a series of nightclub events and morning invitation breakfasts. This led to a series of big-nights out but, also, relied heavily upon *ad hoc* friendships within the group. Attending the Exeter event, the coordinator of the event at the Mosaic nightclub was not affiliated with Jack Wills but, as he told me, he knew them from school. This informant, who was connected to my Rock informants, was key to implementing the events on an ad hoc basis but not fully established with Jack Wills. As of 2011/2012, the Seasonnaire program extended to seeking out university personnel to consolidate the process of marketing. What this sees is a series of key named persons engage in soliciting a network on a basis more fully institutionalised and formalised. This is not to say it is no longer based upon *ad hoc* friendships but rather it is has merely formalised them. When Daisy Hill was announced as the Jack Wills Seasonnaire competition winner for the Summer 2012, to watch her audition video<sup>25</sup> one would be nonplussed if they assume she won from the video-application *alone*. Indeed, as much as she is beautiful and very fun-loving, easy going and confident (all venerable personality traits), the important factor is her *prior* friendship to 2011/2012 Seasonnaire Georgie Cade (no 6

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRmBQgTr2Ac>

above).<sup>26</sup> This intricate network of Seasonnaires is a micro-peerage to the macro-peerage model of patrimony [Fig. 29]:



Figure 29 Salcombe Seasonnaires, 2012:

name-exchange - from left to right: Daisy, Tom, Georgie, Patrick

(from: <http://www.jackwills.com/en-gb/seasonnaires/best-summer-job/>)

As such, these named persons become a limit to group expansion. Georg Simmel (1950) noted that aristocratic groups are small not only due to their character as ‘the best’ (*aristos*) nor simply pure egoism. The smallness of the group is rather a key to its ability to survive as a network:

the aristocratic group must be ‘surveyable’ by every single member of it. Each element must still be personally acquainted with each other [...] the tendency of extreme numerical limitation [...] is not only due to the egoistic disinclination to

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<sup>26</sup> This information comes from Georgie and Daisy being both at Bristol and friends during the Season at a point when the new Seasonnaire was required. The process is not ‘rigged’ but it is not a meritocratic process, nor a lottery. Robo is involved in pairing up friendships in his role as Head Seasonnaire. It relies upon a select few of friendship ties.

share a ruling position but also to the instinct that *the vital conditions of an aristocracy can be maintained only if the number of its members is small, relatively and absolutely.*

(Simmel, 1950:90-91)

Various devices exist in British society for this limiting and surveying: the debutant pages of *Country Life* that announce marriageable girls to society, or announce marriages themselves amongst upper-middle and upper class members; the *Bystander* section of *Tatler* that lists attendees at West London parties. In his novel *Snobs* (2005), Julian Fellowes calls this “name-exchange” – “the names rippled out ...Had they seen the Esterhazys? The Polignacs? The Devonshires? ...Names torn from history books...stripped of any real significance. They had simply become court cards, rich court cards, in the game of name exchange” (Fellowes, 2005:110). Jack Wills’ Seasonnaires imitate this practice of name exchange as they, in effect, become court cards or chess pieces that connect the wider group to a core group of peers. In the example of Florence Huntington-Whitely, her family entered the British peerage in 1918 through her great-great-grandfather Conservative peer Herbert James Huntington. Florence, in extension, is entering into a brand-name peerage; the name circulates with an imitation claim to pedigree. Over and above the material symbols, the name comes to stand for their prestige. Indeed, as Shakespeare’s King Harry says to his courtiers in *Henry V*:

It yearns me not if men my garments wear;  
Such outward things dwell not in my desires:  
But if it be a sin to covet honour,  
I am the most offending soul alive...  
  
then shall our names,  
Familiar in his mouth as household words



Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,  
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,  
Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd.”

(Shakespeare, 2000:94).

Names are coveted honour amongst those ‘in the elite circle’. The “garments”, as a reference to sumptuary law, are less important than the name. In our case, the game of who’s who is crucial, not merely to their “celebrity” (in the mainstream sense) but celebrity to their own circle’s certainty of itself as a distinct group. Names, in short, are ‘currency’ in people form: restricted circulation of names is restriction of membership, elevating exclusivity and the status of personages. For as King Harry continues, this honorific name roll-call is liable to an earned nobility by access to the life of honour: “...gentleman in England now a-bed shall think themselves accursed they were not here, and hold their manhood’s cheap...” (Shakespeare, 2000:94) Manhood’s remain cheap, if and only if, they are kept outside the life-style: Nobility’s biggest problem is that it could, technically speaking, be earned by proximity to the noble names; hence our gentry dialectic and the Seasonnaires role in effecting social closure and filtered access.

This “name-exchange” is not only a limit to group expansion but, more positively, the right way to expand amongst a series of person with “names” in common at locale specific nodal points. This helps to limit the groups’ coherence to a “happy few” as King Harry put it to his courtiers (Shakespeare, 2000:94). As such, we see how name exchange is numerically definable and an institutionalised process. Robo, the head Seasonnaire and Head of UK Marketing, is the person who takes the university Seasonnaires – of which a total of c.25 persons exists – and turns them into a group of ten, as exemplified above, and then divides them

into seasonal locations pairs. If we place this at a purely numerical level and take the Season at each turn we notice this limiting is incredibly important:

1. The 2011 Rock season saw two Seasonnaires (no longer with the brand) meet with roughly of 10 to 15 people
2. The BUSC Ski season saw Stefan, Ed, Georgie – along with Robo and Freddie – interact with a student base of ~1,500 students.
3. The Varsity Polo saw the 10 Seasonnaires entertain at the field a total of, at its zenith, ~7-8,000 persons.

For the Seasonnaires to know *each person* personally during the Season is a human impossibility: for instance, for the 10 Seasonnaires to know *all* the persons at the polo, they would have to know ~800 persons *each* superficially or casually; each person *deeply*, they'd have to know, say, 600 persons *intimately* and allow the residual persons to be local bridges to others (Granovetter, 1976). Placed in a numerical guise, this demonstrates that through the ideology of the brand-image (that they are out to secure a gentrified image of the brand) the season becomes a *ritual device* to limit the growth of the aristocratic group: more people allows for more *weak ties* while the season, as is, becomes a means to *numerically limit* possible entrants. The ten Seasonnaires during the summer are dotted around the UK:

2 in Rock (Ed Vetham & Abby Officer)

2 in Salcombe (Georgie Cade & Thomas Du Luart with Daisy Hill & Patrick Weiss),

2 in Abersoch (Stefan Schroder & Frankie Taylor),

2 in Burnham Market (Georgie Palmer & Theo De Costa)

## 2 in Alderburgh (Ed Barrow & Florence Huntington-Whitely)

The Rock Seasonnaires became close friends to a group which numbered around 10 to 15 persons (give or take the brief appearances of those who holiday for week long periods). The number of ties that 2 Seasonnaires accrue is around 20 persons. At an aggregate level, we notice that this gives the Seasonnaires a friendship network of ~100 individuals. Overall, this breaking up of 10, so as to limit growth of the weak ties, is also the securing of a surveyable group. While only the Seasonnaires know each other all intimately, they are weak ties to those *between* the seasonal holiday locations, limiting the network of persons to an also limited number of *possible* bridges between groups by breaking up the group of 10 to that of 2 by dividing it by 5. What is being secured is the close contact with few persons and, as such, their securing of strong ties amongst a few persons means that overall they're becoming weak ties to the wider composition of the group (Gravonetter, 1975). They aim, then, not for the strength of weak ties but rather the weakness of strong ties. "We few, we happy few."

In his essay on seasonal rituals, Lévi-Strauss (1987:52-54) dwelt upon the rationale for why societies use seasonal rites for honourable activities (marriages, trophies, etc.) and suggests that these activities can be linked to a mythology that explicitly articulates a fear of large numbers, notably augmenting characters in mythic stories. Why this is, he argues, is because large numbers are a threat to how the social group conceives of its ability to conduct itself over time and into the future. In this case, the future of Jack Wills has been identified as being based around a desire for 'a few', small numbers of people and intimate relationships. As such, it aims for an aristocracy to be created and the Seasonnaires are the instituted, seasonally efficient set of persons to achieve this. For these persons will not remain a constant: "we want to pick you up as a late teen", says Peter Williams (2011) "and then you just naturally grow out of the brand." Speaking to Lucie Green of the *Financial Times*,

Williams also stated: “when you’re older you don’t want to be part of something in the same way you do as a teen. You’re more mature, you’ve got more options, and you don’t buy in to that fantasy in the same way. You don’t want to be part of a tribe.” (in Greene, 2011) Seasonnaires, therefore, become a hinge of social contacts so as to sustain a core ‘tribe’ but, also, allow one to naturally ‘grow out’ of the brand.

In short, I have argued that Seasonnaires are acting-heralds who survey, limit and sustain the group as imaginative descendants of a brand-name, imitation ancestor “Jack Wills,” by using close, intimate contacts so as to overturn the alienable, commodity side of the brand and institute a quasi or surrogate kin-like role. Seasonnaires are ‘court favourites’ to a patrimonial brand-name, obligatorily sustaining the name’s central claim: Jack Wills – *Outfitters to the Gentry*. Jack Wills is name that imitates descent from an ancestor;

- (1) This surrogate ancestor, while fake, illusory and imaginary, arises from an institutionalisation of word-of-mouth, intimate relations Peter Williams and Robert Shaw founded in Salcombe in the late 1990s, maintained in the present by the use of the Seasonnaires;
- (2) These Seasonnaires act as a fraternity of heralds that bear messages of ‘on brand’ and establish relations with those designated as proper to Jack Wills’ conceived identity as a gentry personage;
- (3) As such, the Seasonnaires become a small, limited group and their Seasonal activity itself is a ritualised device to limit group expansion and survey those associated with the brand-identity through use of the brand-name as their collective name;

- (4) The symbols employed, and instituted through patronage of seasonal events, draw upon proper heraldry insignia and employ the same design devices in order to fasten onto enduring societies, notably public schools and Oxbridge sporting clubs, and this further entrenches an ideal of descent, lineage and inheritance through the use of branded goods acting under the symbols of nobility.

As such, these claims are all contributing to (a) giving the group their sociological coherence and (b) the value of Jack Wills' products. With inalienable possession, as Weiner (1985:223) argues, it is "through their collective histories the valuables become the proof of a group's immortality", that is, their strength and coherence over time. One can draw a historical line from past possessors to current possessors as these possessions are the enduring link between the two. That said, however, Jack Wills *is* a commodity and the clothes and its origins are modern, commercial and alienable. In order to solve the problem that this comes with – that non desired persons appropriate the material – they place real people in real places to enact these relations with each other, using the symbols to substantiate, in some semblance form, their elite group identity. Furthermore, this is institutionalised so as to foster the means of this group's reproduction into the future as well as the economic solvency of the brand.

#### 5.6 The House of Jack Wills

Coupling the sociological reproduction of the group alongside its economic viability, I wish suggest a rationale for the creation of profit ('surplus value') with the Jack Wills brand. In its institutionalised use of Seasonnaires and the aesthetic of heraldic insignia, Jack Wills puts in place an imitation of a noble house-hold (e.g. House of Windsor etc.). And this is the source of profitability. Lévi-Strauss (1983; 1987) argued at some length as to the origin of "house-based societies" found in the European monarchies as well as certain sections of native American groups (the Kwakiutl, notably). He argued that 'house' societies arise when

noble marriages and kinship conflict with economic activity. Certain patterns of marriage lead to a problem of not only descent but also property inheritance. Lévi-Strauss' notes that the property inherited by certain noble groups was, in fact, acting as a claim to descent over and above the persons they descended from. In fact, he points out that the notion of property is the claim to descent itself. He who claims the crown and wears it becomes the descendant, if you will. Whoever has the material property of the noble line is the possessor of this social status. A situation arises where, in order to make a claim to descent and inheritance, the "house" becomes a solution to competing claims to property and social station. The house becomes an institution. It is

a moral person possessing a domain, perpetuated by transmission of its *name, wealth and title* through a real or *fictitious* descent line which is recognised as legitimate as long as the continuity can be expressed in the language of descent or alliance or, most often, of both together. (Lévi-Strauss, 1987:152, added emphasis)

Carrying on this line of argument, Lévi-Strauss suggests the house becomes a fetish as Karl Marx described commodities in capitalist society. Although Lévi-Strauss he does not cite the Marx of Volume One (1976) but the chapter on 'interest-bearing capital' in Volume Three (1983). This is because the fetish of commodities, as outlined in Volume One, was seen as fetishizing the immaterial part of the commodity, its exchange-value (how much it costs in proportion to another commodity) but in Volume Three, when discussing money interest, Marx suggests we witness the highest expression of this fetish. Money in the bank that augments itself over time (i.e. interest) is the highest expression of the fetishisation of the immaterial (Marx, 1983:515). What links interest-bearing capital with noble houses is inalienable wealth and we glean this from Marx's comparison between interest and valuables

that 'get better with age'. With interest-bearing capital "a capital of 1,000 is characterised as a thing that in itself is 1,000 and in a certain period is transformed into 1,100, just as wine in the cellar improves its use-value after a given period of time." (Marx, 1983:517) Lévi-Strauss makes a parallel with noble houses as the material symbols that manifest the social rank of noble are, themselves, items that 'get better with age' (the crown jewels, the heirlooms, the works of art) as well the immaterial items that 'get better with age' (ancient surnames that go way back into the past; first names that are confined to noble persons (Henry, William, Elizabeth etc.)). Arguably, he suggests, the house "owes its existence neither to descent, property or residence ...but as a projection of relation capable of manifesting in one or more of these illusory forms." Noble persons are not noble in any intrinsic sense but they claim their legitimacy through a series of devices (descent, property, residence) that are completely illusory but able to act as claims to social position and group endurance for, just with interest-bearing capital, "the product of past labour...is seen as pregnant in and of itself with a portion of present or future living surplus labour." (Marx, 1983:523-524) The items that *stand for* nobility are being used as the basis for the future viability of the social position.

In our case, we can suggest Jack Wills is instituting the same (illusory) claims to elite social station and claims its profitability through imitating the basis for noble-house endurance. The problem is no longer marriage and inheritance but alienable commodities which require being used as if they were inalienable inheritances. As such, it mimics house-based societies as it institutes imaginary uses of kinship and inherited property:

- (1) the house name 'Jack Wills' is a moral person (an invention that stands for group identity).

- (2) It transmits this name (brand-name) and wealth (clothes) through a fiction of descent from Jack Wills from Peter Williams grandfather, to Peter and Robert in Salcombe to the Seasonnaires in the present; and
- (3) tries to express this in some sense of continuity through a policy that forms its brand-ethos.

The brand remains solvent because the claims being made about the commodities (*Outfitters to the Gentry*) come with a means to sociologically institute them – that is Seasonnaires and patronage of elite pursuit.

### 5.7 Class and the cultural politics of Jack Wills clothing

The interpretation I have given in this chapter is one drawn from the practices of the Seasonnaires and the corporate mandate to restrict the circulation of the name and its products to preserve the value of the brand in equity terms. I have drawn this out through the lens of heraldry. This line of argument stems from concerns over ‘value creation’, the ‘where does profit come from’ question that has been recently in vogue amongst sociologists and anthropologists of consumption in the ‘age of brands’ (esp. Arvidsson, 2005; 2008; 2009; 2013; Arvidsson et. al., 2008; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2009; Foster, 2005; 2007). One of the most common aspects of this argument is the ‘labour of consumption’ argument associated with the just cited writers: the consumer, or the person who has a preference for the brand, uses the brand’s symbolic qualities (style, performative gestures, image, look or ethos) to actively enact the dominant meanings and salience of the corporations resonance with a community, group or scion of persons associated with such a brand-name/image/symbol.

Using this approach to value creation, the consumption of Jack Wills clothes comes from its appeal to heraldic symbols and ‘poshness’ in general in its brand image. As the



*Financial Times* reported, “Jack Wills also taps into the allure of “privilege” as a selling point” (Greene, 2011). This is *not* where I maintain value arises for the Jack Wills brand. If the value of Jack Wills does come from its ability to sell to the British public the imagery of a privileged life that only a few live, or to some may even seem mythical, then this seems to be suggesting – rather problematically, I maintain, – that the British class ‘system’ (or ‘hierarchy’), or its levels of stratification, works through a process of emulation of one’s so-called betters. Not only has this approach been considered theoretically flawed to the study of consumption in general (esp. Campbell, 1987), but also begs serious questions around how persons identify with class or how it is conceptualised by persons at a lived level. Instead, what I have developed here is an approach to the value of the Jack Wills goods as not predicated upon how the business model exploits some latent feeling of class aspiration and desire, but rather how cultural notions are fused together with a socio-economic practice, that of heraldry-like practices with a business model out to secure profit.

What this suggests is something quite distinct to the value-creation model of other image-based approaches to brand’s appeals. In this respect I am in line with Devine and Savage’s approach to class and culture which situates the link between the two as founded in “the way in which cultural outlooks are implicated in modes of exclusion and/or domination.” (Devine & Savage, 2000: 195) For in Jack Wills’ approach to their business model, the active exclusion and monopoly of the brand image around the Seasonairres implicates lasting notions of class difference into its economic practice. As such, by favouring the interpretation that the Seasonnaires actions are that of heralds whose enterprise concentrates the symbols, image and all the performative meanings of the Jack Wills brand within a small group, this therein reproduces classed notions of British society *and* establishes a series of young, upper-middle class individuals associated with a gentry image.

But, as I say, this is not heraldry as it has been performed or a feature of Britain's gentry history: it is a branding device at its core. For heraldry is not an economic enterprise (although it deals with valuables) in line with capitalisms' ethos toward profit, and its source in the labour of workers (Marx, 1976). Yet by using the interpretative lens of gentry and heraldry, I have been trying to establish the means by which social class, the upper-middle classes and their lifestyle, is reproduced through this business model. Earlier I noted that heraldry best conceptualised the programme of the Seasonnaires over the alternative approaches of developments in youth culture, notably holiday tourism and rave/drug practice (despite the lifestyle employing these elements), because it contained within it an economic logic of distribution and politics of 'who-gets-what'. This pedantry around 'who gets what' is precisely where heraldry takes root; and it is a form of politics as it is infused with notions of distributive justice (Smith, 2014a; cf. Arvidsson, 2009). But just because the symbolism of the brand is that of heraldic insignia, (and notions of surveying accompany the actions of the Seasonnaires, in order for them to 'act like heralds' in the dual sense of heraldry), is this not just a parody of faded and outmoded gentry practice?

This is one line of argument that has also plagued the sociology of consumption in the -so-called 'postmodern' epoch, notably found in Baudrillard's *The Consumer Society* (1998) where he evokes Marx's famous aphorism of historical events repeating themselves and the first being tragedy, the second as farce: "cultural consumption may thus be defined as the time and place of the caricatural resurrection, the parodic evocation of what already no longer exists..." (1998:99) While there is evidence that Jack Wills' image and ethos has been subject to parody, as noted in various parts of this thesis, the interpretation of the Seasonnaires as acting-heralds may instead be viewed as Lévi-Strauss, the original inspiration for Baudrillard's analysis (cf. Smith, 2014a:52), viewed a society's works of art: "as the phantasm of a society ardently and insatiably seeking a means of expressing symbolically the

institutions it might have, if its interests and superstitions did not stand in the way.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1974:197)

It is perfectly plain that Jack Wills’ image has been received by British society as tapping into longstanding notions of class privilege, hierarchy and the lifestyles of the upper-middle class. And what the Seasonnaires demonstrate is precisely this ‘living advert’, as Soames above called it, of what a gentry life *would* be like if we didn’t have the business ethics of capitalism behind the brand. We may think of them as an ‘advert’ for a way of life that no longer is fully realisable today; a common trope of the analysis of brand’s as utopian projects (Heilbrunn, 2006; Mazzarella, 2003b). But we only think of them as such *because* they, the Seasonnaires, exist in the medium of brands, adverts and commodity images in general. These images become a reflection to our lived out realities, desires and aspirations. As Mazzarella (2003b:287) concludes on advertising, it is by “situating commodity images in the concrete contexts of their production and circulation”, which I have demonstrated in this chapter, that said images have “the capacity to make visible the fault lines at which contemporary cultural politics suture materiality and meaning, affect and narrative.” The cultural politics of Jack Wills is precisely its privilege, and it’s so called allure, which it’s ‘lived adverts’, the Seasonnaires, play out. And as such they contribute to continuing narratives and meanings of British class identity through such imagery *and* implement a business model that exploits this heraldic practice of who-gets-what predicated upon some notion of genteel status. Parody or not, it tells the same story.

## Part Four: Ethnography of Economic Processes

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Patronage and Patrimony*

#### 6. Introduction

As an economic relation, patronage takes the form whereby the patron's name is exalted and the patroned are encompassed by this name and identity (Gell, 1998:33-34). Patronage is where an elite personage makes their name by imposing it, often with much dislike, on others who work in order to bolster the patron's fame, nobility or grandeur. In effect, the social relation becomes one of non-reciprocity as it's based upon a series of customs, traditions and examples carried out in the past so that the patronised accepts the patron's elite stature by way of hierarchical precedence (Graeber, 2011:110-115; 1994:8-9; 2001:98-99). As Graeber points out, "the fact that the noble patron merely provided room and board, or money, and that the client showered his gratitude by painting the *Mona Lisa* ... was in no way seen to compromise the assumption of the noble's intrinsic superiority." (2011:112) This precedent, or what Weber (1968:226) called "old-age rules and powers," turns persons into 'his' subjects and is a species of traditional ("patrimonial") authority. Those under patrimonial authority conceive of their personal loyalty dictated by traditions which define the master's identity (Weber, 1968:226-227). Acting upon a traditional authority sanctified by the past as a model for present power, the master is open to seek his goals in his own pleasures and tastes which, upon supplying his subjects with gifts, secures their loyalty up to the point of their co-operation with the master's whims and will (Weber, 1968:227). Patronage, as the economic expression of patrimonial authority, has a "tendency to regulate economic activity in terms of utilitarian, welfare or absolute values" arising from

the edicts of patrimonial domination, notably “the claim to legitimacy and the interests in the contentment of the subjects.” (Weber, 1968:240)

Brand-name patronage usually comes under the heading ‘sponsorship’. Sponsorship is an economic modality whereby a good or service is placed next-to (but not defining) the content of the event. With The Lawn Tennis Championships at The All England Club, Wimbledon, the sponsor adds their name to the cast list of other names supplying the scenery/staging – e.g. Ralph Lauren’s blue ball boy and girl uniforms at Wimbledon. Yet “words from our sponsor” which interrupt the flow of television broadcasts, for instance, act as ‘names’ interjected at intervals but, overall, the content and drama of the event is the key source of recognition and veneration. The argument I supply in this chapter, drawing upon my ethnography of the Jack Wills Season – polo, skiing and summer holidaying, – is that Jack Wills’ noble guise is secured by its sponsorship becoming much more akin to patronage and patrimonial domination. My claim is that, as Weber acknowledged, patronage’s concern for legitimacy of the patron is directed toward securing the loyalty of ‘subjects’ through ‘utilitarian’, ‘welfare’ and ‘absolute values’. The absolute value of patronage for Jack Wills is its recruitment of core-customers compliance in the patron’s veneration and authority to define ‘the lifestyle’.

Commerce is one thing, patronage is another. The brand-name commodity corporation is apposite for the role of patrimonial patron for, as others have developed (Foster, 2005; 2007; 2008; Mazzarella, 2003a/b), it mirrors the elite gift giving of the so-called embedded economies in non-market societies (Mauss, 1990; Polanyi, 1957). Jack Wills, a brand-name with noble pretensions, is not so much against commercial appropriation but *adverse to it* as it extinguishes any sense of personal volition in the distribution of goods: in commerce, the basis upon which ‘giving’ and ‘getting’ are played out are utterly devoid of lasting obligation or sentiment. As Simmel put it, “in exchange and payment one is

subordinated to an objective norm, which the strong, autonomous personality must defer to, something it often is just not inclined to do. For this reason very aristocratic, self-willed natures disdain commerce.” (1971:64; also 1990:103). The clothes, of course, are dressed up around noble claims but ignoble ‘trade’, the unholy use of money, is not something that Peter Williams will allow for his (imaginative) grand-father brand-name Jack Wills. Patronage, I argue here, is a way to extinguish commercial acquisition.

Additionally, instead of viewing these patronised life-style activities (polo, skiing and summering in certain seaside towns) as “sponsored,” I argue that patronage and patrimony has the key sociological connotations (and effects) which allow us to adequately conceptualise the ethnographic significance of the material presented below. Sponsorship is a series of commercial ‘time buying’ exercises for the purpose of attaching the name products to non-related activities, e.g. Dominos’ Pizza and *The X-Factor*, or by a harmony of association, e.g. Ralph Lauren and British lawn tennis during Wimbledon championships. Jack Wills’ patronage and patrimony, in the form of supply of money, clothing, events and practices, to a series of close-knit groups (those who ski in the Alps, those who play polo at elite public schools and universities, and those who summer in up-market second homes), are a series of *acts of appropriation* so as to secure the *social* closure of the group through economic means (patronage) that removes competition or choice on the part of the patronised.

Patronage, as I argue here, is the economic relationship that is most apt for the brand-image Jack Wills wish to extol.<sup>27</sup> In what follows I track the patronised personages as an elite network who, in their role as subjects of patronage, become the personification of the

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<sup>27</sup> I use the term “economic modality” – following David Graeber (2011a) – as a means to talk about the moral assumptions and obligation-logic the underpins the economic dimension of social relationships: patronage, as pointed out above, is a relation of *precedent* and as he says of competitive gift-gifting, the moral assumptions shift the modality of action (possibilities of action, necessary actions) is “an affair of honour.” (2011a:118)

imaginary ancestor 'Jack Wills'. Patronage is able to bolster their elite stature but, by examining the ethnographic detail of this role of patron, it develops a series of *conflicting relations*. Whether they consider themselves sponsors or not, the conflicting relations between Jack Wills and other bodies are a critique of the 'right to' the role of acting patron and patrimony. The patroned university 'societies' (houses) and their life style are not fixed or solely the right of one patron. The market for patronage is, in effect, not open or solely the right of the highest bidder but rather rests upon successful acts of appropriation. The 'market' for patronage is not just a bidding war but instead competing claims to nobility and exalted status in a market where stature is not fixed and the reality is one of fierce competition. Each patronised event in Jack Wills' Season – be it polo, or skiing holidays or summer towns – competes with others for the right to appropriate the life-style and frame its inhabitants as their 'subjects'.

### 6.1 The Image – Patronage and The Season

When speaking to those under Jack Wills' patronage, their primary concern was with the image. Andrew from the Oxford Polo Club (OUPC) summarised: "they want to portray that 'image'; we're seen as having that image." Andrew was my spokesperson for OUPC, a Varsity player and secretary to outside inquires. He is the son of an international business man and housewife who has lived in Poland, New Zealand, and Canada but was schooled in the UK from prep school to his post-graduate studies at Oxford. The polo 'image' is, of course, that of the gentry lifestyle and as such it is a matter of political PR to handle it in a way that appeals to other discourses that hide 'elitism' for some other context, usually this is 'sportsmanship' and 'involvement.' During an interview for the *Varsity* (Cambridge University newspaper), Tom from the Cambridge University Polo club was asked "what is it that appeals to you about polo?" having to immediately go on the defensive:



A lot of people think initially it must be all about the image. But once they sit on the horse and realise they're going 30 mph at a flat out gallop, attempting to hit a ball the size of a hockey ball with a 52 inch stick – then they start to understand the skill and excitement involved. ...The trouble is for a lot of people they're never exposed to it and so they just don't have any interest in polo. Of course there is plenty of stigma attached too ...  
(*Varsity*, 2011)

Tom is well aware of the 'stigma' of polo; and is a little defensive about it. His Dorset based family, themselves keen hunters, gave him his first taste for riding. The son of a wealthy banker, Tom now works in the City for a major bank. Tom was schooled at Radley and has a degree in Land Economy from Cambridge. While now a 'city boy', he is in truth a country gent. Speaking of the skill involved at polo, on one trip to a Cambridge match where Tom's father was in attendance, I heard Hugo, the owner of the polo club and father to two professional polo players, extol Tom's skill.

The stigma of this 'image' runs through both skiing and summering in upmarket seaside towns and is, as Tom has pointed out, linked to the relative closure of these pursuits for the non-public school or non-affluent demographic. It also highlights an aspect of aspiration. Jack Wills, again, figures as an oxymoron of elite patronage – as Jack Wills supplies kit, equipment and 'stash' (branded attire for polo club members) – but also provides an aspect of aspiration, to 'join in' (cf. ch.2). For my informants who spend their summers in their Rock holiday homes, this is also evident. As James put it to me,

“This was their thing – they [the Jack Wills Seasonnaires] went there to create an image. Look at this picture”,

He showed me the scene of a beach barbecue with people wearing Jack Wills Seasonnaire Rock t-shirts cooking burgers with a few surrounding people with bottles of beer in their hands:

“they’ll take these photos and put them in the catalogues and stores; there were only about, maybe, twenty of us there but once they put it in the catalogue teenagers will see it and think, ‘oh cool, I want in on that’. (paraphrase from fieldnotes)

This image of a lifestyle, while developing into a series of friendships amongst the participants (ch. 7), become the central topic to organise all activities. James, the son of a property manager who grew up in a wealthy part of London, was schooled, like Tom, at Radley (but is two years Tom’s junior). James, whose family have owned a house in Rock since 1992, has spent all his summers there. Rock has forged some of his earliest memories.

The constituents of the ‘season’ figure as the personages under Jack Wills patronage – as another Rock informant, William, put it: “people in Rock would be considered Jack Wills’ people.” This co-option of lifestyle into patron-ised persons in the photos that adorn store walls and catalogues are, of course, crucial to adequately forging the elite networks of personages underlying the branded images. It is no different with skiing. Along with summering in Rock, the figure of a chalet girl (as the winter equivalent) is equally ‘stereotyped’ in gentrified lifestyles. As *The Return of the Sloane Ranger* put it,

The Sloane adores skiing. Always had and always will. The Sloane year is just not complete without at least a week in the

Alps. ... Val D'Isère is still a favourite spot (Val Sloane Square) as is Courchevel (Courche). And at both these places the onlookers will be greeted with the overwhelming sight of pink-faced Sloanes, unmistakable in their cufflinks, whistling down the mountainside. Other Sloane spots include Meribel, St Anton, Klosters ... Verbier, Zermatt and Lech ... The would-be Sloane chalet girl leaves ... to Val d'Isère (a top choice) where she'll mingle with other chalet girls and Sloane boys in Gap Year uniform of gel-spiked hair and Jack Wills clothing. (2007:xxvi, xxxi, my parenthesis).

When placed into the context of the Jack Wills season, this sight of 'pink-faced Sloanes' is a crucial presence on the British Universities Snowsports Council (BUSC) Main Event where Jack Wills Seasonnaires play the role of après ski host and patron to parties. As one member of the BUSC team (2011/12) stated:

“I suspect there is a silent majority amongst BUSC clients – the other 75-80% of people who come on the Main Event who are just there for a ski holiday, and are presumably therefore relatively affluent – who have some level of affinity for JW and (hopefully) appreciate their involvement and the support they bring to the Main Event.” (personal correspondence; my brackets)

These three patronised enclaves of localised activity become turned into the commercial advertising that is uploaded onto Jack Wills' website and YouTube channel. This, it could be

argued, is not at all anathema to the ideal of social closure that is aimed at in seeking patronage over sponsorship or mainstream marketing. The *image* may be open to anyone; *the stash is not*. The season conducted under Jack Wills' patronage is the manner in which the dispensing of goods and titles – the name Jack Wills – to various life-style enclaves is conducted as a necessary abstraction, or “synoptic illusion” (Bourdieu, 1977:97ff), to the distribution of the brand-image.

As is well known, the circulation of ‘images’ in the form of advertising imagery of life-styles is abstracted from the ‘life-world’ itself (Debord, 2009; Benjamin, 2008; Baudrillard, 1998; Berger, 1972). This uncoupling of the image to the enactment of the activities depicted is underpinned by a practice of “politics” to adequately define and encapsulate the aesthetic qualities and connotations of what is ‘commercially’ sold via its ‘display’ (Benjamin, 2008:12-13; Berger, 1972:9-26). The display of Jack Wills’ “Gentry England” is the imaginative context to which the product’s aesthetic is directed. Now this Jack Wills season is mediated by commercial, ‘mechanically reproducible’ images and as such is liable to appropriation by those outside the networked elite persons. These images, in the age of mechanical reproduction, show that “a people or class which is cut off from its own past is far less free to choose and to act as a people or class than one that has been able to situate itself in history.” (Berger, 1972:26)



Figure 30 JW camera-man snaps Seasonnaire Georgie as she hands out "stash" and chats and makes friends at the Après Ski - BUSC 2012 (photo by author)

Patronising disparate activities – of polo, skiing and summer holidays – as they go on during the year from the Lent term – (polo) to Trinity-term (seaside) to the Michaelmas-term (skiing) is a device which seeks to capture these activities and give them an idealised sense of closure that links (certain) people to a (particular) history. Videos and photography, as the devices that capture the brand-image, become devices in the constructing of an idealised ‘chronotope’ (“time-space” (Bakhtin, 1981:84ff) or what Appadurai (1996:41-42) calls a production fetish, whereby a “locale” is encased in commodity images to provide closure for

meanings and their origins – images of, say, a polo game could be on any polo field; the persons on skiing holiday could be anywhere; they could be real holiday makers or fabricated ones in the vast media-scapes of globalised cultural flows (see: Savage et. al., 2005:153ff). By taking their video and photographic cue from the life-style activities of on-going cycle of events of their target market, Jack Wills re-create a gentry season based around this way of conceiving persons in a time-space nexus ('chronotope') [Fig. 30]. As Appadurai (1996:83) notes, the open-ended nature of purchase in the commercial sphere is, wrapped as it is in images of styles and practices (e.g. stripy polo shirts and watching polo at Guards Polo Club), always "situated in histories and genealogies." These internal histories that feed into Jack Wills' seasons is that, prior to commercialisation, these activities were conducted in relative isolation from commercial interest. Access to these life-style events was relatively closed to outsiders, conducted on an *ad hoc* basis of internally organised friendships and society membership. Taking the historical period of 1980s/1990s in particular, the Varsity polo, skiing and summer holidays which are customary in the gentrified life-world were *not* commercial experiences but comprised events in the social calendar. The attendees would overlap in the course of the year but their forming into a holistic, one-size fits all 'brand-experience' was not present. *The Jack Wills season appropriates these activities and, through advertising imagery, construes an image-nexus for the social nexus of events.*

It is the placing of images (back) into a sense of cultural history that is the first form that patronage takes. Advertising imagery is not to be confused with disparate spectacles to a non-descript 'consumer' or 'commercial' market (Debord, 2009; Baudrillard, 1994) but rather "first and foremost about the relationship between advertising and marketing professionals on the one hand and corporate clients on the other." (Mazzarella, 2003a:52) This marketing-clients relation I reframe here as patron and patroned. The clients (the patroned – Oxbridge polo; BUSC Main Event; summer season sites) become the ones who are encompassed by the

images supplied by the patron (marketing and advertising agencies, the brand itself). The talk of ‘the image’ and ‘advertising’ in relation to Jack Wills’ purposes with my informants is their inheritance of the well-worn understandings of the life-style activities they are involved in. This ‘image’ comes to define them first-and-foremost. But in order for these “images” to be produced, the lifestyle events have to function effectively and the form this takes is not only the supply of monies or equipment or a backdrop scenery/staging, *but also obligations imposed upon the patroned*. These obligations I shall detail by outlining a closer examination of the dynamics of patronage from my ethnography.

## 6.2 Brand-name patronage as potlatches

The filmic images of the Season are indeed the result of the life style enacted as it becomes a theatrical or filmic display to a non descript audience. But at the level of ethnographic investigation it seems to me that the legitimation of statuses of both patron and patronised is the central purpose of image-production. In framing the investigation this way I am able to envisage the distribution of branded items at the events as gifts at a ‘potlatch’, a system of prodigal gift-giving that anthropologists have outlined as resting upon the claim to high status (Mauss, 1990; Godelier, 1999; Graeber, 2001:188-208). In all three seasonal events, the distribution of branded goods and a heavy degree of theatricality was apparent on the part of those dispensing and receiving. Those giving and those receiving came to be the centre of the event itself. Giving was the event’s dramatic core, literally, as giving was captured on film. The Varsity polo consists of a series of matches which are then followed by the giving out of trophies and branded-bags full of gifts to the teams playing; the après ski events hosted by the Jack Wills Seasonnaires where headbands, sweatshirt/hoodies, t-shirts and other paraphernalia were given to those who befriended the Seasonnaires; and during the Rock season sunglasses and t-shirts were distributed to those who are ‘real Seasonnaires’

(those who work at the Camel Ski School during the summer season) while these persons were given a series of heavily discounted or free clothes from the store.

Such gift-giving is what I wish to account for. Jack Wills' patronage adopts a potlatch-type system of giving that entails struggles predicated upon claimed superiority, indebtedness and counter-claims. I thus take patronage in a social-anthropological direction which, as Weingrod (1968:378) defines it, is "how persons of unequal authority, yet linked through ties of interest and friendship, manipulate their relationships in order to attain their ends." This has its source in prodigal gift economies (Weingrod, 1968:377).

What is a potlatch? It is a vying affair for elevated, high status manifest in prodigal giving as those seeking the *same social station* compete against a rival. Chiefs and clan leaders seek recognition of their *precedential position in a status hierarchy*. It is a regime of economic production that sees goods produced solely to circulate the name of the giver and prove high social status (Godelier, 1986:163-164). Crucially, it is about two or more groups claiming the same rank or position through giving gifts. In 'potlatch societies', as Maurice Godelier (1999:147ff) calls them, social status is manifest in valuables objects, and political-ideological power exists "in the form of titles, ranks, names, and emblems placed in competition and open to those who successfully establish their superiority over others through prodigal giving..." (Godelier, 1999:147).

As Strathern and Stewart point out, "ceremonial exchange" – of which potlatches are one example – "becomes an important constitutive factor in the political order of society." (2005:230) Whole groups – clans, lineages etc. – become engaged in claiming lauded, high status against their rivals and it makes obligations on those who are subject to a clan-leader whose role it is to make a name for themselves (Godelier, 1986:164-165; Strathern & Stewart, 2005:242-243; cf. Strathern, 1971). Whole groups – leaders and those who are their



dependants – treat their social relations as dependent upon “the circulation and redistribution of material wealth and hence on their reproduction.” (Godelier, 1986:171) This form of patrimony, in potlatch societies, usually sees the dependants – children and women – used as pawns in a game to make a name for the ‘big man’. *Potlatches therefore make huge obligations upon dependencies.*

This is because potlatches have their origin in “the instability of a hierarchy that rivalry between chiefs has precisely the aim of temporarily stabilizing.” (Mauss, 1990:97, n.79; cf. Godelier, 1999:158-159) Potlatches are agonistic and based upon deeply held rivalries that have become historically institutionalised and conducted through material objects involving the whole group. To make a name for the giver and grant them political power, prodigal giving is the first obligation of the potlatch (Mauss, 1990).

As Mauss observed, the obligation to give on the part of the host is the essence of the potlatch festival, for only in giving does the host “preserve his authority”; “he can only prove this good fortune by spending it and sharing it out” and, as result, putting the recipients and rivals “*in the shadow of his name*’.” (Mauss, 1990:39, emphasis added) The patronised are not only those under the name, the polo societies etc., but also all other attendees at the event. As David Graeber (2001) outlines this, “Potlatches were, for the most part, the occasions on which names ...were “fastened on” to a new holder and in doing so, “given weight” by distributing more ephemeral forms of wealth to one’s fellow title holders.” (Graeber, 2001:194) A name gets ‘weight’ (i.e. importance and influence) through giving valuables. As these valuables contain the political status of the giver, the way potlatch societies conceive of people is completely formed from their material appendages.

The game of rival giving “relentlessly drives the system to its limits”, Godelier (1999:147) points out. Overall these two dimension of giving and getting rest upon the

purpose of “fastening on a name.” Upon the achievement of a name, the named person was included into a ‘house’. The name signified the owner’s social rank and place in an aristocratic lineage (Graeber, 2001:201-202). Not only does the lineage become founded through naming, the name is the means by which fame, renown and weight are attributed to such a group of persons.

Furthermore, the groups engaged in this form of competitive status-vying gifting outstrips the number of political position available. As Godelier observes,

in societies which practice competitive exchanges of wealth, the avowed goal is to enable *only a few* individuals and groups to accede to the position of titles, and ranks up for competition, which implies that the number of these ranks, titles and positions is well below the number of groups and individuals vying for them (Godelier, 1999:150)

In short, potlatches are about monopolising a niche, i.e. claiming rank to a limited socio-political position through limited named material objects. Potlatches create, or are indicative of, highly unstable social hierarchies.

Branded patronage, I want to illustrate, is such a form of prodigal giving and the patrimonial subjects that result are subject to such political/ideological power as the brand ‘image’ (in name, title, rank and emblematic form) defines the legitimacy of the patron (“Jack Wills”) through adopting its material appendages. Patronage becomes the economic transfer of name, title, emblems, colours (“brand image”) to the patroned, obliging their identity to be encompassed by the named patron. The brand-name claims the status as *the* definite article of the social group it patrons and, with this, excludes competing patrons from claiming the same or equivalent identity and actions. But at another level, this patronised obligation is also the

restriction of named titles for elite stature, making scarce the titles in proportion for the amount of people claiming them. Patronage closes off the avenues of competition from other brand-names that, as competitors, seek to make their named goods the definite article of the social station and persons they seek to patronise.

The patronage sought by Jack Wills to key societies (Oxbridge polo and rugby; BUSC Snowsports and Summer Seasonnaires) is a means to allow the brand-name to substitute the persons under patronage and attest to the presence of the brand-name as personifying these persons. As such, the ceremonial supply of their patroned goods is for the veneration of the brand-name at the expense of those of similar brand-names or competing names, for these brand-names are competing groups who use other material objects for the same purposes. In truth, the branded goods given are surrounded by a claim to the title of host and their distribution forms a ceremony which, in being conducted, constitutes the hierarchy of persons involved in the event, embodied in the valuables distributed (Strathern & Stewart, 2005:230-231; Weiner, 1993:146-148). With that in mind, let me detail a discussion of the polo patronage and then move onto further ethnographic themes that arise from this particular case.

### 6.2.1 Varsity Polo

As I spoke to Tom from the Cambridge Varsity team during one visit to a league polo match in the Wiltshire countryside, we looked out over the fields and watched the grooms tend to the ponies prior to the match. I asked him about his role as sponsorship [patron] coordinator:

Tom: “They’re [he, ‘Jack Wills’, is] into the whole upper-class life-style thing, like polo and the stuff here and the people who holiday in Rock and Daymer Bay, but it’s mostly middle class people who buy it. We don’t really wear it ... but they’ve been telling me they’re trying to go inward for the lifestyle people.”  
(added brackets)

Daniel: “What’s the purpose of having your Varsity match under their brand?”

Tom: “For them its advertising – because they don’t do any other advertising; the polo for them is a way to advertise the lifestyle.”

Daniel: “So what role do you have in this?”

Tom: “Basically its making sure the polo isn’t compromised by the event; I’ve had a couple of meetings in their London offices about this; because it’s our Varsity match, for us, and for them it’s their loss leader. They make our kit, and we play; and they make sure they can put on the event to advertise their brand.”  
(paraphrased from field notes).



Figure 31 The Cambridge Varsity team get ready to play a league match (photo by author)

This patron-patronised relationship was marked by a cavalier attitude. As we finished this portion of our conversation Tom picked up his whip, cracked it against his pristine boots and made his way to the ponies to play the day's match. Aloof, he indicated a clear demarcation of duties. The Varsity polo players are able to play on a prestigious pitch and have a ceremony in tow; Jack Wills is able to advertise a lifestyle through filming the event. Carrying on where Tom left off, Catherine said: "If you watch their new promo video for the polo this summer it's only got about 10 seconds of footage of actual polo." This video, which takes some 10-seconds from the previous years' Varsity game, is more aimed at encapsulating a general genteel aesthetic, the life-style that is being commercially packaged. But in order to do this it has to develop the role of patron. As Head of International Marketing at Jack Wills, Olly Finding states,

[The Varsity Polo] is our ambassador day for marketing; it's the biggest marketing project we do. It embodies everything we're about as a brand, it embodies our customer ... and it's the fact that we own this event, as well; we're not just sponsors coming in and sponsoring an event that already exists. We as a brand, alongside a great team, have managed to turn something that was nothing into a fantastic day that is now enjoyed by our customer... (2010)

In the explicit rejection of a 'sponsor coming in', Finding articulates their seemingly 'out of nowhere' strategy turning nothing into something to "em-body" the customer in the language of patronage. They make a multitude; a corporate body of which the brand-name Jack Wills stands as the body-politic. Indeed, it follows that the primary purpose is not so much the polo *per se* but the 'celebration' of the brand-name Jack Wills as bodies take on the name. Following this, co-founder of the brand name, Robert Shaw states,

We started the polo about four years ago [c. 2006/7] with Symle's help. It's been a great brand builder for us, really. It's a celebration of the brand, really. So people can come and enjoy the brand, enjoy the polo if they like, hang out with their friends. It's a sort of life-style event. (2010)

Stating that one may 'enjoy the polo if they like' during what is articulated as a life-style event, the central message underlying the day is in effect a place where one is meant to simply 'be there (and be seen)' so that the brand may, by filming the day's activities, make those filmed become 'subjects' to patrimonial domination of the brand-name. As the video is a *document* of patronage, this is not to be confused with merely 'advertising' as the

construction of a fictional world or ‘pseudo-world’ (Boorstein, 1963:49-50; cf. Berger, 1972:136-145). On the contrary, the function of the polo is as much about exalting the name of the imaginary ancestor ‘Jack Wills’ as it is legitimising the statues of the patroned. Finding’s claim that the brand have instigated the event is, I would argue, a claim to a noble “name” and with it an attempt to conceive of the patronised personages as fitting into a lineage of persons.

The Varsity match becomes the prime site for such real world, on the ground veneration for the claims of a viable image for the patron to be legitimated. Relying upon the metaphor of an ancestor as their branded persona, the claim for aristocratic patina and precedent for the commodities endorsed by the brand-name requires authentication. The Varsity polo and patronage of the Oxbridge polo teams, along with Eton and Harrow public schools and Harvard and Yale Ivy League teams, allows the Jack Wills brand-name to act as a would-be ancestor for the group by fastening his ‘name’ onto the event while they fasten themselves on a lineage. The Varsity polo was instigated in 1879 and during the Varsity day the programme distributed to all attendees by Jack Wills’ Seasonnaires emphasises this fact in a teleological history [Fig. 33]. The Guards Polo Club, which hosts the polo, claims it is the oldest annual fixture still in play and the programme reads as such –

*1860s – Military officers imported the game of polo from India to Britain*

*1879 – The oldest known polo fixture, Varsity Polo, played its very first game which saw a triumphant win for Cambridge*

*1989 Eton and Harrow joined the Varsity Polo ranks.*

2007 Jack Wills took the mantle as host. It all began one sunny afternoon when a Pimms bus and 1,000 spectators came together to watch Oxford play Cambridge and Eton take on Harrow.

2008 With the crowd growing to 5,000 strong, Oxford and Cambridge warmly welcomed Harvard and Yale to the fold. (copied from Varsity Polo Programme 2012)

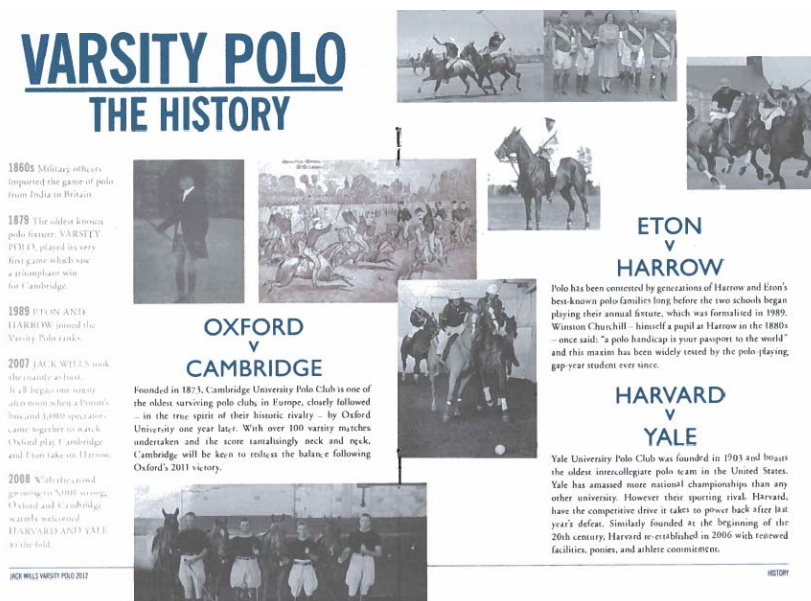


Figure 32 Jack Wills' Varsity Polo - The History (author's copy).

The historical significance of the Varsity match is what supplies the legitimacy of the name 'Jack Wills' to claim 'himself' as a would-be ancestor and his polo playing subjects to claim their elite status. As the programme puts, Jack Wills 'taking the mantle' suggests they're taking on a precedential obligation set by past, elite personages (i.e. the aristocratic, military officers). The story of the Varsity match is, it must be pointed out, told from the perspective of the conclusion as historical events are told not from A to B but from *how B (here and now) comes from (the past) A*. We see that historical shifts are seen as merely steps along the *same* path rather than contingent and hazardous – as colonial officers import the game, naturally



the Oxbridge clubs form; more naturally, the Clarendon schools are admitted and so on in harmonious unfolding. In fact, this is not history but rather *mythology* as events or facts become encompassed into a story of ‘origins’ which side-step human agency and become the projection of the past acting upon people in the here-and-now at a ghostly remove. As others have argued, turning history into mythology means that a day’s events and ritual aspect become framed in a classificatory scheme where ‘dates’ (1879, 1989, 2007, 2008) turn into normative devices to idealise the events of the days as simultaneously occurring ‘as always’ (see, Lévi-Strauss, 1966:236-237; Leach, 1961:135; Gell, 1993:52-53).<sup>28</sup> One’s imagination projects onto the players that take the field that not only are they riding today but so are some ghostly ‘past Etonians’ alongside them; real humans (‘Etonian’) act as metaphorical devices for imaginary ones (‘old Etonians’).

This has supreme ideological power. Projecting the here-and-now as originating ‘way back when’ gives the day a quality of the unquestionable (cf. Bloch, 1974). Not only does the event become legitimate if only because one cannot question what one always has done but also because the terms it is articulated with are so narrow: the argument doesn’t hinge on either/or but ‘is’. It also passes over instances of change. Jack Wills arising in 2007 isn’t questionable as a patron role because, quite simply, it has already happened and having already occurred once it becomes immutable; i.e. it is articulated through the terms of ‘taking over’ what came before. In this respect, the persons playing become personages that lineage connexion with ‘ancestors’ is able to be articulated. The profiles which Jack Wills require from the team members link them into a lineage through the facts they supply. One salient fact is that of ‘overseas polo’ found in player bios. This is a custom that is rather common as polo is, in other areas of the world, developing tourism for ‘polo gap years’ or summer camps; but this recent development is not articulated in the polo programme. It reads,

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<sup>28</sup> I have made a more detailed, fuller account of myths in brand-name persona in Smith (forthcoming, 2014)

“Winston Churchill – himself a pupil at Harrow in the 1880s – once said: ‘a polo handicap is your passport to the world’ and this maxim has been widely tested by the polo playing gap-year student ever since.” [Fig. 33] This programme blurb is couched mythology such that it makes the past seen co-terminus with the present. Historically conceived, Churchill’s remark is more likely to have arisen from his officer life in British India where regimental culture took the form of a ‘polocracy’: regimental training, recreation and patrimony centred on playing polo (McDevitt, 2004); the success of Churchill in this regard being his deep pockets *and* prowess with a stick and ball (McDevitt, 2004:42-43). This became apparent during my fieldwork as, after polo matches in Wiltshire, the ex-military officer now Club owner, would often bemoan the commercialised ‘gap year’ in Argentina, noting not only how they don’t “teach” polo, rather “want your money.” There is little point in attempting to improve, he stated marking the attitudes of the Argentines, as ‘high-goal (pro) status’ would never be achieved. This critique has bearing on his status as a descendant from a series of officers of the Churchill-ilk, stating that his son – a professional polo player – is now giving all these “little toe-rags” his insider knowledge he taught him growing up.

The mythology often counters the historical realities. Hugo, the club owner, is exceedingly patrician; by marriage related to the progeny of national hero, Horatio Nelson (1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Nelson), and himself a descendant of a prominent landowning and military family. It was, to my ignorance to whom I was speaking, that when, after a polo match at his club, the teams were discussing the travel distance they engage in to play polo (a game unlike football which can be played ‘down the local park’) that Hugo told stories of the days he’d spend travelling of horseback during the 1960s and 1970s to play polo. I then ventured, from knowledge of history books, that Churchill would travel from London to India to play with his regiment. In a game of top trumps, Hugo then stated that his grandfather was a member of Churchill’s regiment and they’d in fact travel five days on horseback in the Indian desert to

play to local Indian Princes at polo. Such historical features of the patrician nature of polo, therefore, are mythically appropriated by Jack Wills and seek to infuse the world with the fading patrician vision of the sport in the contemporary period.

Mythology is, therefore, a way of conceiving of the past as if it were, in fact, the here-and-now. This odd inversion has implications for the modes of conceiving of time, space and people (chronotropes):

...we might say that a thing that could and in fact must only be realised in the *future* is here portrayed as something out of the *past*, a thing that is in no sense part of the past's reality, but a thing that is in its essence a purpose, an obligation. (Bakhtin, 1981:145)

The obligation Jack Wills has to the future is precisely this surmounting the brand-name into the cannon of gentry identity. As the fixtures are played, the mythology frames the ceremonies and, in its enactment, brings forth the legitimation of status through the ceremonial dispensing with prizes.

The ceremonial prize giving is where we witness the patron's exaltation in the context of the teams receiving their laurels for the day's play. In the course of prize giving, it is important to point out that Peter Williams – i.e. the patron acting on behalf of his imaginary ancestor 'Jack Wills' – presents the gift bags (which contained within them a £50 token for Jack Wills clothes and exclusive polo and Jack Wills magazine) and the trophies to the teams and through this the commentator of this ceremony intermittently asks the crowds for cheers

for ‘Jack Wills’ to show thanks and gratitude. As the announcer pronounces to the crowd, he speaks the speech trippingly steeped in mythological resonances –

*“Ladies and Gentleman, we will now have the presentations for this Varsity match 2012 and I have to say a quite spectacular effort by Cambridge and I know all of you in the pale blues will be delighted with that score, and as an Oxford man I have to be a little bit disappointed ... The presentation for the Varsity Match first started in 1879 and a warm welcome again to Peter Williams and Rob Shaw who will be making the presentations for these two teams.*

*Well sadly there has to be runners up and we’ll start now with the runners up for Oxford. ...”* (taken from the audio from authors film)

At the end of the prize giving, the clubs and the brand ask for photos with Peter and the teams [Fig. 34] to be taken. What this demonstrates is how these patroned Varsity shirts bearing the brand-name become crucial to ‘getting the ritual right’ – the named-shirts become important as the teams stand side-by-side, the gift bags at their feet, together with their hands in front of them, Peter in the middle, as they pose for photographs and everyone watches in the process.



Figure 33 Oxford (left) and Cambridge (right) stand for club photographs with Peter Williams (centre) after Cambridge's victory at the 133<sup>rd</sup> Varsity Match – still from author's film.



Figure 34 Cambridge players - after their victory - feature more heavily in the promotional material; below – Cambridge 'most valuable player' lifts the Varsity trophy

[www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com)



Making sure people witness this is where the valuable nature of these patronised persons is *dramatically realised* as they register the patron's causing this ritual to be undertaken in 'the moment': "Jack Wills" allows it to occur and the teams gain importance in bringing this to fruition. Having filmed the match and ceremony as it was played out, the polo players figure heavily in the video that is uploaded only a day later on the official website [Fig 35]: The filmic versions of the day's ritual become *video-masks which allow the accumulation of wealth or equity for the brand* by being what Mauss called 'the "money" of fame': "they have a power of attraction that is felt by *other* copper objects, just as wealth attracts wealth ... as well as the possession of spirits and fruitful alliances." (Mauss, 1990:45)

They draw quite a crowd.

At crowd capacity of some 9,000-10,000 at the Varsity day, these successive presentations are sacralising these persons made manifest in the right to a title or brand-name – with the right to wear a branded 'coat of arms' in the form of the Varsity shirt, the patron secures his place in the imaginary lineage of British ancestors – or so he hopes. These clubs

(Oxbridge; Guards Polo) are patroned by Royalty (Cambridge, HRH The Prince of Wales; Guards, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh); the Jack Wills name wishes to stand close to them.

Upon entering the ethnographic field with Cambridge, the discussion of patronage was not as clear cut as the Varsity day makes out; we can say that, given the potlatch nature of the Varsity day as names are ‘fastened on’ (quite literally) to the shirts of the polo players and the display of the name as ever-present on anything that could be emblazoned – fences, banners, flags, pitch demarcations, bags, peoples clothes, the clothes sold – the whole effect is theatrical. Like potlatches,

everything goes back to public theatre, to what one can put over on a (demanding but appreciative) public. The titles and treasures would be meaningless without it; everything about them refers to the presence of an audience [...] These performances are not in themselves remembered. If potlatches did enter into historical accounts, it appears to be only when they served to ‘fasten on’ some new names and privileges...  
(Graeber, 2001:203)

While it would be hasty and absurd to say a direct parallel is occurring between the Varsity polo and the potlatch, there is no doubt it is staggeringly similar. What should be pointed out is that this theatre, here promotional lifestyle advertising, is but a veil which covers the more intricate details of acting patrons.

Cambridge – with whom the majority of the fieldwork was conducted – made it quite evident to me that EFG International, the private bank, are the clubs ‘main sponsor’ (patron). At one league match prior to play while we are all awaiting arrivals, Charlie, stated:

“EFG are our main sponsor”, to which Nick haughtily laughed, correcting him:

“They’re *meant* to be our main sponsor.”

The amusement arose from the animosity that exists between patrons. As Tom was able to explain: “Jack Wills make our shirts and kit; but EFG aren’t happy about this because they sponsor us, also; they don’t want Jack Wills on our shirts because they want us to be Cambridge, EFG; not Jack Wills.”

Why such name fighting?

As Tom would later tell me, “I’m the one who organises the alumni dinners for EFG, we have dinners each year.” EFG want sole sponsorship and networks out of this as they are the primary sponsors of Cambridge University Polo Club. The use of dinner parties which facilitate an ‘old boys network’ requires, to make a series of city contacts, the use of clubs – as much as the old boys at EFG ‘club together’ so do the current members. But “clubbing together” is not just, as one French observer said of the Westminster clubs, “convivial jocundity.” (in Picard, 2000:200) It also has an economic dimension that links into such jocular drinking. Dr. Johnson’s dictionary defined the verb ‘to club’ as: “the shot or dividend of a reckoning paid by the company in just proportions: an assembly of good fellows, meeting under certain conditions.” (in Picard, 2000:199) It has *two* aspects for *one* meaning, patronage for the bringing together of stand-up chaps. These certain conditions could be a physical location but it can also be a ‘house’ in the metaphorical sense where a series of notable persons who “club together” by a general equality of status amongst themselves pool



their resources by paying toward furthering their own interests. EFG’s clubbing together, then, is pooling their resources into patronage of a polo club that allows them to enjoy the company of a series of suitable persons. As John Brewer (1997:40) noted on the eighteenth century club origins, the purpose was to identify men of association with “an elaborate web of influence and patronage by creating a sympathetic climate of opinion...”

During 2012, Tom had been in talks with EFG concerning new match shirts, shirts which would put the EFG insignia emblazoned upon the centre of the shirt unlike the Varsity shirts which, as Figure 36 shows, shows only the Cambridge lion rampant and Jack Wills’ shield. Notice how in Figure 34 Cambridge’s most-valuable player from the Varsity 2012 is photographed prior to the match in a Cambridge EFG shirt but in the celebratory shot of the trophy rise the EFG shirt is forgone for the Jack Wills/Cambridge Varsity shirt.



Figure 35 Cambridge Varsity Team (c.2011) photographed with Peter Williams, second from the left, and club captains ([www.cambridgeuniversitypoloclub.com](http://www.cambridgeuniversitypoloclub.com))

EFG had paid a considerable amount to secure these shirts to be manufactured through Jack Wills. EFG wanted to make sure these shirts would be worn for the rest of the polo fixtures Cambridge were scheduled to play. Yet this understanding was thrown in contention when Cambridge showed up to one fixture in their old Varsity shirts, shirts not bearing EFG's insignia. This became incredibly problematic when, who happens to be spectating but none other than a prominent EFG director whose daughter is playing polo against Cambridge on this occasion. When the daughter noticed the Jack Wills insignia, she asked her father "Daddy – I thought *you* sponsored Cambridge?" The director was furious to find out that Tom hadn't supplied the Cambridge team with their *new* shirts. Tom made his excuses to a belligerent banker and tried to assure him that the order had been slow and that they had no choice but to wear their old Varsity shirts.

This would have been the end of it but, strangely, the Cambridge shirts went missing this particular day, after the match. When a search party had been launched, they appeared in the mud and mire outside the farmhouse where they'd been playing. A truly vexing situation as Cambridge had a game the next day and had to hastily wash the shirts. The culprit to this theft remains elusive. As this was relayed to myself as gossip; no malefactor can be identified definitively; it may be someone disgruntled whose exalted status had been forgone for a certain "Jack Wills." I can't say for sure.

Jack Wills wants *all* the reward and glory manifest in the persons the corporation patronise. EFG are a faceless and quite placeless corporation – as European Financial Group, the international banking corporation require clubs to gather clubbable would-be bankers *and* assert their identity in the elite echelons. Along with Jack Wills – whose British identity is founded with *people and places (locales and their chronotopes)* – EFG are using patronage to also create a sense of place they lack.

As it stands, the House is divided. Two competing patrons exist. Patronage has, by removing the mutual co-existence of oppositions in commodity trade (as money allows exchange of in-equivalents), created a situation where the ability to provision goods is so limited to one source that the only option to effect the substitution of contrary entities (Jack Wills for EFG) rests upon subjective claims to worthiness so valuables are conducted via an economic logic of: One giveth; another taketh away.

### 6.2.2 BUSC Main Event

This theme sets the tone for the subsequent ethnographic facts I wish to supply to the BUSC Main Event (2012). Cambridge's experience with Jack Wills/EFG's demonstrate something that is typical of 'potlatch-type' festivals – that is, the vying for titles and precedent at the feast as these titles tend to stay 'in the family' or with a series of persons connected to the 'house' (Mauss, 1990:43-44; Lévi-Strauss, 1983:17-20). EFG have formed a surrogate form of hereditary patrimony by use of the polo club and the organisation of dinner parties to 'club together'. Patronage, then, becomes a way to inherit social contacts and a 'name' that encompasses one's personhood within that group of networked peoples. The BUSC event is rife with this type of association and forges the context for the conflict uncovered during the fieldwork of the BUSC Main Event week. Skiing, for the majority, is a holiday. And a holiday that, usually, doesn't involve that much skiing – for many they're in it for the *après ski* rather than skiing *per se* and in this respect it becomes two competing ideas in the imagination of the attendees.

This is reflected in the event's patronage.

A large event and one that needs considerable backing financially (and not to mention the large number of attendees and database of students), the use of patronage is vital to success. Jack Wills *Seasonnaires* are a key patron to the BUSC Main Event week, along with

Syndicate, Liberty Skis, Rome SDS, Red Bull, Beach Break live, SNO!Zone and Freeze Pro Shop.

The British Universities Snowsports Council (BUSC) is the national, university-student run, organisation for putting together the Snowsports competitions. It brings together all university ski societies for a Main Event week in the Easter term holiday each year. The demographics stretch to approximately 2,000 people and BUSC is affiliated with 80 UK universities and a database of nearly 10,000 students. For the majority of attendees, the Main Event week is the primary event they'll attend but, for the BUSC committee and those involved with snowsports, it is the culmination of a year's events and the end competition where universities compete against each other for coveted prizes of 'best time' and other such specialist snowsport honours. In addition to this commitment to the snowsports, the BUSC Main Event provides those who wish to form a bid to become a committee member to shadow those who are currently 'on committee'. This specialist group of Snowsports dedicates form primarily in and through the calendar of the snowsports year, i.e. competitions. For those on committee and heavily involved with British snowsports these competitions are the key sites for organisation and become the central events for the recruitment of the committee. The campaigning and voting usually takes place during April/May, the Dryslope competitions up and down the country as each university forms a group and a bid for committee membership. During the April-May period, the campaigning occurs and then in October the Captain Trip to Les Deux Alpes weekend provides a second and prime opportunity for people to network and forge contacts for a campaign to become a committee member for BUSC. Then in November the elections and results are announced at BUDS (British University Dryslope Championship), the largest competition which brings those involved with snowsports together.

The BUSC committee is the centre for a series of networked person who, through snowsports, form an elite group of sportspersons and develop friendships through it. This network is built around a strong identification with the sporting prestige and, as such, links into their mode of identification with named-products and apparel. Elite snowsports patrons, notably Syndicate, come as a key source of identification for those strongly committed to these networks; for in truth the BUSC Main Event is the end of the season of networking and team building. In this respect the elite group on the slopes is, as we noted above, not the Jack Wills cognoscenti but rather the snowsports persons. *The patronage supplied by Jack Wills in this case is not analogous with the elite personages that oversee the events.* Unlike the polo, where the majority (but not all) of those connected to the polo teams directly tend to form an Oxbridge network of the public-school educated, the snowsports widen this demographic and take, while affluent, not overtly gentry persons. Jack Wills patronage was first introduced the BUSC 2010/11 season and maintained in the 2011/12 season (it has, however, not retained its patronage for 2012/13). The rationale for Jack Wills' patronage, however, is evident in that it forms part of the gentry season and the use of patroning this event is effective in securing that coveted image the Jack Wills brand-name craves. In dealing with BUSC, Jack Wills sought to implement the role patron of parties – notably the opening ceremony, which inaugurates the event held on the Sunday night, a Winter Warehouse party held on the Tuesday and an après ski held every day Sunday-to-Friday (3pm-6pm) at an off piste bar where Seasonnaires would distribute “stash.” [Fig. 37] The original intention for the après ski was to ship out the Jack Wills DJ Horse Box. However, logistically, this was not possible and instead they opted for a marquee stall fitted out with patina carpets, battered suitcases, an old Chesterfield armchair and cushions, and a taxidermy pheasant [Fig 36-38].



Figure 36 Jack Wills Seasonnaire's pop up store, site of the après ski



Figure 37 Seasonnaire's distribute 'stash' to attendees at the Après ski all week long



The use of après ski's to distributed the branded 'stash' (free gifts) to those who frequent these places for drinks provides a large group which soak up the countenance of this patronage as they become privy to receiving these gifts given prodigally – and moreover it demands accepting this image under the cover of these goods being *free*:

As we sat chatting over some beers, one Seasonnaire –Stefan – came up to us, greeting us with a casual (almost uninterested)

“Sup, Players? Have some headbands”,

Dropping three packets of Jack Wills *Seasonnaires* signature headbands onto our table, he strolled off covered by the sunlight and face hidden by ray ban sunglasses. As he walked off one of the guys at our table asked,

“Headband? They’re so shit.”

“Tell him!” said another on our table, to which he replied: “No way! I’m on [BUSC] committee next year, I can’t piss off our sponsors. I only want them because they’re free.” (fieldnotes)

On the ground this genteel image fights against that adopted image by the snowsports elite. Having to accept the patronage of Jack Wills is something that cannot be argued with; one cannot discredit the gift because in its giving, we see clearly here, they require patronage to conduct the trip. Once again we see the obligation to give and receive play out agonistically. And the antagonism arises from mutual similarities, not differences. If Jack Wills' 'preppy' aesthetic fits into their aristocratic ethos, then the snowsports elite tend to develop their aristocracy based around the sporting prowess they garner.<sup>29</sup> It is this aristocratisation that, it must be made clear, *makes them similar* despite having an aversion to each other – it is the minor differences of 'style' that underline similar ethos to appropriation. The snow sport ethos is dubbed 'steeze', an abstract noun which can also be made into a verb ('steezey'). In use steeze can mean something 'is' steeze or someone or something is 'steezey'; steeze is a key source and term for reputability gains.

First hearing this phrase upon the opening ceremony night I asked some Snowsports informants of its meaning. "It – how do I explain it? It's stylish and easy. Like if you did a smooth 720 [spin] off a kicker and then just causally boarded off down the piste, that's steeze." I was then told that people on BUSC committee are 'steeze' as being steeze is an almost pre-requisite for being so while, to quote one informant, the Jack Wills Seasonnaires are "trying to be. But they're not really into it. They're a bit too pretentious to be steeze. You're more likely to find them playing polo than on the piste. Or in Verbier than on BUSC, you know, that expensive resort in Switzerland. Nothing against them, *per se*. But yeah." This came out in inverted form when another informant of mine, on the side of the skiers and Jack Wills', surprised the steezy snowboarders as he was, actually, "pretty steezy! He went to

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<sup>29</sup> I use aristocratic very loosely. One may think of its use here as Nietzsche's very broad and speculative philosophical anthropology saw it in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1990:192ff): the assertion of a stronger hand.



Winchester [elite public school] and he flew here! [two luxuries] I had him all wrong. He's fucked his shoulder, and I asked him how he did it, "doing a rodeo out of a rail slide today" – Steeze!"

These informants, two students of the University of the West of England ('UWE'), were anything but 'not posh'. One, the son of a military officer and incredibly well spoken, was aware that what he would say against his Jack Wills peers would be hypocritical. And the other, while less 'posh', was in fact an old school friend of Seasonnaire Robo.

In this regard, it's interesting to place this context of preppy and steeze in relation to the weeks patronage for the weeks event itself is not all defined or tied together by 'being steeze'. Often "steeze" became a *look* or *image* of these peoples, as one BUSC committee member said to a friend during one après ski, "Looking mighty steezey in that hoody" to which she replied, "Yeah I just wish I had the skill to go with it!" It refers to the practices which unite the group around snowsports, not overtly to the life-style as a whole and in this crucial gap we notice the dimension of ambiguity – the Main Event is made up of two competing claims to not only an image but also patronage. In this regard, the opening ceremony was entitled "BUSC Opening Ceremony *in association* with Jack Wills Seasonnaires." (added emphasis) The subtle naming of this event as 'in association' with Jack Wills is telling of this tension both in ritual's split representation and in everyday experience. According the BUSC committee this opening ceremony was something that Jack Wills were very keen to be engaged and active within. The head of committee put it to me after the event week itself:

"You may have noticed the subtle difference in naming? BUSC Opening Party in association with Jack Wills Seasonnaires; and the Jack Wills Warehouse Party. This was a distinction that we

were all keen to maintain but which was probably lost in the heat of the event!” (personal correspondence)

As such their name is applied to the title but the names refer to differing reputable gains which the patroned subjects subscribe to. Two competing claims are being made in the ritual. In this context, I noticed that when one chap had forgotten his pass to enter the Opening Ceremony his friend quipped to him, “They’ll let you in anyway: you know the committee, plus your hoody is pretty steeze...” The overlap between titles and images (of knowing BUSC committee and being steeze) is reputable but, in this context, so is being preppy and enjoying the skiing holiday, the party included a Jack Wills VIP area. There are, in effect, *one mass of persons* at these patroned events but *two parties going on*.

Through the two parties, they grew into a mass of ‘students’. Yet in the issue of titles for the events, one is exalted and the other group goes un-named in the biggest party of the week, the Jack Wills Winter Warehouse party. Although I am told from the BUSC committee this was an initiative they came up with in association with the Austrian hosts, the Jack Wills Seasonnaires were billed as patrons of this particular party. This evening was a key photo opportunity for the Jack Wills Seasonnaires’ camera crew, a key point of interest in their video-promotion of the event on their website, and this was known as *Jack Wills’* night to those on the trip. As our surprisingly steezy ex-Winchester student said to me at the après ski prior to the party that evening, “Because it’s Jack Wills you know they can put on something good, they’ve got the money.”

What occurred on this evening was not so much ‘something good’ but something that may be expected from this type of exemption of one group and lauding of another. As I recorded it in my field notes:

*Secret Winter Warehouse Party: 21:00-01:00*

We were to meet at the ski lift around 8/8:30. Unfortunately one of my informants from Edinburgh was unable to arrive with me; I instead had to go alone. I made the five minute walk down from the hotel I was staying at and stood around, looking for a few people I may know. The riotous noise I was met with, however, indicated something different. As I got to the meeting spot, I became highly aware of a group of extremely boisterous students; by their accents I assumed they were from the north of England and I noticed they were all wearing Jack Wills branded t-shirts. Their rowdy behaviour was very noteworthy, especially as they were drawing attention to their shirts. Every other piece of Jack Wills clothing I had clocked as I walked down the main street was that of ‘stash’ given out from the après ski the previous few days, or the odd Jack Wills gilet. Something about these rowdy northerners was a little too conspicuous. As I stood in the crowd, a few places behind them, they were the drunkest or at least acting as such. They were by far the loudest. In fact, they were the only ones making a noise. I stood in the queue, spotting a Barbour jacket or two but no one I knew, so I turned back to the Northerners. Finding a quieter one, I asked him, “what do your t-shirts say?” noticing a little slogan written under the Jack Wills logo. In dulcet northern voice, he smirked and said, “Jack Wills – because every toff needs a uniform.”

“How on earth did you get them?” I asked.

“Our captain knows some very dodgy people.”

Dodgy Capt. had, it transpired, stolen them from the back of a Jack Wills lorry and embossed the ‘because every toff needs a uniform’ tagline with his own

screen-print, subsequently handing them out to his team for this specific ‘secret party’. As one of them, (the drunkest and rowdiest) stood to the side of the snaking queue, poised with his friend squirting cheap vodka in his mouth from a toy water-gun, he shouted “going to piss off the toffs.”

He had succeeded. Those I was standing behind (both in their Barbour jackets) said to each other, “what a tool.”

As we made our way up the gondola to the off piste warehouse, the northern students became a little group of their own – somewhat separate to all those others who were doing their best to maintain a safe distance from them, most likely to avoid the association that they were ‘with them’.





Figure 38 The Northern students don their stolen and defamed Jack Wills shirts at the Jack Wills Winter Warehouse Party (video from YouTube)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwZV-Ls\\_SxU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwZV-Ls_SxU)

Who are these northern students? The reader may have noticed the densely connected links between the informants in this chapter, either through school, background, and lifestyle. The northern students here, however, are distant participants in this network: they are not nodal links in the network of personages this chapter, and thesis, is tracing. Outside the network, they don't receive patronage and are not recipient of the brand's gifts. Hence their derision. Yet their mockery is positioned in such a way that it, inadvertently, supports the very regime of Jack Wills. As Egan-Wyer et. al. (2014:6) state:

“Many could attack Jack Wills for being terribly discriminatory but it still manages to institute an ethical economy wherein goods are allocated to those deemed worthy of representing the brand. It does so, we believe, because it is so extreme in its elitism that it borders the comical, which makes it difficult to attack in a serious fashion.”

What is more is that the comical elitism, evoked by the northern students in their theft and slander, is itself a veil which also secures the elite patronage network from harm of infiltration.

As such, this situation of theft by the northern students and their campaign of mockery is, in fact, the sociological result of a social regime built upon aggressive, agonistic gifting – patronage as potlatching. Resistance is here being demonstrated through the re-appropriation of the articles of gifts that act as the substitute to the vilified ‘toff’ these student personify with the brand-name Jack Wills. Jack Wills is the name for those personages on the slopes and at the same party. So in a party the northerners are, in effect, not properly considered or don’t consider themselves welcome guests at, the resistance through defamatory gestures of patroned cloth is their act of re-assertion to a semblance of social dignity previously submerged through potlatch patrimony.

In fact, theft has the same logic of patrimonial gifts. As Mauss says of theft in *The Gift*: “the actions and obligations it entails are patently due to the power inherent in the thing. It possesses within it an *aeterna auctoritas* [eternal authority], which makes itself felt when it is stolen ...” (1990:50 brackets added) Theft is always identity theft if the valuable is a substitute for the personage’s person. Stealing shirts and their defamation is gift-giving in reverse. As Godelier (1999:133) and Simmel before him (1990:320) have pointed out, the logic of the gift and the logic of theft stand at opposite ends of the same spectrum – they work upon the same principle but with giver and receiver turned upside down in either case. Here, instead of receiving the stash from the Seasonnaires who give it, the Northern students take (instead of give) the stash they wouldn’t (wish to) receive. In either case, the prodigal wasting remains intact. As Veblen might put it, in the invidious comparison between ‘upper and lower class’ which is played out here in Lordly giving and overturned in the Robin Hood

stealing, the lesser persons in the hierarchy use the aristocratic method of distribution in masquerade form (cf. Veblen, 1994; Varul, 2006:111).

Indeed, it was not just the northern students who felt unfairly represented and excluded through Jack Wills' patronage.

The party in the mountain warehouse closed down around midnight/ one o' clock and people descended into the town. As people started to disembark, a few of the Jack Wills Seasonnaires shared a gondola with a few the Syndicate sponsors. On this fateful ride the Syndicate reps proceeded to insult Jack Wills' Seasonnaires, claiming that their 'stash' had no relevance to Snowsports or BUSC. Freddie, an ex-Seasonnaire who no longer works for Jack Wills yet who came along to BUSC with the current Seasonnaires, decided this insult was something he wouldn't accept flatly. As they disembarked the gondola, Freddie swung a swift right hook to the face of the Syndicate rep who had insulted their stash and patronage.

The next day during the après ski, gossip had travelled and people all become quite self-conscious of Jack Wills' patronage as a talking point. "If you see him," said one girl referring to the Syndicate rep, "you can't miss it. His face just ballooned up." And people started suggesting that Syndicate did, actually, have a point with regard to their sponsorship [patronage] and talk turned to whether the Seasonnaires did, however, have the right qualities for patronage. All in all, no solution or conclusion was raised. We were left with advice that – "if anyone asks" said one BUSC rep at the table, "make sure you say *ex*-Seasonnaire" so as to not endanger the position of sponsorship [patronage] or the name of either BUSC or Jack Wills. However the animosity that once lay rather hushed in observed but not vocalised contempt began to rise to the surface. This all came out clearly on the evening of the BUSC prize giving during the ball at the end of the week. After the prize giving the master of ceremonies said, "And a big thank you for our sponsors the Jack Wills Seasonnaires!" to

which a small cluster of Syndicate associated, elite Snowsports person gave a chorus of pronounced “booing” – clear public refusal of the gift and the right to hold the title.

When one turns to the Syndicate video-diary, and their “image” of the event they placed upon their own website and YouTube channel, this animosity is much more explicit. Indeed their image ties together the central fact of the potlatch being an attempt to fasten on a name. On their YouTube channel, SyndicateTV put together a series of video-diaries. On the first day they uploaded a video with their head rep in a piece of garden furniture, a wooden horse and cart, stating (three days prior to his black eye) [Fig. 40]:

*“We do not alienate anyone in our systems, not one. Not those with boat shoes, not those with ponies. We are matching you pound for pound. Syndicate has its own Horse Box.*

*“That’s right. What’s next on the list? Maybe Daddy will buy us a yacht? I don’t know. But we’re standing up for ourselves and it’s going to be fun, so watch this space! [mimics a horse]”*





**WE DON'T DO POLO MATCHES.  
WE DON'T HAVE A YACHT.  
WE DON'T WEAR BOAT SHOES,  
WE DON'T RIDE IN A HORSEBOX.  
WE DO THE THINGS WE KNOW HOW,  
MAKING THREADS AND  
SHREDDING POW.  
SO FOR THOSE ABOUT TO RIDE,  
WE SALUTE YOU RIGHT NOW.**

**syndicate | USC**

Figure 39 SyndicateTV - BUSC Video Diary, Day One.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6Q6w1iCU-g>

Utilising the symbolic weaponry of Jack Wills, e.g. their Horse Box (with its association with the ferocity of polo), the Syndicate elite deliver the exact same message of ferocity and claims for status through the use of predatory symbols. The sporting elite utilise the same

sublimated element of warfare, just like cavalry element found in polo.<sup>30</sup> From the discourse of matching Jack Wills “pound for pound” or their claim of “we salute you” to those who ‘ride’ the slopes with their ferocious presence, the elite Snowsports group are, too, situated in an ethos of predatory defence of privileges and status through hyperbole and make-believe: Invidious comparison to ‘Jack Wills’ rests upon the same propensity to bring about the same honourable qualities.

Just like Cambridge dealing with EFG and Jack Wills, the BUSC Main Event has to deal with two patrons with equally weighty claims to defining the persons in attendance with their name, image and title. In truth these two ethnographic facets –patronage and glorification for the patron who is represented – reveal how strikingly important patronage is not only to the brand-name and its equity which rests upon its image but, moreover, the sociological consequences.

### 6.3 Conclusion

Often when one hears the word patronise, the assumption is that the subject is being spoken down to. The phrase “Don’t patronise me!” translates as ‘don’t insult and debase me’. In many ways, we have found this logic of ‘talking down to’ by a (as the etymology of the word suggests) father (*pater*) in brand-name form as it institutes patronage as a key economic modality to its purposes. The Jack Wills brand-name, acting with vested interests in venerating this name, acts akin to the ancestor-name that demands, generation upon generation, the fulfilment of commands that are issued from what appears to be a netherworld of obligations. In our case, the Jack Wills brand-name acts in this way by making a real sense

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<sup>30</sup> “Sports shade off from the basis of hostile combat, through skill, cunning and chicanery, without it being possible to draw a line at any point. The ground of an addiction to sports is an archaic spiritual constitution – the possession of the predatory emulative propensity in a relatively high potency.” (Veblen, 1994:156)

of indebtedness on the social group so as to fulfil their wishes; while, additionally, this economic relation creates hostility toward those who are removed from the issue of patrimony. The reason for this is quite clearly the fact that the social group patronised are required by Jack Wills as a corporation so as to fulfil and charge up its product with the claims it makes of itself – i.e. *Fabulously British* and *Outfitters to the Gentry*. But more than this, it does so in order to bring this social group into a unitary conception of itself. Patronage, through the brand-name, makes what would be disparate, unconnected and accidentally or coincidentally similar activities unified into one *name*, the brand-name itself ‘Jack Wills’ as standing for a distinctive social group. While the interest in the life-style activities and the ability to frame these activities as celebrations of lifestyle is part of already-existent life-cycles of the gentry group sought out by Jack Wills, what patronage demonstrates is a means to elevate both these patronised people above those not under patronage while also *patronising* them at the same time, i.e. impinge upon them in some means to fulfil corporate interests (i.e. brand solvency and lifestyle advertising) that are not necessarily their own or their desires. It would be a mistake, then, to suggest that patronage is a reciprocal process despite the fact that parties share a vested interest in the life-style. Instead it is about establishing an economic means to make a brand-name an enduring lineage name to a series of elite personages it has to patronise in order to make a claim for its own high status. As we’ve seen, in this process it comes into contradiction with many competing patrons who may, or may not, have the better the interests of the patronised at heart.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Gifts and friendships*

#### 7. Introduction

In this chapter we deal with the intricate exchanges that exist between those persons participating in the patroned season and how, at the level of ‘in-group’ membership, this forms the basis for the group’s core-values – networking and conviviality – and is conducted by gift-giving. If the gentry dialectic is exclusivity permeated by pockets of openness, then the gift regime is the turning of openly accessible commodities into exclusive presents.

Having outlined in chapters 4 and 5 the distinction between a gift and the commodity (cf. Carrier, 1994), and while economic anthropology and sociology have explored the various nuances of this distinction (e.g. Panoff, 1970; Parry, 1986; Strathern, 1988; Weiner, 1985; 1993; Gell, 1993; Carrier, 1994; Godburt & Callié, 1998; Godelier, 1999; Graeber, 2001:151ff & 2011:96ff; Miller, 2002; Strathern & Stewart, 2005; Yan, 2005; Bird-David & Barr, 2009a/b), this chapter focuses upon Jack Wills as engaged in similar activities found in the most famous gift regime in the ethnographic canon: the *Kula* of the Trobriand archipelago. The *kula* exchange has one express purpose: to make the traders famous. “*Kula* is trade of a noble kind” writes Mauss (1990:22) and it is “reserved for the chiefs” who are the “leaders of fleets of ships and boats” and is “carried on in a noble fashion, apparently in a disinterested and modest way.” *Kula* establishes the *fame of the donor* and the ability of the gift is to first establish sociality and subsequently sustain a nexus of social relations after these transactions with other notables.

Nancy Munn’s *The Fame of Gawa* (1986) is concerned precisely with the question of the fame of gift-givers and fame’s ability to produce powerful networks of social influence.

In her ethnography of the famous *kula*, Munn outlines the actions and activities that persons on the tiny island of Gawa engage in so as to bring renown and eminence (“fame”) to their people. The fame of Gawa is manifest in an exchange regime conducted by prominent members of the island whereby the giving and receiving of armshells and necklaces come with a prestige to the name of the donors and subsequently their island as a whole. This chapter details with the same processes for the Jack Wills’ Seasonnaires in the beautiful, small town of Rock and its accompanying Camel estuary and Daymer Bay beach on the western coast of Cornwall, England with the use of Jack Wills clothing to induce the fame of Rock through the brand-name as well as aspects of the BUSC skiing Main Event. Fame, that is, of their lives. My argument is that through engaging in gift exchanges, just as with the classic *kula* ring, the fame of the brand and their peoples is manifest in the relations, activities and friendships that the gifts and services conducted in Rock during the summer season and the Austrian après skis in the Easter gives rise to. Taken as a whole, they form a network of social relations that are binding to our group’s coherence and identity.

Munn’s ethnography of fame and gift-giving has resonated with the study of globalisation as concerning the reproduction of small social groups (Appadurai, 1996). Appadurai (1996) suggests Munn’s work is part of what anthropologists discuss as ‘ritual’, the ways group existence is made meaningful to members. Placed within globalising processes, these rituals reveal how local activities factor into global processes. As the *kula* exchange ring produces the meaning of ‘Gawa’ (its fame), Appadurai says this is a “highly specific way of localising duration and extension, of giving these categories names and properties, values and meanings, symptoms and legibility” (Appadurai, 1996:180). It illustrates how globalising processes are dealt with. Locale production gives actors concrete footing on social processes and securing social identities. The locale of the Jack Wills Season is categorised, I suggest, through the gifting that occurs amongst those who frequent the bay

for the summer and the après ski in winter and the exchanges give rise to a sense of duration that grants the value, meaning and conception the Jack Wills brand has an ideological commitment to, i.e. that of a genteel, ‘fabulously British’ space and its persons as the personification of these values.

This became evident during my fieldwork, notably when speaking to the head of UK marketing and head Seasonnaire, Robo, on the BUSC Main Event. During one après ski event, as signature hoodies, headbands and t-shirts were being handed out and twitter names and telephone numbers were being collected by the Seasonnaires, Robo and I discussed the “image” of Jack Wills, notably its hedonism and its university life-style and he ventured this:

“What you’ve got to remember is that we’re a university outfitters, and students get drunk and have sex and that’s what we’re trying to stay close to, it’s just teenage girls love it so we get in trouble for that [he said, referring to the banned advert of 2011 for sexual content].” [see below]

“Which is why this is so great, this event has a really great, chilled vibe. We did it last year and we’re going to do it again next year, and because BUSC is all university”, [he gestured to our surroundings on the mountain side bar in Austria’s luxury ski-resort] “you don’t get any teenage girls here: like you see all our stuff is free because it’s all for students.”

[I then referred to the way event was run, saying, “it seems much more intimate.” To which he continued:]

“Yeah, that’s what we’re into – we’re into real friendships with people, like the people we’ve met here. We’ve got our i-pads for people’s numbers and twitter so we can just send them a text, tell them what we’re up to and say come along. We’re not trying to just sell people clothes.” (fieldnotes)

Spoken during the giving away of named clothing ‘for free’, Robo hints at our subject matter in a clear fashion. While clothes are being acquired, it is selling that is opposed or annulled. The free named goods are, in effect, a series of gift exchanges whereby the seemingly ‘free’ goods are reciprocated with twitter details, telephone numbers and subsequent sociality. As we spoke about this during the frivolity of the après ski, there was a sense of carnival joviality as a series of contacts were being coveted and filming took place despite their explicit, or conscious, awareness as the prodigal laughter, indicative of that spirit of university hedonism, went hand in hand with gift giving.

Gift giving and friendships act toward the consolidation of the Jack Wills social group during ‘the Season’. We shall explore this process of generating a favourable (brand-)name indicative of the ideals or virtues of a gentrified life-style that Jack Wills becomes famed for. Exploring the seasonal activity of gifting, as Robo pointed out, involves partying, a ‘chilled vibe’ to foster real friendships and it is conducted with an intimacy that other localities do not supply. Robo’s contemporary, Ben, the Seasonnaire who oversaw the American expansion, suggested to me:

“None of it is rocket science, really. I guess the essence is to try to be genuine and get people to do things because they want to and like to – more than selling people things ... The hope was, in return, they’d love the brand or at least our relationship and at

least do it for the brand. That's really how it worked. ...And, you know, some of them are still really good friends – in fact one of the [US] Seasonnaires' I stayed with is visiting right now, we've kept in touch. I think while they may have moved away from Jack Wills, they loved the time.”

The sociological details and consequences of this genuine series of reciprocities will now be discussed as I draw upon my ethnographic fieldwork and explore the *fame* of the locales as an amalgam of people, places and practices manifest in gifting. Conducted like kula, we see it produces a network of elite personages that embody the brand but, also, gain their elite standing through this.

## 7.2 Gifts of friendship

In the summer of 2011, a new Jack Wills store opened and, with it, a general mood of surprise. James, my main informant, said: “I had heard of the alpine Seasonnaires, where I believe the concept started, out in resorts. It was surprising to see them promoting in England where the brand is already well established and the shop was in such a good location that it would already get customers.” As we've heard from Ben and Robo, our Seasonnaires, the coveting of customers is not the intention – sale is contrary to the power Jack Wills seek for their brand-name. Rather what were sought were friendships. Who the Seasonnaires made friends with becomes clear, however, when one considers the purpose of gifting – the manifest fame of the brand-name. They are the water skiing instructors and boating instructors who work for the Camel Ski School, these persons are:

1. James (Radley; Exeter)
2. William (Wellington; Nottingham)



3. Camilla (St. Swithuns; Exeter)
4. Georgie (Durham)
5. Archie (Bristol)
6. Hugh (Loughborough)
7. Alex (Loughborough)
8. Emily (Southampton)
9. Millie (UWE)
10. Charles (Sherbourne, Bristol)

These core, “real Seasonnaires” (as they called themselves but with little or no sense of superiority or one-upmanship) institute a Facebook ‘Rock Summer’ updated each season and this has a total of ~80 persons who holiday with this group during the period June-September (the university holiday period). These person have holidayed in Rock since their early teens and continue up until their early to mid-twenties. These core persons were befriended by

1. Indie Rose-Smith (Seasonnaire; Godalming College)
2. Robbie Fotheringham (Jack Wills Seasonnaire; Oxford Brookes)

While they arrived not knowing anyone, the Jack Wills Seasonnaires quickly found that the Camel Ski Instructors were able to effectively charge the season with the right fame desired. The use of Rock as Jack Wills’ locale is crucial to the brand-image, but without integration with the real Rock Seasonnaires who work at the Camel Ski School no group, in reality, would come into existence under such an image. For Jack Wills to claim elite station, life-style integration is crucial.

Establishing genuine friendships and creating obligations that are willingly played out is the central purpose of the Season. In this respect, the Jack Wills Seasonnaires frequented the Mariners pub in early July and this was the place of initially meeting the real Seasonnaires. The Mariners is a key bar for those who holiday in Rock. It has a reputation to it. In the channel4 documentary *Posh Rock* (2001), the viewer is able to witness it as a central talking point about conviviality and all gossip concerns the personages within and all people meet outside and questions of ‘what school do you go to?’ become opening lines. It is a consolidated space that acts as a nodal point in a gentry map: it is the rock of public school convivial networking. Indeed, so convivial that when I asked James as to how the meeting occurred he said, “Uh, it was a bit of blur; we got so wasted.” William, however, supplied more information. It was from this meeting that contacts were established and they were able to embed themselves within the cognoscenti group in Rock, the real Seasonnaires.

“They just literally opened [the Jack Wills store in Rock] so we went over to Padstow just across the estuary, as kind of recognisable faces, to help them in their colourful land rover, to show that Jack Wills exists down there...

I think, generally speaking, I’ve seen this all over England, they [Jack Wills] buy these old [Land Rover] Defenders, paint them pink and blue, so they stand out like a sore thumb and then essentially they drive into town, park in the middle of the road ... What they would do is hand out these flyers, Jack Wills promo flyers, which has one side a map to the store and then on the other it said, ‘if you spend £50 pounds in store we’ll give you a free pair of party pants’ (fieldnotes)

This herald role of flyering and arriving conspicuously in the locations, reminiscent of *kula* canoes elaborately decorated to instill awe and desire to exchange shells (Gell, 1992), was a key friendship act. It relied upon gifting clothing that was able to meaningfully charge the summer with a sense of convivial and jovial hedonism that is central to the activities in Rock, notably the fluorescent party pants. But notice that the relationship is based upon soliciting key persons in the locale itself. Rather than resting upon a putative or supposed magnanimous character on the part of the Jack Wills Seasonnaires to give, this giving relies upon their ability to solicit contact with a core, elite group within the vicinity. Describing themselves modestly as ‘recognisable faces’, Williams is telling us that the Camel Ski school persons are prominent in the seaside activities that define the region – speed boating and waterskiing – in the lifestyle area.

As the season took the form of holidaying, the real Seasonnaires were also conscious of their efforts in using Rock to construct a lifestyle image for Jack Wills in the process. As James explained it,

“Interest was generated by using the ‘real’ Seasonnaire, the people that worked down there. Jack Wills Seasonnaire t-shirts were given to all instructors for free, which ended up being worn a lot, as a favour to the Seasonnaires who by that point had become very popular due to their great personalities, I’m still very good friends with them now.”

And as William went onto to tell me:

“they had t-shirts which said “Jack Wills, Seasonnaire, Rock” in big plaster writing and pink wayfarers with JW Seasonnaire on one arm and Rock on the other. Then they also gave us, the

water ski instructors and the other people working down there, loads of t-shirts which said “Jack Wills, Rock” on it, then I would wear that water skiing, surf in those t-shirts, whenever I was working I was wearing those t-shirts; whenever we went out I was wearing them.”

Illustrating the emphasis upon friendship, James and William exhibit exactly what Ben, our Seasonnaire, suggests about the obligation of acceptance of gifts based upon genuine personal relations. The favour to the Jack Wills Seasonnaires is their ability to generate real and genuine relationships to those sought out. While Ben described it as ‘not rocket science’ it is, however, certainly not commodity science. It is purely gift logic: the giving of gifts adheres to a social principle of reciprocity. Giving is received well and favours begin to develop. As James says, ‘the great personalities’ of the Jack Wills Seasonnaires was part of the willingness to reciprocate. The personalities were crucial because as all explained; it was made fun and enjoyable as Ben suggested and they enjoyment is much more binding as a social lubricant.

These favours are not so much promotional as they are sociable. What began to develop through the season was an economy that was deeply embedded within the lifestyle activities; as Polanyi points out with embedded economies (*kula* being one, Jack Wills’ season being another) “it is often impossible for the observer to collect the fragments of the economic processes and piece them together.” (1957b; cf. 1957a:46-50). As Mauss (1990:27f) observed of the *kula* and Munn’s (1986) ethnography claims throughout, the whole of village activity is engulfed within it and is not predicated upon subservient requirements that we could call ‘economic’. For us, we realise, it’s all for the fame of the brand-name. Notably, the Seasonnaires affinity to the store – the prime site of economic interestedness – is, in fact, rather minimal. While they would spend a certain amount of time

in the store during their stay each day, the main concern was that of constructing the life-style imagery through their integration with the real Seasonnaires. Prior to their involvement in the Season, Robbie (from Oxford Brookes, Seasonnaire 2011) and Indie (from Wimbledon College of Art, then full time Seasonnaire 2010-2012), had no affinity to Rock and neither with one another. Instead, they came fully-fledged as Jack Wills' persons but without contacts in the life-world of the Season. Speaking to Indie while at a dinner party at James' home, I asked her how things worked in this respect. Not to plan. Robo was supposed to get a log cabin for her and Robbie to stay in, only to find themselves on a campsite a twenty minute drive away. "I phoned up Robo and said this is ridiculous! We're supposed to make friends with people: How are we to have dinner or make friends with people; have them over before we go out, if we're twenty minutes away by car?!" But luckily and increasingly important for the development of more intimate relations, some of the real Seasonnaires had spare rooms or sofas in their second homes; this problem of distance was alleviated through hospitality. Indie is expressing the fact that the friendships sought is the central task of turning the brand-name into less a name for a series of commercially available products but, instead, as a name that is couched in reference to a clearly definable, recognisable series faces; themselves and the real Rock Seasonnaires. These persons become the brand-image and economic activity is embedded within the non-economic, that is – friendships in special fraternities of membership (notably the Camel Ski School and their network of contacts).

As such, gifts solicited not merely the brand-image to be fastened onto the locale but also became the manifest way of expressing friendships. Accepting the gifts and being part of generating interest in the brand was not a commercial activity. Instead it became an organic part of the summer activity. As William put it:

"No, we weren't paid to do this but because Robbie became a really good friend of mine, and if had an afternoon off

in the sunshine I would go up to the land rover and hand out flyers. So I must have about 10 t-shirts now and about 100 pairs of sunnies now, but no I wasn't paid I was doing it off my own bat.”

Daniel: “So what motivated you to do it?”

“Just because he was a good friend and because if you're going to sit out in the sun, you might as well do something with your time.”



Figure 40 Rock Summer 2012 - uploaded on YouTube, embedded on the private Rock Summer facebook page to the real/JW Seasonnaires: above, Camel Ski School instructors in JW Seasonnaires t-shirts, below Seasonnaires enjoy time on the boat in the Camel Estuary (acquired from informants). Note William (far right) is in his 2011 shirt – it's “like” a lineage (chapter 4).



Figure 41 The Seasonnaires enjoy time on the boat in the Camel Estuary. Taken from private Facebook group.

What is being demonstrated is that these gifts solicit not so much commercial interest in the brand but rather entry into the locale is based upon a series of networked persons, for as James puts it, they were “favours” for the Seasonnaires who had come to popularity amongst the Camel Ski instructors. For the ‘real Seasonnaires’ these *free* Jack Wills clothes were, in fact, not understood in terms of debts or a concern towards balancing accounts, such as a market rationale of “well this t-shirt costs £30 so I’ll do £30 pounds of promotional work for you...” Forging a mutual friendship, the clothes, emblazoned with *Rock* on the shirts comes to bring the group into existence as a series of persons whose affinity with Jack Wills is not so much based upon commercial acquisition but rather favours amongst one-another; maintaining friendships through the ski-school and the wandering Seasonnaires occurs through these gifts of stash [Fig. 41]. Instead of seeing their relationship to a corporation, instead, they are viewing their relationship to each other as based upon transactions that are part-and-parcel of the summer activities. Adoption of exclusive t-shirts, here, are being acquired as obligations of favour rather than interested economic concerns. Indeed, what is constituting friendships is a case of mutual flattery; both groups are providing the basis of each other’s claimed social station. The real Seasonnaires are able to feel respected, and

indeed, quite legitimately elite as they are sought out as those ‘in the know’ and ‘having the right brand image’; while the Jack Wills Seasonnaires gain the right brand-image alongside integration into the elite group they seek. Friendships are sought as mutual advantageous and constituted a similar concern with collectively shared ideals of lifestyle.

This leitmotif of friendship can be found in ethnographies of gift-economies as a prominent facet of the nexus of relations (Strathern & Stewart, 2001:21ff; Strathern & Stewart, 2005:235-236; Biedelman, 1989:242-248; Godelier, 1977:150-152). And this friendship motif is of real significance to integrating Robbie and Indie into the Rock Season because, in effect, it is the most lasting effect on the season. At the dinner party with Indie (after she relinquished Jack Wills’ patronage) in October 2012, some year and half after the 2011 season, she half complained about her time with Jack Wills as much as she lauded it. The problem, for her, was that the brand is trying to act like a small company when it has the resources of a larger company. This puts pressure on the Seasonnaires because instead of taking care of them as a corporation, they gave them money for parties but little real insight into the ins and outs of brand promotion. As James piped up, “the brand seemed to rely on the personalities of the Seasonnaires to ensure the success rather than preparation and knowledge.” Indeed, this may be the case. But what is also being demonstrated is that in order for such a dominant friendship group to arise, the brand *has* to be lax on corporate support, or on any real presence in the vicinity. Not only does minimal or no corporate presence impede the exclusive nature of the brand, it also makes the authentic relations of gift economies stand up to endurance. As Ben stated above, he was entertaining an old Seasonnaire friend from the US when I interviewed him and as I was speaking to Indie and James during the dinner party, Indie excused the brand with this: “I mean, if it wasn’t for Rock I would never have met these guys, which is great!” These lasting friendships arose from the gift-economy and the manner of the arrival with no contacts to a geographically



isolated region with little corporate help or presence integrated into the locality. This is classic *kula* and trade of the noble kind, as Mauss described gifts. Indeed, I think it mirrors the themes found in the Homeric epic, the *Odyssey*, in the manner in which regions are entered and relations struck up and the general structure of the locality.<sup>31</sup>

Beildman's (1989) analysis of gifts of friendship (*xeinia*) and supplication (*hiketia*) in Homer's *Odyssey* mirror the case presented here, for Odysseus' journey from Troy to Ithaca is one where he is a 'stranger' who has to solicit relations of *philia* (close-friendship) with a series of aristocratic persons dotted around the peninsula. Homeric society was one based upon a series of autonomous households (*oikos*) which would produce for themselves their goods and wealth which was overseen by aristocratic persons – a person's station was one where they would develop autonomy through gifts and hospitality, gain respect and *philia* (friendship) in return and not be subordinated to working under the rule of the household as a servant (Beildman, 1989:229-232). In the passage where Odysseus' is stranded upon the shores of the Phaeakian kingdom, he is taken in by the King's daughter, clothed and cloaked and, upon entrance into the court sets himself on his knees, prays hospitality to the Queen and then sits in the ashes of the hearth, where he is then accepted into the court as his gifts of supplication recognise him as an equal (Beildman, 1989:243-244). At face-value certain analogies may be pointed out from what we documented here – the Seasonnaires arrive in Rock as strangers but, entering the Mariners which, like the court hearth, is the centre of the Camel Ski school's hangouts, they appeal or supplicate themselves to the real Seasonnaires

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<sup>31</sup> To make it clear, I am not suggesting that Homer's epics and the world of Jack Wills are homologues of one another, or that what applies to one can also apply to the other. My purpose is to illustrate how an aristocratic group, the Jack Wills Seasonnaires and their friends, tends to conduct itself on similar principles.

and, by having their gifts of appeal recognised, are able to become friends/*philia*.<sup>32</sup> This is how they make a name for themselves as ‘great personalities’.

The gifts of friendship in the form of ‘stash’ – sunglasses, party-pants, signature t-shirts – turns the brand-name commodities into something completely different for, as they are acquired by the real Seasonnaires, they are done so as to solicit friendship over and against monetary exchange conducted in the stores. Others have pointed out the difficulty of distinguishing items of trade from the items of gifts (Strathern & Stewart, 2005:235f; Godelier, 1999:167-170; Strathern, 1971:101; Gell, 1992:167-168) and what they point to is how social relations become conducted upon differing basis and effect the functioning of the items: the Jack Wills clothes, in the context of stash gifts as friendships, become vehicles of ‘constructing a lifestyle image’ but, in the process, engage in the valued acts of the lifestyle as the real-Seasonnaires and the Jack Wills Seasonnaires forge a quasi-dynastic elite that operates on the basis of intricate networks of who-knows-who so as to co-ordinate the events. Over the summer my informants were key to the success of the Jack Wills Seasonnaires. Showing up with the mandate to put on BBQ beach parties, in-store cinema night (which wasn’t such a success), an open-mic night at The Mariners (which was very successful), and banana boating parties on the beach – it requires friendships, notably friends with speed boats and contacts so these parties can go off.

The Mariner’s open-mic night, for instance, requires bands and singers and the Seasonnaires community at Rock have dense contacts with the music scene – one musician is Nathan Ball, an independent artist whose following has an underground appeal and is well respected by the real Seasonnaires: “basically they said to Nathan, ‘we’re putting together an

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<sup>32</sup> It should be pointed out that the analogy Malinowski made of the Trobriand *kula* exchange akin to Jason and his Argonauts – the band of heroic sailors who rescue the golden fleece in Greek mythology – in the title of his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* is rather striking in its similarity to house-hold embedded economics of hospitality, *philia* and aristocratic *arête* (cf. Munn, 1986:50ff)

open-mic night, would you play for us?’ then they said there’d be an open bar and the store would be paying for everything – so we all went along. ...It held a couple hundred people in the end.” said William [Fig. 43].



JW SEASONNAIRES | UK SUMMER 2011

Figure 42 Open mic night at The 'Mariners Rock', now encompassed by *Jack Wills*. [www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com)

In effect, the dense contacts are crucial to not only the image but also the success of the events and it is difficult to analytically separate the gifts with the events. The fully stocked open bar, which is put on the Jack Wills corporate credit-card, would be futile were not able to attract persons whose renown in the locale itself brings the reputation Jack Wills seeks for the brand. James’ statement on the beach parties made this plainer as, not only does boating and beach parties become life-style activities, they too are key to the commodity image that the season sets out to produce:

“They relied upon us for loads, because they didn’t know anyone or anything about the area: if they didn’t know us they wouldn’t have known where to throw the beach parties. We knew the best place, we set up on the popular part of the beach

because we know that lots of people do walks down that area so we could get lots of people as they walked by and they [Robbie and Indie] could hand out flyers. They got contacts of loads of people that way; they got about 100 or so just sitting out with us on the Landrovers. We didn't mind because they're great personalities, and they made it so fun for us."

[Showing me his pair of JW sunglasses on his desk he said]

"these were an accidental success: I started out with about 18 pairs but lost loads when riding on the boat, so I would just ask Robbie or Indie for another pair. They're great to use on the boat when you're driving because of the sun."

James showed me his pink and black wayfarer sunglasses he was given: "these were great, we'd all wear them on the boat", flicking through his Facebook pictures of him and his friends in the estuary wearing them; then stating, "They put these pictures up in the changing rooms of their stores."

Having the real Seasonnaires in the photo, in the clothes, is part and parcel of what the events entail and, in the process – it turns these branded goods into part and parcel of the substantive aspects of the community. In the video footage for the entire season, the use of speed boats was of operative importance to the Jack Wills brand mandate and, in order to do this, it requires a speed boat [Fig.44]:

“...it was this video”, James remarked as he went onto the Jack Wills website, clicking on the Seasonaire page for the summer 2011 video: “here”, pausing the video on the boat “this our friend’s boat, she lent it out to them for filming; when it’s [ the video footage, is] all put together it looks like a really big thing, but they [the Seasonnaires] didn’t have a budget to pay for things so they relied upon us, which we were happy to do because they made it so much fun, but the brand didn’t take care of anything of that side.”

Jack Wills  
*University Outfitters*  
FABULOUSLY  
BRITISH

Jack Wills  
**SEASONNAIRES**

BUSC | VARSITY MATCHES | BEST SUMMER JOB | EVENTS



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Figure 43 Jack Wills Rock Seasonnaires, from [www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com).

James’ description here demonstrates the fact that the exchanges between the real and Jack Wills Seasonnaires is positive and based upon an economy of reciprocal, equal-standing give and take. Not having a budget, nor a speed boat themselves, reliance upon those who do is crucial to not just forging an image (as a brand) but also accumulating a positive sense of indebtedness that merges persons into friendships.

What the concept of stash – free clothes handed out through the season – develops is an embedded economy whereby the exchange of goods enables the Jack Wills Seasonnaires to make friends and produce the lifestyle image for the brand solvency on the commodity exchange market and equity market. The fact that they're "free" and, therefore, "have no price" does not mean they're worthless, however. In fact they are even more valuable for being free, paradoxically. Value arises from shared sentiments of seasonal friendships. When I asked James and the real Seasonnaires if they bought the clothes, he laughed and said:

Georgie, bless her, she must have bought out the whole shop – we got everything so cheaply; like I have a really nice quality jumper which cost over £100 which I got for like £20.” He then showed me photos of the parties he and friends threw, not related to Jack Wills parties, “see we’re all wearing the clothes because we got those t-shirts for like £3... I don’t know if they were told to do it [give away discounts and free clothes], Indie’s a smart girl she knew what she was doing, but us wearing it was a big help for them.”

What is a ‘big help’ for the brand is that this type of means of distribution is a way to consolidate an elite group. It demonstrates the way that if those living in Rock come outfitted with a brand-name, these persons are the proper owners of the image advertised for others. In speed boats and with their faces on store walls, what sets them apart is the fact that their getting it for free is a way to demonstrate their allegiance to not a store but others being outfitted for free over and above those who pay. In this case, discounting or free refers less to the goods themselves more to the people who receive them – they receive them on the basis of their friendship and reveals a paradoxically high value being placed not upon the products but the people. In the context of the community, the economic modality they rest upon means

that their “value” is set by the Rock locale; the goods as stash, i.e. free, are granted to the real Seasonnaires on the basis of *not* soliciting commercial acquisition – in fact, speaking to Camilla about the clothes, she was incredibly blasé, stating after I asked if she would purchase them, “Not really – they’re just clothes.”

What is the economic rationale behind giving away clothes (i.e. not selling them) ‘for free’, then?

It is useful to think of the provision of Jack Wills’ clothes during the season as contributing to the self-sufficiency of the community or locale of Rock. As such, another analogy to the ancient *oikos* may be made in this respect. Polanyi’s (1957b) analysis of the ancient economy turned to the question of “necessity” as an economic category, demonstrating that ‘necessities’ in modern parlance (food, water, shelter – Maslow’s basic needs) as coming ‘first’ and luxuries ‘last’ would be an economic anathema to the ancients. Necessities were, to them, everything that makes an aristocratic household autonomous (i.e. not reliant upon outsiders) – so wine for the festival of Dionysus is not a luxury but rather a *necessity*, as not relying in neighbouring households for viticulture grants said autonomy. Much the same can be stated here – speed boats, beach parties, and stash for an image – are necessary for the locality of Rock to be autonomous or self-sufficient as the group’s “image” stands for itself, i.e. *through it the group comes to exist as set-apart from others, becoming conscious of itself and their special relationship to one-another.*

‘Ancient economies’ conceive of transactions in an explicitly, non-quantitative calculation (Polanyi, 1957a/b); transactions refer to social standing. In the anthropology of the gift, Marilyn Strathern (1993) has suggested that often a ‘monetarist’, quantitative logic underlines gifts transactions and misrepresents the field. For us, this is of special significance. The whole point of friendships and the economy of gifts and reciprocities discussed here rest

upon what is talked about as ‘freebies’, ‘stash’ and a sense of ‘fun’ that goes along with it. Free is part of the fun. Branded goods are being treated as *qualified values*, in Strathern’s terms, and the central point in these cases is the ability of the transacting parties’ (real and Jack Wills Seasonnaires’) to convince the other party that their goods – stash and speedboats, for instance – are mutually substitutable. Jack Wills, as a branded good, is not treated in terms of price (as a commodity) but instead turned into a gift that has an *image* that mutually supports the qualities of the locale. Taken out of the view of Rock as a season site – of which Salcombe, Abersoch, Aldeburgh and Burnham Market are other such sites for Seasonnaire programs – what this gift-economy demonstrates is a mutuality of personages that underlines an economic mentality that we could, amusingly, suggest supports Withnail’s *aristocratic* theory of wants and gains:

“Why did you tell him I went to Eton?” asks *I* after the visit to Uncle Monty’s to secure the country farmhouse for the weekend.

“Because it wouldn’t have helped if I didn’t”

“And what do you mean by that?”

“*Free to those who can afford it*”, smirks Withnail holding the key: “*very expensive to those who can’t.*”<sup>33</sup>

It is by supplying these dotted plots of gentry life-style, its image and activities, that they may be treated as autonomous aristocratic groups whose embedded economy of gifts provide the group with its coherence and, also, its elite standing. By engaging in activities that substantiate the claims made by Jack Wills’ gentry slogan, the fame of the brand is manifest through soliciting favour from the real Seasonnaires.

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<sup>33</sup> Dialogue from a scene in the cult-classic film, *Withnail & I* (1986).



### 7.3 Stash and masquerade

Having made our case with regard to the gift economy by focusing our study on Rock, I will now to elaborate a few more aspects of the summer season in Rock with additional material taken from my ethnographic experience with the BUSC Main Event. We dealt with prodigal giving, it now follows that we elaborate upon the other half of Robo's insight on the hedonism of the student aspects of Jack Wills core-demographic, notably lavish parting. We need, also, to illustrate how this fits with an embedded gift's creating fame economy.

The hedonism of which Robo speaks referred to the ASA ruling on a banned image from their Summer 2011 catalogue, resulting in major newspaper attention (e.g. Poulter, 2011; Luu, 2011). Significantly for us, the advert was filmed in Daymer Bay, Rock – based upon an aesthetic which, like Prince Hamlet said of drama, 'holds a mirror up to nature'. It attempted to dramatize the very beach parties that Rock has become famous for; their drinking, chanting and sexual licence (Éclairé, 2012; Bloomfield & Anderson, 2005; *Posh Rock*, Channel4, 2001). The explicit image, in Fig 45, demonstrates the frivolity, gaiety and sexually charged imagery that Robo – stated above – saw as part of what the university aged person engage in. Advertising with partying and sexually explicit material however is not, I suggest, a purely a 'sex sells' angle. Instead it is key to the economics of stash and friendship circles.

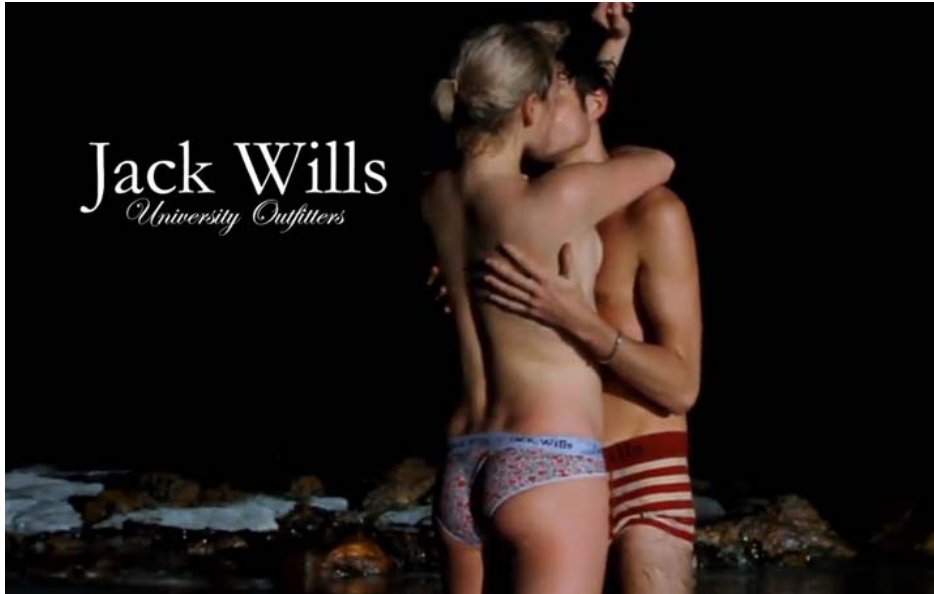


Figure 44 The banned advert – Spring 2011:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pf0pZyKYpOY>

Jack Wills' implication in these parties is part and parcel, as we've seen, of their gifting presence and if the Seasonnaires are like Odysseus in that they supplicate their entrance through gifts, the party giving is also like the up-start Trimalchio whose lavish parties were something of indulgence to say the least.<sup>34</sup>

What is the purpose of these parties?

Their significance can be read at two-levels; themselves part of the contradiction at the heart of the gift as voluntary given and obligatorily reciprocated (Mauss, 1990:5f). Parties, in themselves, are a gift to their guests and also they are conducted with a façade of polite generosity, hospitality and voluntary gesture but have as their underlying motive an

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<sup>34</sup> See renowned classicist Moses Finley's (1973) *The Ancient Economy*, p.37-38 & p.50-51, where he discusses Trimalchio (the character for the ancient prose/poetic text *The Satyricon* by Petronius) in the embedded status economy. Trimalchio, a freed slave, is a senator-level person – in wealth, class and senatorial values – but he is not *noble*, nor can he be called a *parvenu* per se because he never arrives in the social circles he so desires to enter. But what he does achieve is the parties he gives making a name for himself. As a character, Trimalchio can be regarded as similar to F. Scott Fitzgerald's (1993) famous Jay Gatsby of *The Great Gatsby*, the party giving parvenu of West Egg Long Island (as *Trimalchio of West Egg* was a working title of the novel and Gatsby is referred to as Trimalchio in the novel by the narrator, Nick (1993:71)).

acceptance in the social circles of the guests present – for they are the *proper guests at the proper place*. It is in lavish parties, spilled with prodigal laughter that one makes *a name for oneself amongst those very names to which they desire entry and acceptance*. Denied “the primogeniture due of birth,” as Shakespeare’s version of Ulysses puts it, *the parvenu misrecognises the court pageant for its courtiers*; it is an upstart’s trick and can be incredibly successful.<sup>35</sup> The Jack Wills brand continues this tradition and a Trimalchio-like party closed the Summer season at Rock.

As the gaiety of summer ended, Jack Wills’ Seasonnaires put together one last hurrah, a Fabulously British night at the Mariners (with an open bar) where all in attendance were to dress, as the title suggest, Fabulously British – my informants’ Facebook photos all showed a playful use of classic English garb (tweed etc.), William going in officer uniform as he was at Sandhurst and one Jack Wills’ Seasonnaire wore the his colourful trousers. All of this dress us was treated with a playful irony by the real Seasonnaires and the shore of Daymer Bay was full of primary coloured Jack Wills clothing and the bar was open.



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Figure 45 The Rock 'Fabulously British' night at the Mariners.

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<sup>35</sup> Shakespeare’s Ulysses (Roman name of the Greek Odysseus) appears in his *Troilus & Cressida* (Act 1, Scene 3)

As William told me,

“At the end of their time there they threw us a beach party with champagne and hotdogs then we all had a house party. They had this house in Rock which they had decorated with all Jack Wills stuff, everything pink and blue, as a thank you for helping them out. They did it as part of their yearbook, have you heard of that?”

Daniel: “No, what’s that?”

“They do this thing called a yearbook, which is like photos and video of their year, and during the party they had people filming it and photographing it, and we ended up in their handbook which goes out.”

With their faces in the catalogues, I asked William, “So are you like Jack Wills celebrities” – my tone inquisitive and innocent. Laughing he said, in crisp officer tone, “Well, I wouldn’t go that far.” While this blasé attitude may be a sign as aloofness that comes with being subject to prodigal generosity, or just the sheer irony of the whole scene, the Rock Seasonnaires are more celebrated than they may think. Picking up on this point of seasonal pictures in the handbooks and yearbooks generated by the brand with Robo, I mentioned that Seasonnaires are something of celebrities to the younger consumer, the teenage girl that idolises the idyll of Jack Wills. Smiling to himself, Robo ventured, “Yeah, in store it’s quite annoying when they recognise you and run up to you.” (fieldnotes) Yet during Rock beach parties or alpine après ski events, the celebrity qualities tend to work ‘for the group’ rather than a distant, third-party (*not party attendant*) witness. The quality of dress up, more for the amusement of the persons in attendance, added also to their image those not in attendance as

these parties become the Handbook images for the persons who idolise the brand image. The fact that the two go hand in hand is somewhat the point. As Munn (1986) says of fame, it gives the valuables a higher level of exclusiveness as people are seen and spoken about at distant points. Those teenagers who buy up the handbooks, now lined with Rock's elite, grant them this elite status by way of circulating their parties to non-attendees.

As much as the season in Rock or alpine skiing, or the Varsity Polo, is a celebration of a lifestyle it tends toward all the qualities of a carnival or masquerade and this is not without its purpose or consequences. The carnival comes to stand as the mode of behaviour, where drink and informality, laughter and excitement, sexual promise and flirtation, all co-exist but it *also* obscures the fact that a political economy is at work – not only are parties thrown, they come to encircle the distribution of stash as such. The beach party brings with it the pink and blue of the brand, not to mention its ability to shell out on the alcohol as the convivial merry maker. During the BUSC Main Event, *Après skis* were held at bar where booze was purchased and clothes given away while groups formed and danced to the Seasonnaire's hired DJs; the Varsity polo sees a celebration of the brand, but it also distributes trophies and stash and ends with a riotously loud After Party – to notice the economics distinct from the party takes an ethnographic eye.

During the *après ski* on the Main Event, the conduct of carnival was most evident. People would ski up, loosen their attire and quickly acquire the party spirit. The Hip-Hop music echoed around the mountains and one could hear it from the bottom of the hill and around the town. Stripping to t-shirts and dancing on table tops, adorning their bodies with stickers they'd acquired from the Seasonnaires, lowering their trousers to show their 'party pants' they'd acquired previously. These dances would be filmed, photographed and uploaded onto the Jack Wills website, as usual, but on the ground they intermingled with the peculiar embedded economy. As the girls would dance and adorn themselves in Jack Wills branded

stash, they did so in the spirit of blasé gaiety. No one present during the après ski was at all serious or in awe of the brand, rather they knew – as the Rock Seasonnaires knew on Fabulously British night at the Mariners – that it was not to be taken seriously, in fact it was meant to be funny or ‘ironic’.



Figure 46 Stash, stickering and dancing: [www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com)

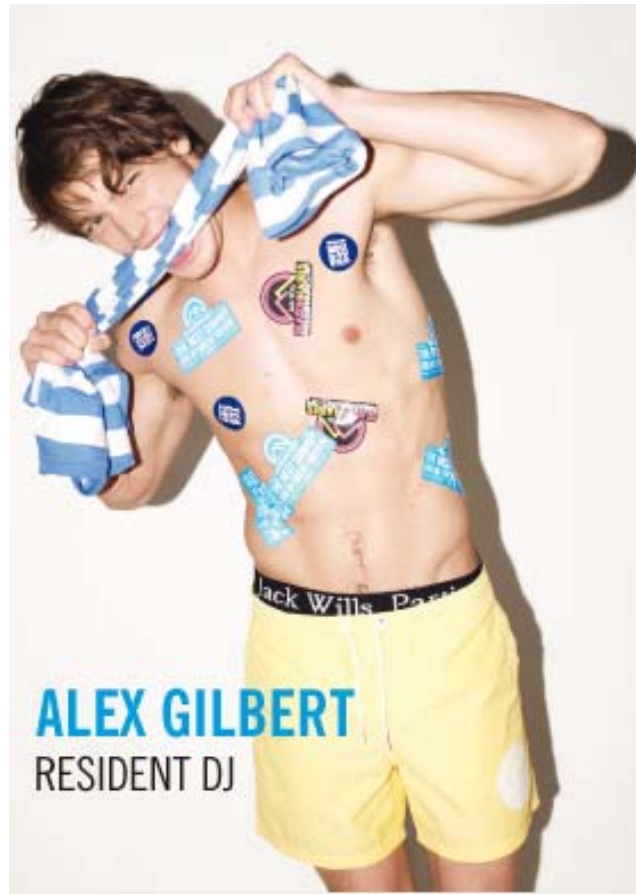


Figure 47 Robo (far right) with the Alpine Seasonnaires on the BUSC Main Event 2012, photo from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jwseasonnaires/6895510642/in/set-72157629730521977>

By dancing and playfully living up to the symbolism of the brand they, however, obscure the mode of distribution of ‘stash’. As I got to know people on the ski trip, the distinction between those in affinity with Jack Wills as a brand and the Jack Wills Seasonnaires was clear not from wearing the stash, per se, but rather their intimacy with the Seasonnaires themselves. I would often see Robo making his rounds through the assembled throng at the après ski, stopping at tables and chatting to various groups from various university society’s from up and down the UK – his manner was wonderfully casual but, in this party sociality, all persons are casual. Yet only the Seasonnaires have a ‘job to do’. In parties, as groups swell, form and break up and reform in parties in general, Robo and the Seasonnaire become notable go-betweens in the social circles. What is possible to perceive is that, in the dance of the party, a specific social dance is also being conducted. Take this excerpt from my fieldnotes; not only does it capture an interaction which demonstrates the economic logic of stash on-the-ground but also demonstrates how it obscures as much as reveals its presence at a party:

*Après ski.* The Seasonnaires were by their pop up store as usual and Robo saw me and smiled a hello at me: “How you doing, mate?”

“Pretty good, you?”

“Yeah. Good man.” As he walked off, he went and chatted to two informants of mine so I joined them as they walked up to my table.

After a while, with Robo going off to charm others, we were joined by some of their friends as talk turned to the previous night. Dancing, sex, joking – more joking – more sex.



The table had filled up by now; one of those seated at our table, jokingly, lifted up his shirt showing where he'd been drawn on the previous night – to queried looks he quipped: “It’s my secret club symbol, like Jack Wills.” The girls seated, wearing their stickers and party pants, looked a bit put out: “They’re not that bad!” When Seasonnaire Ed came round to our table we soon realised why. Very happy to see him and chatting over the previous night’s frivolities, one crooned, “*E..d*” [These are the girls in Fig. 47]

Sweetly elongating the syllable her voice became a cymbal. She dulled his reserve and made him lean in as much as his name was stretched out, she asked: “Where’s our stash?” into his ear. “We wanted some hoodies and pants...” Ed made excuses, saying that “he’d get on it”, put his hand on her arm and made sure the girls had their stash soon.

A new arrival at the table mockingly exclaimed, “He’s been telling me that for the past three days...” Coming round a few moments later Ed had come through: “Yeah girls, Robo’s put together a box of stash for you, it’ll be at your hotel later.”

“Oh, thanks Ed.” Ed lingered.

“Where you girls out tonight?” Glowing, wayfarers obscuring his gaze.

“Biker Bar.”

“See you there. I’ve got to go do some work now.” (fieldnotes)

Underlying this interaction is the subtle, secret logic, of the branded gifts of stash – how do they arrive at these girls hotel room? Boxed and sealed by Robo himself – and note how

one person seems strangely put out at his lack of hoody, despite the fact that these goods are ostensibly free. He should have engaged in the dancing. The importance of the dance to the embedded economy of stash, while obvious in that it turns the goods into the brand's hedonistic image, is also of deeper sociological significance – for who one dances with at court is, of course, dangerously close to courtship and the community that comes into existence in 'dating circles' via dancing circles. The dance floor can become a space of entrance as much as it exclusion to social circles, for while there is no market at work here as stash is subtly gifted, there is a marketplace of another kind – who girls do or don't dance with. Through dancing, adorned in stash, they come to form a special group bounded together by that name – Jack Wills.

The parties are crucial to the fun and hedonism that frames the events as, firstly non-economic and based around friendships, but secondly, able to unify a wider network of personages under the fame of the brand-name through their common activities together. In the first aspect, the economics of gift giving demonstrates how it restricts social circles.

Gift-giving during parties is a furtive logic of distribution. Stash, as it's called, with its connotations of 'being stashed/hidden away', entails a system of distribution which is inherently archaic and it worth drawing another illustrative analogy: it has its origins in booty, treasure, trophies, prizes of fortune and the spoils of war (cf. Polanyi, 1957b:77-78; Beidelman, 1989:238-242; Canetti, 1962:87-89). These external goods – prizes or treasure – were scarce in the ancient sense because they were simply restricted to honorific activities and as such defined by virtues to be acted out, not acquired by anyone or everyone (Polanyi, 1957b:78). Stash is the opposite of swag as 'Stuff We All Get'. Stash is linked to one's involvement in private friendships and restricted social circles and becomes 'treasure' (Canetti, 1962). Stash has "special value" to it for like treasure it is attempted to remain restricted in its access by a select few and rests upon a dialectic of mendacity and

magnificence: “the peculiarity of treasure lies in the tension between the splendour it should radiate and the secrecy which is its protection.” (1962:89)

And it is this economy of stash that aids the fame of the brand through embedding the goods in partying. A key item in the parties, as noted in Fig. 49, are the aptly named ‘party pants’. Speaking to Ben about the launch of the Seasonnaire program in Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard in the summer of 2011, he said of the freebies supplied to those on the island: “Yeah, they went nuts for it. Especially the party pants. They were kind of like the big thing. Yeah, really successful.” ‘Especially the party pants’ is the key for why they are so highly prized is not because of anything other than the central place they occupy in the dramatics of the lifestyle. They are, in a way, a beacon for the lifestyle in a florescent, colourful symbol of hedonism – they are flirtatious as they hint at sex through being underwear displayed while clothed; they draw attention to themselves as they light up at night, again highlighting sexual licence and also they centralise a sexual component to the identity not of the brand so much as *to those people in the season itself*. Being associated with primarily the females, they are flirtatious not to sell sex but to entice sex into the circles around which they are being distributed. Coupling is key to securing a group that is restricted in membership as the circle turns inward upon itself as members are seen as potential partners. As noted above, they are given in the presence of talk about sex.

Speaking to James about the party pants, he hinted at how the partying is also a way to restrict membership

*Rock. Party Pants:* “They’re so much fun – the girls loved them. They loved to show them off. They gave out loads to us, like I bought a pen from the shop and got them for free; but others had to buy £50 worth of stuff to get them.”

James then pointed out on his Facebook pictures the girls in these pants, moving to the Jack Wills website of the same Season in America in Martha's Vineyard; the pants were a fluorescent beacon to his transatlantic cousins (fieldnotes)

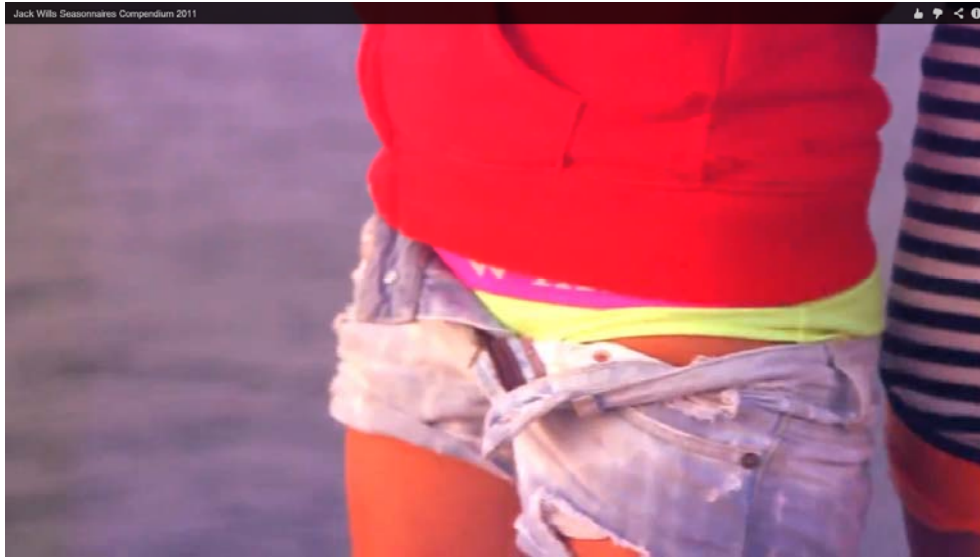




Figure 48 The British Jack Wills Seasonnaires on Nantucket Island (2011) in party pants :  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKncLQvdRoo>

Giving out many to his circle of friends as well as limiting those who access them through pricing, the free party pants link the Rock locale mirrored in New England islands in America; they unify a crucial image to not only the brand but the social identity of the social group. While the images circulate; the stash does not. On James' personal Facebook profile to the public brand photographs, the two blur and overlap as the real Seasonnaires are the true sources of inspiration for the dramatics of the Season in brand-image guise. 'Going nuts', as Ben put it, for party pants is not so much the product itself but the work it's doing to frame the social interactions on beaches and parties. Stash sustains a *commerce* of social closure through an allusion to *connubium*.<sup>36</sup> Being 'so much fun' and part of how the 'girls liked to show them off' is not showing off the product in and of itself but rather how this product unifies relations of convivial, deeply networked hedonism amongst specific persons. As Randall Collins says of kula gifts, we witness giving as "a form of diplomacy." (1993:228) Party pants escape our sociological awareness of them as ritualised instruments of elite group

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<sup>36</sup> This is an allusion to Marcel Mauss' theory of the gift and communal relations: "In its origins, *commercium* goes together with *connubium*, marriage follows commerce and commerce follows marriage." (cited in Graeber, 2001:159, original emphasis).

consolidation, a form of ambassadorial concern to make harmonious and positively charged friendships through playful items, if we simply regard them as playful and inconsequential or worse tawdry. While a flirtatious atmosphere pervades their use and, when in promotional films, they puncture the display of beach parties and conviviality, we have seen them here as a central item to the groups values over and above the superficial. Party pants may be part of how “Sex sells” but, at the level of the group, it is positively demonstrating appropriate means of uniting a series of definable personages through a common, unitary symbol – flirty, fluorescent pants.

What does this material illustrate as to the importance of gifts exchanges through brand-name goods?

#### 7.4 The *hau* of the brand-name gift

The use of branded commodities to feature as gifts in the marketplace has been a topic recently taken up by various scholars and come under many different names: “mass gifts” (Bird-David & Darr 2009a/b) or “merchandise gifts” (Godbout & Caillé, 1998:79-86), or “free gifts” (Belk et. al. 1989:17-19) or “little presents” (Lash & Lury, 2007), even “alienable gifts” (Miller, 2001). These *critiques* of branded gifts point out the glaring difference of to the gift-economies described in Mauss’ *The Gift* (1990). It is a critique of corporations adoption of a gift logic where the use of swag is central – i.e. promotional items that are generously given away to inspire purchases in the future. Lash & Lury (2007) state the contrast behind Maussian gifts and brand-name gifts as such:

the classic gift consolidates ...it *consecrates*: today’s little gift –  
the ‘free gift’, treats, promotions or items of merchandise  
*punctuate* ... it interrupts, it agitates, it insinuates  
(obsequiously). The social bond it creates is not, as in the

classic gift, lifelong and enduring. .... we have the social bond of weak ties. The classic gift describes an economy of proper place: of patrimony, fixed domestic capital, an economy of the hearth, of inheritance and reproduction. This contrast with the placelessness, the non-place of the commodity economy. (Lash & Lury, 2007:206)

Contra Lash & Lury, the material presented here shows a much more intimate Maussian gift than their conception of a brand-name gift.<sup>37</sup> We've been discussing kula, trade of the noble kind. Throughout we have seen that, in fact, some notion of 'hearth' (the Mariners Arms/ the Après ski), of 'patrimony' (gifts from a brand-name), 'fixed domestic capital' (speed boats, waterskiing, and parties) and 'inheritance and reproduction' (as the gifts link them throughout space and time, from Rock to Nantucket). And the bonds are lasting – we see these friendships sustained *over and beyond the ties to the corporation per se*. These gifts include elites and, by their social logic, exclude the mass of consumers – it is the gentry dialectic. Ben demonstrates his friendships, quoted above, through continued hospitality; and our Rock Seasonnaires remain as close friendships through their time in the summer season and are even *more* socially connected thanks to it. Speaking to James after my time during the skiing, I asked him if he knew Robo – “Ha, yeah. What a nutcase. He’s such a great character.” Robo is, as the head UK Seasonnaire, also a floating character who has acquired the strongest contact network amongst the group: he is known to many; his Facebook has the largest amount of friends and include many persons that link the informants here to persons they scarcely know but also have much in common with. The real result is what Robo, in this capacity as the bridge to many in a vast social network, is able to do for the real

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<sup>37</sup> That said, the argument I supply in criticism to Lash & Lury (2007) stems *only* from my material. Their argument works perfectly well for many aspects of commercial transactions coming with a gift dimension; e.g. 'Buy one, get one free' or vouchers or loyalty points etc.

Seasonnaires: “He’s a great guy – he’s got great London contacts. [Fig 50] He gets us into Mahiki [nightclub in Mayfair] where Prince Harry goes – we wouldn’t usually be able to get in, but he put us on the guest list.” This is a gift economy that has real, demonstrated effects of networking and reward.



Figure 49 Jack Wills Seasonnaire Robo (far left), ex-JW model Josh Parkinson (centre left), Oliver Proudlock (centre right) star of Made In Chelsea and Jamie Laing (far right), star of Made In Chelsea: <http://www.tatler.com/bystander/events/2012/december/suitcase-magazine-party#/8995/image/8>

What this chapter has argued is that with the gifts of stash exchanged is are unifying the group and this has a key significance to the Jack Wills brand itself. Without these exchanges, the brand would be worthless as only ‘a many’ would exist whereas with kula gifting, *only the noble need apply*. Mauss used the Moari name for the series of elite personages that accelerated worth of gifts, the *hau* of the gift: the spirit behind the thing given that contains the identity of the giver, the giver being – and this is seldom pointed with force



– being a member of a noble household (Mauss, 1990:10-13). Academic debate is extensive on the *hau* of the gift (e.g. Sahlins, 1972:149ff; Parry, 1986; Weiner, 1992:44ff; Gell, 1998:106-109; Godburt & Callié, 1998:130-144; Godelier, 1999:49-56; Graeber, 2001:178-183). For our purposes we can see it as that which makes the social group behind the brand-name famous for the elite. What we have been documenting is how an elite brand-image is made credible by way of the Jack Wills brand actively integrating their representatives (Seasonnaires) in real localities that, as a whole, act as nodal points of a wider exchange regime that connects a series of mutual, like-minded persons sharing a common way of life. Overall it is the brand-image that is the spirit of the brand-name gift (cf. Mazzarella, 2003a/b).

We can note a parallel with Mauss' original account. For Mauss, the spirit of the gift is “invested with life” that “seeks to return to ...its ‘place of origin’, or produce, on behalf of the clan and the native soil from which it sprang, an equivalent to replace it.” (Mauss, 1990:13) Mauss is expressing a concern for the social group's (the clans') identity in a specific locale that defines their shared history manifest through giving away items that stand for the identity of the giver (cf. Appadurai, 1996 above).

The gift exchange we've documented here is all directed toward making the brand-image stay true to the identity of branded slogans through a series of personages acting under it. This is the 'yield' or profit to the exchanges. Sahlins' interprets the meaning of *hau* to be profit or yield but it is not profit in the sense of money making (cf. Marx, 1976). Instead, yield is the coming together of noble houses into a network of nobility. As Sahlins points out to us:

observe where the term *hau* enters into the discussion. *Not* with the initial transfer from the first to the second party, as well it

could if it were the spirit of the gift, *but upon the exchange between the second and third parties, as logically it would if it were the yield on the gift.* (1972:160-161, emphasis added)

Spirit arises through a *series of exchanges*. The yield (as spirit) is *not* more value to the object given but how this object given stands for the relations that have been *generated through exchanges – people are its yield or profit*. The yield of the party pants, then, is not on them as objects but how they stand for the intricate, and small, network of persons wearing them in distanced but shared convivial activity. For turnover is not accumulation of things but people tied together in a trans-personal network. What is being conducted is a series of *yields*, both in the personages connected to the image and how through this image persons are inter-linked over vistas of time-space which aids theirs and the brand-name's fame. The Jack Wills Seasonnaires will turn private parties into public images: excluding the many, including the few. The spirit of the gift is the social process that encapsulates the gentry dialectic.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Commerce & Aspiration*

#### 8. Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate the efficacy of Jack Wills's corporate presence in this sociological reformation via the contradiction at the heart of the gentry ideal, that odd mixture of aspiration and aspired; achievement entangled with ascription. The final chapter will detail this social contradiction from the perspective of the aspirant in the context of 'the market' and the consumption of commodities.

Markets and commodity acquisition is usually treated and often is written about as if it occurs in a vacuum (see Granovetter, 1985 for a critique). Against this conception, I wish to understand the market as embedded in social processes and treat the purchase of commodities as articulated around not just their physical destruction or physiological aspects but rather "the incorporation of the consumed item into the personal and social identity of the consumer." (Gell, 1986:112) Commercial purchase always occurs within the dramatic enactment of the wider social relations whose dance and gait they are caught up in and become defined by: "the incorporation of consumer goods into the definition of the social self arises out of a framework of social obligations and also perpetuates this framework." (Gell, 1986:112) To understand the definition of the 'self' the aspirant has in the Jack Wills ensemble, and their role in a wider series of social relations, I will take the central advertising model of Jack Wills – the Varsity Polo day – and demonstrate that, through an ethnographic description of the events personages, one finds a social hierarchy that gives us a clear visualisation of existing class distinctions but also how the Jack Wills brand *frames its product and defines all persons in terms of their relation to this ritualised hierarchy*. As such,

I view “the market as a secular event, but ...also part of the ritual of social relations.” (Gell, 1982:472)

Elizabeth Moor’s (2007) concept of ‘branding spaces’ regards the consumption of objects, also, as inextricably bound to its origin in corporate events, thereby structuring perception and opinion of products as to their ‘proper place’ within a ritual space. Writing of her fieldwork with Irish brand Witness, Moor argues that

although the context of origin for an object like the Witness sun hat would appear to be highly specific (the festival), once it passes beyond this point the only trace of this specificity is the Witness logo itself ...the brand logo has an ongoing capacity to invoke a whole of Witness time and places, and indeed to link these narratives to the private narratives of the consumer.

(Moor, 2003:50)

The consumption of Jack Wills goods are bathed in the light of ‘the Season’ and the polo is the culmination of this imagery. Through an analysis of this event, I suggest we view it as a commercialised reconstitution of how the brand and subsequently its products become entangled in a narrative not merely of private consumer pleasures but social aspiration writ large. The market does much more than mediate the sale and purchase of commodities. Taking his cue from Geertz’s infamous ‘Deep Play – Notes on a Balinese Cockfight’ in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Alfred Gell suggests the

market has a significant ceremonial component in that it provides a *mapping*, in space, time and in the form of market interaction, for the gamut of social relations found in wider society...quite overt in the spatial layout of the market.

(1982:472-473, original emphasis)

The fact that I am placing this map of social relations in a hierarchical conception is that, from ethnographic observation, the remit of hierarchical gradation at these events is an indispensable fact. Without an analysis of how commerce is engaged in this hierarchical scheme our analysis would underestimate Jack Wills' ritual significance.

Section 8.1 details the hierarchical series of personages on the Varsity day to illustrate how the day dramatically enacts a visible amalgam of classed persons, of guards/gentry (upper class), polo players (upper/ upper middle class), Seasonnaires (upper-middle class/middle class), Aspirants (middle class), Teenie boppers (middle class), Outsiders (working class). The reader may wish to skip this description for it reiterates well-known class assumptions in British society. After this description, I draw upon interviews conducted with those persons who fit into the "aspirant" (middle-class) category of the social hierarchy and detail how their relation to the Jack Wills brand is structured by an ambivalence of attraction to but need to distance themselves from its central, ideological meanings. The problem, I suggest, is that because they are economically near to the product in terms of commercial purchase, they are however socially far away from the dramatic centre of the core meanings of the product, that is, its standing for the gentry group they become encompassed by. As the aspirant group, they are ambiguously placed within the hierarchy as not 'too lowly' but neither are they 'too high', hence our analysis of them will demonstrate the aspirant side of the gentry dialectic and our conclusion dwells upon the consequences of commercial acquisition of the product.

## 8.2 Social Categories and Market Space

The Varsity Polo has a mixture of persons who play different roles during the day and in doing so tend to form into a hierarchy of personages. As such, the list of personages I supply here is meant to illustrate their position on the 'map' of social relations that 'the

market for Jack Wills' establishes. While, of course, these personages are inter-related, their social role during the day separates them into certain personifications of types whose identities become mutually exclusive.<sup>38</sup>

*'Guards' and Branded Gentry.*

In the world of polo, those who oversee the event are typically and almost exclusively persons of high rank. Staff pages on polo websites are never dubbed 'staff' but 'who's who' and at the level of presidents and chairman, their rank is aristocracy and royalty, with Guards' Polo Club president being HRH The Duke of Edinburgh and Cambridge Polo Club's president being his son, HRH The Prince of Wales. Usually the directors and managerial level personnel are drawn from officer class military rank (Major, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel) and public school or Oxbridge university elites. These persons I call 'Guards' as a play on both the club's name and their tendency to dress in military inspired garb during the day, usually distinguishable by hat wearing as recreational, off-duty symbols of rank precedence. They interact, on the Varsity day itself, closely with what I will call the 'Branded Gentry', i.e. the owners of the Jack Wills brand, Peter Williams and Robert Shaw and their various dependants (Olly Finding (Head of Int. marketing), Robo McCallum (Head of UK marketing), Freddie Wyatt (Head of Digital Media) and their production partners Smyle Creative).<sup>39</sup> During the event, the prize giving to the polo teams sees the Branded Gentry intermingle in the conduct of honouring the polo players – it is here that the announcer, affiliated with Guards Polo Club, welcomes Peter Williams and Robert Shaw to the pitch and as they hand out prizes, take photographs together and assist one another with the event

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<sup>38</sup> The categories I list to describe each group come from the ethnography of the polo itself and what should be clear is that the Varsity polo *does not cause* these persons to arise but rather the polo is orchestrated so that they are realised in this way.

<sup>39</sup> Hopper & Vallance's *The Branded Gentry* (2013) was released in April 2013 and the notes and work on this chapter, which refers to those associated with brand as 'branded gentry' (as a play on words), began when I realised in April of 2012 that 'Jack Wills and the Branded Gentry' would be a good thesis title; that said, I use the term not in their sense here but only in respect to the ethnographic portrait I am painting here.

organisation. They set themselves apart from others through these duties and via the fences separating the pitch from the spectators. Guards, the club and its persons, and the Branded Gentry are the interested parties for here the polo acts as space for their professional network relations; ownership of the event by the Jack Wills brand maintains the close association of the wealthy and the high ranking persons of British society.



Figure 51 Peter Williams (left) and the 'Guards' (managerial Guards Polo Club) (right) – Varsity Polo 2011: from, [www.wwd.com](http://www.wwd.com)

### *Polo players & Friends*

The next level of the hierarchy is the polo players themselves. The Varsity Polo, as a historic institution, is a custom for continued linkages between polo players who use the game as means to 'club together', which is why the day officially 'begins' with the 'Old Boy' matches. While the official *Jack Wills Varsity Polo* begins at half past 11 with the opening of the Jack Wills Village, the ad hoc store for purchase of Jack Wills' goods on the day itself opens at 1pm along with their Music Tee-Pee for JW Unsigned acts.

At the level of the polo players, they are more closely tied to the Guards and Branded Gentry; their role as the continued personages of the historic institution also brings them affiliation with the interested elite. When the prize giving is conducted, the handshakes

between the polo players and Peter Williams becomes a symbolic gesture of networked co-operation in bringing together the event. A co-operation that is historically becoming more noticeable as commercialisation has occurred. Former Oxford Polo Club player, now Creative Director at Selfridges, Alannah Weston said of the Varsity Polo at her attendance in 2011: “I was the first woman to play on the Oxford polo team in 20 years — but it certainly wasn’t anything like this. No marquees, no Pimm’s — and certainly no crowds to watch us.” (Sparks, 2011)



Figure 52 Above: Peter Williams and Tom shake hands during the Prize Giving, June 2012

(still from film by author)

Below: Peter Williams shakes hands with Oxford polo player June 2010 (from OUPC website: <http://www.oxforduniversitypoloclub.com/index.php/gallery>)





Figure 53 Peter Williams meets and greets the Polo teams at the Jack Wills Varsity Polo

Lunch - Guards Clubhouse 2010.

<http://www.oxforduniversitypoloclub.com/index.php/gallery>

### *Seasonairres & Friends*

The Seasonairres are an intermediary series of personages for their intimacy toward the interest elite of the Branded Gentry is obvious as they are closely associated with Peter Williams and the marketing mandate of the day, but they are also excluded from proximity toward the polo players and their club friends as well as an association with Guards overall. Instead, they represent the elite of the Be-Seens over and above the aspirants and rest (below). This is evident in the fact that, upon entry, all attendees are given a lanyard of cards with the day's activities (Pimms bus, food stalls, music tents and polo games times), one card being a 'Meet The Seasonairres' card listing all their names, photos and twitter addresses [Fig. 56]. The Seasonairres have their own area to mingle and be recognised in the centre of the fields and often one Seasonairre presents to the camera for the promotional footage,

thereby situating themselves on the borderline between proximity to the interested elite and the promotionally directed, disinterested persons.

As the Seasonairres are ‘society people’ the day for them is to mingle and mix with those who attend the Varsity polo and will, in July-August period, be visiting the seasonal sea-side locations for the summer period. For the Seasonnaires, the Varsity Polo acts as a commercialised debutant ball and is conducted as their cotillion [Fig. 55].

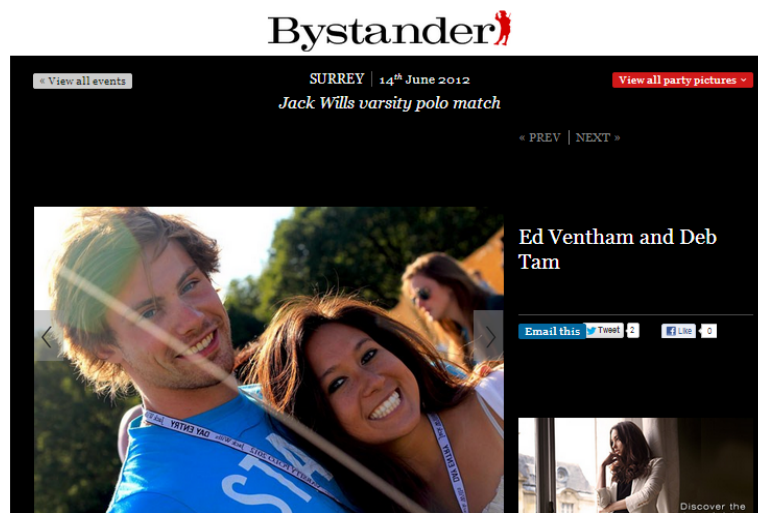


Figure 54 Jack Wills Seasonairres Ed and Deb, society pages of Tatler/Bystander  
(<http://www.tatler.com/bystander/events/2012/june/jack-wills-varsity-polo-match#/7447/image/3>)



Figure 55 The Seasonairres - the Varsity cotillion, "Meet the Seasonairres";

above - photo by author, Varsity 2012; below - scan of tag handed out to each attendee

(authors copy)

**MEET THE  
SUMMER SEASONNAIRES  
AT THE VARSITY POLO**

 <b>ED BARROW</b> ALDEBURGH   @barrow_ed	 <b>STEFAN SCHRODER</b> ABERSOCH   @StefanSchroder
 <b>GEORGIE CADE</b> SALCOMBE   @georgiecade	 <b>FRANKIE TAYLOR</b> ABERSOCH   @FrankieTaylor1
 <b>THOMAS DU LUART</b> SALCOMBE   @thomasduluart	 <b>ED VENTHAM</b> ROCK   @EdVent13
 <b>GEORGIA PALMER</b> BURNHAM MARKET   @PalmerGeorgia	 <b>THEO RODRIGUES DA COSTA</b> BURNHAM MARKET   @TheodoreRDC
 <b>FLORENCE HUNTINGTON- WHITELEY</b> ALDEBURGH   @florenceahw	<b>FOLLOW THE DAY'S EVENTS ON  TWITTER</b>

### *Aspirants & Be-Seens*

These persons would be indistinguishable from the Seasonairres were it not for their lack of fraternal, convivial connection; instead they consist of the persons who – through no

fault of their own – become envisaged as lesser on the scale of persons; often they would be called ‘consumers’ as they are distinguished by their “dressing up” in the spirit of the event and are in effect witnesses to the events activities. The obligation to dress up as the host desires, i.e. Jack Wills attire, is a form of polite sociability but in so doing they *watch* the polo and crucially *don’t play the game or the convivial contacts game*; neither do they figure in the cotillion photographs that make their way to the *Tatler /Bystander* (unless they are *friends with the Seasonairres* which usually they aren’t or are very weak ties to).

Where these persons do appear is on the Jack Wills photo-album on the official website and in effect become nameless faces of the Jack Wills “look” as the day is the prime spot to be-seen dressing up. These photographs deem them the *public* engaging in “aspirational” activity [Fig.57] who would be virtually indistinguishable from the friends of polo players but who, by being ‘out of the loop’, lose this privilege and become the parvenus. Lacking the contacts of the interested elite they become the residual disinterested persons who enjoys the ‘day out’ and that vague, affected sense of superiority that comes with being at the right place *next* to the right people and who they *naively* come think of themselves as akin to simply because they dress and look alike. Snobbish as this may sound, these assertions and affective qualities emerge not from their motives that bring them to the day (*or my opinion of them*); they arise from the hierarchy of British society that is being articulated in the process.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hierarchy, as anthropologists tell us (Dumont, 1966; Parry, 1996; Graeber, 1997), is a series of exclusionary encompassments as the personal features of those at the top of the social ladder “encompass” those below them as those on top gain autonomy and separate from the rest – this is because hierarchy rests upon asymmetry of persons and their mutual inter-changeability becomes impossible (Parry, 1996:265-267; Graeber, 1997:723-725): hierarchy is based on precedent, says Graeber (2011:111) while equality is based upon what could be termed ‘mutuability’ (as people are seen ‘the same as’ each other’ (Sahlins, 2011a/b). Ergo, the dreams of the aspirants are encompassed by the aspired. Or we could say, the observation of emulation comes *after* the dream has been seeded in the person (cf. Varul, 2006:113)



Figure 56 “Be-Seens” enjoy their picnic, Pimms and the ‘day out’ – [www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com)

*‘Teenie Boppers’*

The ‘teenie boppers’ (a name one polo informant gave them) are the teenagers whose association with Jack Wills is primarily through the clothes as advertised; they dress up and have no presence in the life-style aside from their ability to buy-up the clothes (through either parents generosity or ‘saving up’) and attend the Varsity polo between the hours of 11am-7pm where, for them, doors close (as post 7pm is over 18s) [Fig. 58].

Teenie boppers are those to whom the Jack Wills brand has ‘made room for’. They are not the target market as their age is pre-university but their disposable income is ample means to bolster sales figures. Prior to 2008 – when the event attendance shot up from 1,000 in 2007 to some 7/8,000 – the day consisted of the above persons but not teenie boppers and, crucially, no Jack Wills Village existed either. It was purely a Varsity polo match and pleasure garden with a Pimms bus for liquor and picnic space for ‘be-seens’. For these youngsters they borrow the names, colours and life-style of those above for a game of dress up that forgoes dolls and models as the day becomes playing at being around a world that is dreamt about – they buy up the cheap t-shirts sold on the day, kitsch t-shirts of the festival

type (*Oxford vs. Cambridge 2012*) that show they've 'been there' as a surrogate of group membership.



Figure 57 Photo collage on YouTube from JW Varsity Polo 2012 by a teenage attendee

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeayHbl6hIo>



Figure 58 Stills from Varsity Polo 2011 - Teenage shoppers and the piling high of Jack Wills goods in their preferred setting of distribution ([www.jackwills.com](http://www.jackwills.com))

### *Outsiders*

These persons are those that *the genteel events create* as they do not fit the general aesthetic of the dress up and neither know anyone in the life-style. These persons are distinguishable through apparel, voice and behaviour as well as their relatively limited

numbers. In the snobbish convictions of the Varsity day, they become ‘vulgar’ as they are, as the phrase goes, ‘matter out of place’ – dirty, that is, and may be today dubbed “chavs”, the untouchables of the British class.

\*

This portrait of the persons at the Varsity day supplies us with a map of the social relations that are actively performed and being orchestrated. It is, in effect, a microcosm of the wider social relations that the Jack Wills brand has been crucial to implementing. Without brand-name presence, this sociological amalgam would not have crystallised into this form. As I said above, the Varsity hasn’t *caused* this to occur but rather in the attendance and orchestration of the event, it results in this particular social hierarchy. It is, also, a hierarchy visible in time-space for in the event itself the spatial layout mirrors this hierarchy. Fig 60 is the map of the day which, when turned counter-clockwise 90 degrees, shows the social hierarchy in spatial form:

Guards / Branded Gentry – Polo field

Polo Players – Polo field

Seasonairres – Seasonairres space

Aspirants / Be Seen’s – Adjacent to Seasonairre space

Teenie Boppers – Jack Wills Village

(Vulgar – sparse)

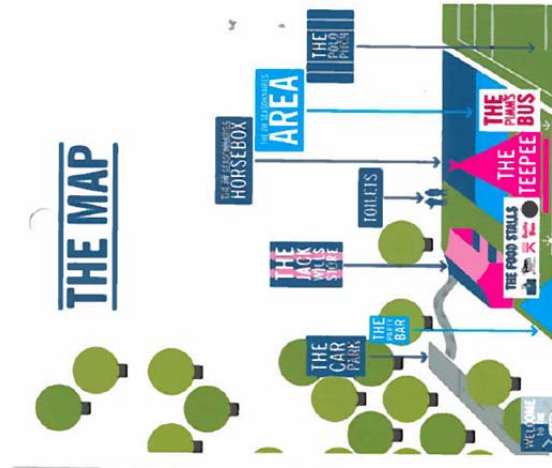


Figure 59 The Varsity Polo Map 2012 – scanned from program (authors copy).

### 8.3 Aspirant people and market acquisition

The Varsity Polo is a ritual but also a *market*. The foregoing description gives us a way to visualise the gentry’ dialectic of inclusion and exclusion in ambiguous interplay. The Jack Wills Varsity Polo is *advertising* but what it is advertising is not merely life-style but moreover the *hierarchical conception of British society*. The Varsity polo is a dramatization of the wider ensemble of social relations in British society, usually articulated in class-terms of upper-middle-lower etc. Here it is articulated around a brand-name corporation. Widening this perspective, in this section I will outline from interview sources the manner in which this hierarchical vision, found dramatically in the Varsity polo, is infused with or becomes a referential backdrop to any consideration, negotiation or understanding of the Jack Wills brand as a marketed, alienable commodity acquired through monetary purchase. This focuses upon how the aspirants/be-seen, as the non-core gentry “consumer”, shows them negotiating themselves with regard to the Jack Wills brand-name and lifestyle.

As this entire thesis has outlined, the *name* of the Jack Wills is so powerfully charged with the personages of an elite, ‘gentry group’, because its explicit purpose has been to outfit them and, sociologically, unify them as a distinctive elite manifest as continuation of a



historically delineated British identity. In the next three sections I outline how this influences people's understandings of Jack Wills's clothes purchased and how they negotiate their relationship to it with explicit reference to university students who are peers to but not members of the gentry group. These interviewees are all ambivalently placed within the Jack Wills scheme of purchase; they are not under patronage, subject to gifts and neither – as the reader will see – do they positively identify with the product's overarching image or symbolic statements concerning British society in general. They are middle class. In more recent class terminology established by Savage et. al.'s (2013) 'Great British Class Survey', they are either technical middle class or lower branches of the established middle class (I qualify this below). And the ambivalence they muse on is precisely due to their position as middle class aspirants in a hierarchy; for hierarchies are, as anthropologists have often argued (esp. in Louis Dumont's classic *Homo Hierarchicus*, whose this chapter is influenced by in an oblique way (see previous footnote)), a series of encompassments. The elite encompass the middle classes; the middle classes encompass the working class etc. This line of argument is found in British sociology of class in the work of Wendy Bottero (2004) whose claim that emotive-feelings around class, such as aspiration and desire, envy and shame, etc. should be read as responses from what she calls 'hierarchical positionality'.

### 8.3.1 Negotiating purchase

In contrast to what we've argued previously, the network of 'good relationships' for the Jack Wills brand-name is a network the persons purchasing Jack Wills 'on campus' find themselves encompassed (by higher persons) and 'out of the loop' of their world. To the non-core person, their social identity is encompassed by real persons who they are intimately close to in life-stage and campus proximity.

*Laura*

For Laura, her relationship to the Jack Wills is between two modes of thought, on the one hand it is aesthetically appealing: “Did I tell you I have these pictures on my wall?” she said as she picked up the Jack Wills Handbook, only to state, “Not these ones specifically, because these look too ‘rah’, but they’re quite artistic...Like that, pictures of flowers,...but as soon as I get to the clothes it’s like urgh! How much? How much? My word.” Laura is from a modest, technical middle class home. She is the daughter of a school teacher and a stay at home father. Growing up in a secluded and beautiful part of Cornwall, she has lived in an equally beautiful home which is large but not extravagant; posh to city folk but not gentry to those who live in the countryside. She is Russell Group university educated but went to a local state school growing up. And, like her mother, she is now also a school teacher.

Laura’s ambivalent thought process toward Jack Wills can be read from her background, countryside but not posh, privileged but not spoiled. And this thought process was present in her understanding of Jack Wills when she encountered an attractive, item in a charity shop in Exeter:

“Well I saw this top [the Jack Wills top she is wearing], and thought ‘oh that’s a nice top’ and then looked at the label and was like “oh, it’s Jack Wills, do I want it?”, kinda of put me off it because it was Jack Wills, and I hate the whole thing about it. But then I was wearing it just now and I said to James [close friend] ‘this is my Jack Wills stuff’ and he was like ‘oh, I wouldn’t have even known because it doesn’t even look like it, it looks more like what you would wear normally’. I think it is good quality. I washed it and it is really soft and it’s better than Primark quality, but that’s not hard. But I still don’t think, well, I’m one of those people who likes to have lots of clothes so I

can dabble, but they're not that good quality, and when I get bored of them I don't care, but if I bought Jack Wills I would feel 'no I can't get bored of this, I'd have to wear it all the time because it cost me 80 pounds!'" (Laura. October 2010)

Laura, shopping at a charity shop (as to her sense of social justice in both frugality and helping others less fortunate), has to negotiate not only with the fame preceding the label but also how this fits into her social relation to the gentry group. With statements that she 'hates the whole thing about it', giving an account of an interaction with a friend to justify how the top, in fact, fits with her already-fashioned self-other perception allows this brand-name to resign its fame as the name of an elite group and becomes part of her identity that is manifestly anti-gentry. Within this reassignment of name-meaning is a consideration of the monetary aspect. As the sole mediator between giving and getting (M for C), the money association becomes a means to not only justify purchase but also articulates a purely quantitative determination of use and understanding of the good. Unlike the clothes she gathers in charity shops or low-end retail, the Jack Wills brand's price-tag is seen as obliging her to wear items more often purely through money as a medium that is essentially defined by its quantitative determination of worth: the logic is £80 means quantitatively more wear ('day after day') to an item of £10 in proportional terms ('every now and again'). That said, price is not purely an abstract device. The aesthetic appeal of the Jack Wills shirt comes not merely from being priced reasonably for her but rather because it is, aesthetically speaking, appropriate to a social milieu that honours and prioritises the Jack Wills product. Being friends with, and socially close to, the proliferation of Jack Wills' aesthetic on campuses, the ranking of goods is infused with considerations of what buying Jack Wills says about one in the context of campus culture. Consideration of the product rests upon one's own place in a purported 'cult' of the brand-name

I just didn't want people to look at me and think, well I suppose the way I judge people if they're wearing Jack Wills, they're spending a lot of money on that they could have spent on better things, and they just have too much money to know what to do with and I don't want people to think that of me. But then again, I know people who, before they'd come to uni would never have worn Jack Wills, and then came to Exeter university, and you know what it's like, it's just so full of "Rahs", and she just bought into it and she doesn't have enough money as it is, so she just spent her overdraft on Jack Wills clothes, like what's the point of that?! ...she wants people to see that it has the logo, and she'd buy things on ebay just because it's Jack Wills. But why? Yeah, I think she just liked the kind of, like in her seminar's she was with these girls who were quite 'rah' and if she was wearing clothes like, they'd be like, 'oh ok', she'd fit in, but you they we're very nice girls, but, I don't know. I do look at it [Jack Wills] and think it's nice and if it was cheaper I would buy it, but, ... like I don't know why its "fabulously British", but then 'fabulous' is quite a flamboyant word so it does suggest it's the higher end of Britishness, or the fact that there's a pheasant which is what people shoot, I think that is a big thing. (Laura. October 2010)

In the course of this description is the lingering, background conception of a social hierarchy that price encompasses: that is, the gentry group are a constant reference to purchase.<sup>41</sup> Noting the spending on the logo and brand-name, we notice this is infused with those who personify this – the ‘rah’ girls in seminars, the coveting of the items so as to incorporate oneself into a lifestyle context. Notice that this is a consideration from the point of monetary purchase that, mediating acquisition of the goods, necessarily means that fame precedes the association or understanding of the material goods so any consideration of purchase is predicated upon how one may negotiate their place in the shadow of a name for a lifestyle in how far it affects their financial solvency: as Laura acknowledges, the aesthetic appeal of the goods is warranted, but only in so far their acquisition is manifest in ‘cheapness’. At the end of Laura’s consideration is reference to her being ‘out of the loop’ and her encompassed social station that infects her purchases: What is fabulous here but the higher social station? What is a pheasant but a stand in for the gentry group? It’s a “big thing” because the fame precedes ones’ consideration of purchase, a volitional action that one produces from their bank-balances point of view rather than membership to a nexus of community relations that is predicated on an engagement in a lifestyle.

### *Alexander*

From Laura, who seeks to aesthetically incorporate her social identity with an ambient appreciation of Jack Wills in so far as money is moderated and the “look” not applied, with Alexander in Durham his social trajectory suggests another case of negotiation but in relation to ‘moving up’. Laura and Alexander, while not friends are closely connected: I met Alexander through Laura’s friend from university who grow up with Alexander at party in mid-2011.

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<sup>41</sup> “the *price* of an object is the proof of the attachment of others to the goods that one is holding” (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006:201)

Alexander and Laura have similar backgrounds, yet Alexander is ‘moving up’ the social ladder as his technical middle class upbringing is being displaced as he enters into the higher professions and embarks on a life-course which is oriented toward the established middle class, possibly even the elite. Alexander has embarked upon a career in Law. Alexander studied in Durham and Oxford for his degrees and with his new career in the higher profession the road to gentrification is evidently present, manifest through the Jack Wills brand-name. Coming from a comprehensive school background and growing up in Cornwall, the name and world that Jack Wills articulates was alien to Alexander for much of his life. It was entering Durham that changed that and the brand was active in his self-transformation. Alexander is an aspirant that is moving closer to the Seasonaires social network:

One of my friends I did my [Law] course with last year, and he was at Durham, at my college, his sister works for Jack Wills and her whole family just, like, love it. Now that she works there they go to family and friends days and the mum and the dad must be so exposed to it now; she’s just gone to America and launched it over there. She was part of the whole Martha’s Vineyard thing. And I think she’s still out there, she went earlier this year to go and launch it. Like it’s a massive thing for them. She’s in the promo video for it. And I remember talking to them about it once asking how she was and what she was doing and they took us for lunch ... like his dad was a public school boy, finance and stuff, and they’re in that area. Whereas my parents wouldn’t have a clue. My mum might, only because my sister might have said something. (Alexander. August 2011)

Moving into social circles that are linked to the network of Seasonairres and their intimacy to the brand-name required Alexander to adopt the obligatory aspects of the Jack Wills “look” and with it have to re-negotiate his self-identity to himself and others, itself articulated around the ideology of the brand-name:

Alexander: They call themselves university outfitters. This made me laugh. I was like, what do you mean university outfitters? You mean exclusive enough to be at some universities but not others?

Daniel: It stems from public school; you have to go to an outfitter to get your uniform.

Alexander: Sweet. Wow. That is a class divide.

Daniel: How much have you experienced that?

Alexander: Well, when I first was there, but I would say over time I’ve got more rah, only because I went to a comp school and then went to a good university, it’s not inevitable because a lot of my friends haven’t given in to it, but I don’t know. I don’t know why I have. I just feel I’ve been exposed to it. You see everyone wearing it and think, oh, I quite like that, oh, ok I’ll go in and now they have an outlet site and because Bicester has a good outlet store, you can get it a lot cheaper, more affordable. I wouldn’t often buy a full priced thing from them. I don’t feel like I have to. I mean some people would. People do spend hundreds there, and that is there whole outfit, but I never felt the need for that. I quite like having a gilet. I love it. ... I don’t know, I think it’s that thing, like, ‘oh you’ve got a Jack Wills

gilet'. Even though no one would say it.<sup>42</sup> (Alexander. August 2011)

At first ignorant of the public-school ideology of uniforms and the gentry-class ideal of uniformity, Alexander goes onto negotiate his position in a social hierarchy of non-public school elite by increasing exposure to the social circle and its network again through monetary consideration: use of outlet stores and not paying full price are quantitative negotiations to a sociological status shift. Purchase of the Jack Wills gilet, as an iconic item that is charged with affective assumptions of class/life-style distinction that go unmentioned but linger in people's imaginations, is proof of exposure of the appropriate attire to group membership steeped in sentiments of prior exclusion.<sup>43</sup> Acquisition based purely upon monetary concerns is being pushed aside here. Instead of being an avaricious acquisition, as suggested by Laura of certain persons who simply covet the look, the acquisition through purchase by Alexander's considerations pushes away acquisition for logo's sake, "never felt the need for that" he states while recognising honourable items within new social circles and emphasised with an identity transformation to 'more 'rah'' which could also be described as 'more Jack Wills'. This, of course, brings with it a need to re-negotiate social networks on the basis of the commodities:

See when I first got it [the Jack Wills gilet] I did feel a bit uncomfortable at times, wearing around my close friends, they weren't interested in or saying like I can't believe you've got it, I was like, if I came to Oxford to visit my girlfriend, I wouldn't

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<sup>42</sup> See also, Archer et. al. (2007) on Nike and working class educational perceptions; and also Reay et. al. (2009) on working class students in elite universities. That said, Alexander is middle class but not privately educated and experiencing gentrification.

<sup>43</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu's conception of cultural goodwill: "...a particular frequent choice of the most unconditional testimonies of cultural docility (the choice of 'well bred' friends, a taste for 'educational' or 'instructive' entertainments), often combined with a sense of unworthiness ...commensurate with the respect that is accorded" (1984:321)



hesitate, they were, like Brookes is very rah, and very exposed to it, ... after that I didn't care, didn't give a shit, at home my friends, you see, some of my friends at home, they might not know about it, at all, because we're not exposed to it, I wouldn't feel uncomfortable wearing that there, although they might go 'oh my god you've gone really preppy', like 'oh because you've been to Durham'. There's that link between wearing it and like, who you're hanging around with and stuff. So yeah.  
(Alexander. August 2011)

Renegotiating social station within the context of friendship networks and the change from middle to upper-class, in broad terms, through the context of the brand-name is couched in the term "exposed to it": one is not exposed merely to 'a brand' but a network of sociality that is manifest in the brand-name as a distinctive social type, a gentry figure. Speaking further on that infamous gilet as a metonym of the life-style network, Alexander stated:

I got a Gilet in my second year, I didn't buy it, I got bought it for Christmas, or my birthday or something, from my girlfriend and, because I was after one for a while, and then when my housemates found out they were 'I can't believe you've got a Jack Wills gilet!, blah blah blah' and I was like 'I didn't buy it' and they were all 'but still! blah blah blah', so yeah in that sense they wouldn't really interested in it at all, in that side of things, and they we're like me as well, went to comprehensive, well most of them, but they just didn't see the need. ... I wasn't like 'oh I'm not going to buy anything', I just kind well, joined the Durham scene, like, I mean, you're kind of exposed to it –

you're not forced to – but there is kind of that, 'oh you've got a Jack Wills gilet, ooh', you know, and people do follow suit sometimes (Alexander. August 2011)

The defences put up and the fact that it was a gift at first act as a distancing mechanism to the fame that is manifest in the brand-name and, with this, a reference to social networks – the disinterested attitude is exposure to life-style and social circles. Put in the phrase “joined the Durham scene”, Alexander finds the locale coloured by the gentry group and social recognition predicated upon this commodity's definitive place as standing for the elite social networks. Entering into the higher professions, the dilemmas over the status of a brand-name commodity becomes a metonym to one's metaphorical sociological movement up the social ladder from aspirant/be-seen to Seasonairre/friend in Alexander's' case.

I want to recognise that within sociological shifts the common arbiter of dislocation – from Laura wishing to stay 'out of the loop' and Alexander finding himself increasingly inside it – is money and monetary terms. To the non-core consumer, the logic of the commodity is the primary means of establishing a negotiation with the fame of the brand. For Boltanski & Thévenot (2006:133-140), this is to be expected. When two competing claims to worth or justification for economic valuables is articulated, it works via a state they dub *deficiency* in the minds of the social actors:

An initial challenge to a situation comes when disharmonies between the worth's of the persons and objects involved are made manifest and translated into terms of *deficiency*. The scene of contention is then developed around the exposure of a lack of worth and thus of some injustice or lack of justness in an array. (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006:134 original emphasis)

Purchase of the Jack Wills branded commodities is being understood not purely as a transaction but rather how this transaction has to stand in relation to the wider ensemble of social relations, one that find itself dramatized in the Varsity polo but may be any number of gentrified spaces, notably the campus, that the commodity has its 'proper place' within. Negotiating acquisition through money, what I wish to elaborate further from the above material is that a sense of social justice being played out as to what is appropriate for the brand-name and one's relationship to it in purely monetary terms. Understood here as a commodity that is overshadowed by the fame it has accrued through the social processes we have outlined from ch.4 onwards, the articulation of deficiency places the monetary relation into rationalisations of worth juxtaposed around the fame of the brand-name.

As intimated in the above material, acquisition is justified in monetary terms in so far as it seems to fits ones relation to the fame polity the brand exists within. Speaking of his signing up to the online outlet store – a website that allows for persons to have first pick of end of season sales – Alexander stated,

I'm on the outlet site, I must have signed up ages ago, and then two months ago I got an email saying, you're now allowed on our site and I was like, it was a waiting list? It was ridiculous! Like for an online outlet site?! I had completely forgotten; I joined and haven't bought anything since being a member or having access. I probably should. It is heavily discounted, like there is some really good stuff on there. (Alexander. August 2011)

Articulating a sense of injustice ('Waiting list? Ridiculous!'), Alexander then suggests that the heavily discounted items are, in fact, an enticement to further purchase. Understanding

the brand-name in purely monetary terms, the ‘discount’ is in fact acting as a form of prestidigitation. Like the children’s magician who pulls a rabbit out of a (seemingly) empty top-hat, the outlet store is effective by way of misdirection. Instead of understanding the store’s clothes as over-priced items that index (to them) an aspirational lifestyle, they’re now understood “less than previously advertised.” Despite a purported exclusionary ‘waiting list’ procedure, as if one attempting acceptance in a private members club and may be black-balled, monetary acquisition is a way to turn all value judgements into considerations of ‘how much’ (Simmel, 1971). Enticing purchase through misdirection of ‘sales items’, the economics of worth for a commodity acquisition works upon the qualities of money, that is, that one can engage in rational accounting procedures – e.g. ‘Was £150, down to £100’ – that negate potential concerns of justification: ‘well I didn’t pay full price’ one could say.

*Kate*

For Kate – a cousin of one of Jack Wills’s retail staff – the aspirational aspect of Jack Wills was evident for her cousins’ family and her own, but came with an understanding that brand-name was not fully integrated to their own life.

Daniel: “Do you go to any of their events?”

Kate: “No. I don’t see the point. It’s a shop, it’s not my life. I suppose my cousin she would; she like, buys into it.”

Daniel: “So they’re part of that crowd?”

Kate: “Yeah, I’d say so. Or I’d say they like to think they are; probably aren’t.” (Kate, January, 2011)

Kate, who is good friends with Laura but does not know Alexander, is Russel Group university educated but comprehensively schooled. She is aspirational; and it is the family

ties which have influenced this. Growing up in Devon she is close with the Surrey based branch of her family. With cousins in public school and aunt and uncle well placed in the property ladder, she is from the aspirational branch of the family, with the Surrey end being much more the aspired. As such, we can read this local-family nexus into the grander scheme of the British class system. By not being fully accepted or a members of the elite series of contacts and networks with Jack Wills, any understanding of the product comes with this lingering association of 'not included' and underwritten by a sense of 'buying in' when placed within a sociological elaboration of the product:

"I first bought it off my cousins, and my brother, my brother used to buy it, because he's three years older than me, she was quite into Jack Wills, Crewe, all those sort of makes. So I think he kind of pushed me towards it, in fact the first time I was at Jack Wills I was with my brother. ...

And certain things of Jack Wills I don't buy because I think everyone has them, so I buy stuff I really like and it's not too obvious, but I don't like buying stuff sometimes if I think everyone is buying it and going to see you're a Jack Wills ...buyer...

I guess it's just the group of friends I'm in. My home friends, who aren't at uni here, and we've all grown up just being from Devon, we've grown up with it, I'd be more likely to buy it and wear it around them, than my uni friends who are more judgemental to the average Jack Wills...buyer, because it

is kind of associated with first year, rah-ish, university students.” (Kate, January, 2011)

What Kate’s account here demonstrates is how deficiency is being elaborated around the central figure of the Jack Wills brand-name and, in order to justify her purchase, negative reference has to be made to the core-customer prior to any further explanation. The figure of ‘the rah’ is evoked specifically in reference to purchases and limits her choices, while in addition the social circles of her friends she grew up with, over and above the university campus, finds itself in contradiction to her campus friends who whose “judgemental” attitude puts into contention her justifications for purchase. Because any assumption made about the wearer refers back to the articulation persons atop the social hierarchy, being encompassed as such requires alternative methods of justification, i.e. one may only choose limited items; one may only wear them on certain occasions and one has to put up with negative assessment of one’s character in some cases.

The problem is, fundamentally, that social aspiration is being metonymically distilled into a series products whose fame precedes its purchase and is the central manifestation of its market worth. Being outside this framework of attributed fame, the aspirant is being incorporated as subservient and going above one’s true station. Aesthetically Jack Wills’s evocation of ‘gentry Britain’ which is centralised in its corporate program gives rise to a commercial culture whereby the class hierarchy becomes dramatize and articulated through the talk of justified purchases (cf. Shankar, 2006). This is exemplified by our final interviewee, James.

*James*

James is from Leeds but doesn’t sound like he’s from Yorkshire. His vowels are a little softer than his more patrician counterparts in the south of England but to look at him

and hear him speak from his bold up-right frame, he'd mistaken more for Hugh Grant's son than as a Yorkshire lad. From an established middle class family, privately educated but not a prominent school, he is less the patrician more the performer of a middle class sensibility with a liberal outlook. For James, the aesthetic is what is appealing not the substance:

James: I really liked the style, that's quite broad, but it seemed to me quite fitting. I was going university, needed a new cool wardrobe. I didn't go to a boarding school, but, it just nice feeling like that, like the university, it makes you feel like a student, it's really good, it was really good and that's what I liked about it.

Daniel: So the people who wear it and the ways it's marketed, that's appealing about the brand to you?

James: The people who wear it are a deterrent more than anything. Because you tend to be tarnished with the similar brush, which isn't a very good one... yeah, definitely not the nicest people in the world. (James, November 2010)

The contradiction articulated from James' first answer to his second effectively highlights the problem of aspiration: one may find the life-style aesthetically appealing but nominally excluded and, as a result, seen as personally deficient to inclusion. This has wider implications in terms of social class exemplified through a brand-name. What recent work on the sociology class has taken as central is "moral worth" and class inequalities being based around affective states – envy (Hughes, 2007) or shame (Sayer, 2005) or other emotional responses (Reay, 2005) – over and above a causal economic model of income/life-chances so as to illustrate class in the effect of self-identity formation. Consumer items are crucial to

underlying emotional aspects of social stratification (Rafferty, 2011; Archer et. al., 2007) because they are manifest in public and articulate these affected states through their exemplification of enduring cultural connotations of class difference outside of a workplace model of stratification (Savage, 2000; Bottero, 2004). What the interview material presents us with is an affective state that isn't envy, shame, guilt or jealousy but rather *ambivalence*; for every affirmation there is a negation that follows as responses are charged with positive and negative descriptions.

### 8.3.2 Ambivalence and romantic melancholia

I want to suggest that ambivalence is manifest in the commercial acquisition as a psychological state precisely because of the fundamental way that modern consumerism is pursued, namely as Colin Campbell (1987) demonstrated: it rests upon a 'wilful suspension of disbelief' that people engage in as one imaginatively day-dreams and fantasies about what a product will give or allow one to think of themselves. Invariably, disappointment follows. This disappointment is manifest here in aspiration as a *romantic melancholia*. Taking Campbell's argument, Graeber (2011b:495-496) has suggested that the disappointment one feels after purchase is because the way desires are being played out is psychologically close to a form of depression, namely melancholia as a psychological state. Melancholia is where one tries to embrace, get hold of or take possession of something this is incorporeal, imaginary, i.e. not an object. This is found here. With their place in the social hierarchy, aspirants acquire a surrogate state of melancholia (i.e. *not* applicable as anything like 'clinical depression' or sadness, as such). The interviews reveal an aesthetically appealing commodity to aspects of one's longed for, desired states of mind: Laura puts pictures on her wall; Alexander covets the gilet as part of the 'Durham scene'; James desires the wardrobe to fit a university experience; Kate looks toward countryside upbringing. The Jack Wills products are enjoyed 'at a distance' for the aspirant persons because they are sociologically outside of



the social networks of which the product is properly dramatized within and used in. Yet with aspirant ideals, statements to the contrary arise as these persons turn against their affirmation of desired objects – they're 'over-priced'; they're using an outlet store as an exclusive members club; one becomes personified as a social character ("rah") that is not their own nor their desired state. What is being longed for is not the commodity at all but rather the romanticised world of gentry England which, as such, is not attainable in a material object but rather revealed in the sentiments found in the person day dreaming. In melancholic states, the ego longs for an object that has been lost but, unable to face up to this loss, turns this lost, idealised object into what they desire most and wish to attain it through narcissistic identification with it; only to find it always out of reach (see Freud, 2004:81-83). In our case, the longed-for idealised gentry England world which one glimpses in products in stores or in the handbooks or through the videos put upon the websites, is not able to be enjoyed by the aspirant because this is not their social world or network. Rather it is enjoyed and longed for while never having been fully recognised as a member of the group. What they long for is something they've never possessed and that possession is not an object but rather membership to the social group. As such, identification with the aesthetic of Jack Wills' product and lifestyle is narcissistic in the loose sense of enjoyed and longed for due to personal reasons of social aspiration but unattainable in object form because group membership is not founded in an object as such. Therefore this situation gives rises to the scripted responses above.

What allows this ambivalence to play out isn't reducible to psychology however. The politics of aspiration rest upon the sociological role money is playing in the case of commodity purchase. First and foremost, these interview cases illustrate a microcosm series of concerns with the Jack Wills brand as acquired through monetary purchase. What ambivalence hangs on is demonstrated in how social aspiration has the underlying concern

with spending money: Laura has to distance herself from perceived aspiration with purchase with retorts of “How much? How much!”; Alexander has to deal with an aspired lifestyle and life-course under gentrification and suggest purchase was made for him; Kate has to deal with differing judgments of aspirations between friend groups as to who buys Jack Wills; and James has to admit aspiration as part of the purchases only to acknowledge the darker, unattractive aspects of persons associated with the figure encapsulated by the brand-name. What these interviews demonstrate is that lack contacts and mediating acquisition through monetary purchase leads to a situation that articulates itself through ambivalence. As a final consideration, we may ask: Why is commerce such a fertile economy of worth to achieve this ambivalent dialectic of aspiration and ascription? Why is money so powerful and problematic to giving rise to potential aspiration and its problems of justification? From the proceeding interviews we see aspiration pointed to but only to be found deficient to success in money terms. To conclude, I will argue that within the ontology of money, as a social technology, is the possible answer to these questions.

#### 8.4 Commerce and the Tragedy of Aspiration

Social aspiration is *tragic* in a technical sense. Tragic consciousness arises when two competing claims to just causes arise and, with equal weight and reason, their reconciliation is open to question. In the proceeding interview extracts we see only ambiguity as what is being articulated are two stations of perspective that remain unresolved.<sup>44</sup> Informants give reasons *for* justifying purchases only to give *counter* justifications, e.g. James – ‘I liked the clothes; I don’t like the people’; or Alexander – ‘I like the association of the gilet; but it

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<sup>44</sup> This view of tragedy can be found in Hegel’s *Aesthetics* (Volume 2: trans. T. M. Knox, 1975), known as the theory of the tragic collision. I choose this outlook for, as contemporary philosopher of the tragic, Simon Critchley, has argued, it could be viewed as the “staging of dialectical thinking ... It’s a medium that is able to articulate the ambiguities that constitute our life...” (Critchely, ‘The Tragic and its Limits’ in *The White Review*: <http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-simon-critchley-the-tragic-and-its-limits-2/>) See Critchley & Webster (2013) for a fuller view of tragedy and unresolved social conflicts in their perceptive analysis of Shakespeare’s Hamlet as resting upon a *sociological* problem of kingship in early modern Europe, rather than the reductive psycho-analytic framework outlined by Freud.

wasn't purchases by myself".<sup>45</sup> On the one hand money is opening the person up to legitimate acquisition to a commodity through 'the right amount'; on the other, this purchase is opening them up to social criticisms as to their ulterior motives in what is a perfectly justified purchase. I.e. the critique of this social process is: 'It may be bought and paid for, but that *isn't* the whole story'. As we noticed, the commercial acquisition of Jack Wills' attire is a borrowing of associations from the world of gentry and, in their articulation come into contraction as to the social identity of the purchaser as lesser or 'out of the loop' in their position in the social hierarchy.

That this manifests itself in commercial products is not inevitable but a commodity is especially apt for articulating this sociological contradiction of aspiration versus ascribed status because, as an object, it is defined as between *consummation and its refusal* (Simmel, 1971:180-181). The social script one brings to commodities is 'they are open to purchase, but it's up to you whether you do so'. This, when articulated around the series of social assumptions that the fame of the commodity has, tends to give rise to a notion that one may engage in a world or not engage in it. Money seems to suggest that social station may be 'bought and paid for'. Positioned in the guise of commerce, social aspiration manifest in Jack Wills' branded goods makes perfect sense. In the commercial development of a society that is ornamentally defined as high class but open to parvenus, this gentry dialectic is perfectly distilled in the commercial logic of *buying and having*, of *money* as embodying the ideation of consummation and refusal.

With money's central role in this process, it gives special meaning to the notion of 'price'.<sup>46</sup> Price in its *quantitative character*, as in 'how many coins must I part with', is

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<sup>45</sup> Classicists call this type of expression 'form-parallelism' as see it as the verbal basis for the contradictions articulated in ancient tragedy: see Seaford (2003)

<sup>46</sup> The reader may wish to look into anthropological accounts of how money is intimately bound to transcendent goals that exist beyond its functionality (Gell, 1982; 1986; Hart, 1989; 2005; 2009; Bloch & Parry, 1989; Zelizer, 1989; Holbraad, 2005; C. Smith, 2007; Wherry, 2008)

encompassed by socio-moral message when goods are articulated in this branded mythology (cf. Wherry, 2008:367-368). The price we pay for Jack Wills's goods is articulated within this historical consciousness. Buying clothes is (in a chain of cognition) seen *as if* one is buying entry to a *social circle, an elite group whose valuables they co-opt to effect recognition of social station*. With the non-elite aspirants, they are *economically near to but socially far from* the aspired. From the view of the hierarchy outlined and our interviewees concerns, the notion of near-far articulated through the Jack Wills branded goods is always one where people are too near-to *and* too far-from the price and its moral script. Acquiring the valuables of British genteel society through money produces this ambiguous, over-determined "too near, too far" because money is being used *two ways*

(1) It is transferring goods from one person to another

(2) It is transferring goods from *one social station to another*

Money displaces products from one to another. *That is the full exhaustive limit of its effectiveness as 'the value of money' is never anything more than how one note or coin is able to be equivalent to however many commodities* (see Gell, 1981:489) Yet in the course of the interviews, transactions are subject to claims that are not present in transactions themselves and linger on in the considerations. The ritual use of Jack Wills in lifestyle enclaves and maintained by patronage and gifts is present as background noise. Furthermore this lingers behind purchases themselves. With money, one is able to bring into consideration not just buying or not-buying but also transcendent values, that is, *values beyond the concern of giving (M) and getting (C)*:

...this is due to the fact that money relieves us to an ever-increasing extent of direct concern with things, while at the same time making it infinitely easier for us to dominate them and select from them what we require (Simmel, 1990:509)

While money is about giving to receive a commodity, what Simmel is suggesting is that money doesn't facilitate acquisition of goods it actually puts in place is the means to facilitate exchanges (esp. Simmel, 1990:226) and, with this, is open to the romantic daydreams (see Varul, n.d.): we think of their place with 'our' dreams for an idealised way of life. As much as money buys only, it necessarily *is* linked to a free-play cognitive association as people engage in a type of purchase that comes with possibilities and claims that are not logically found in monetary transactions e.g. "With £600 I could buy up the look *and* the lifestyle event and then I will be happy!" or the criticism that is brought to purchasers: "you may think your genteel, but you're just buying into something you're not!" This is the *magic* of money and its *tragedy*: it brings into play states of mind not present in the nature of money as a technology to effect movement of goods from one person to another. Money's *magic* is the *collective desires of the social group distilled into a technological device*.<sup>47</sup> This association is wrapped up into dreams unable to ever be consummated for they, having taken shape their, only ever exist in the imagination of the reveller, not their purse. As such, we can conclude with the words of Marcel Mauss on the magic of *mana*, the emotive energy of the social group, as equally applicable to the social psychology of money. Tragically, "*the whole society suffers from the false images of its own dreams.*" (Mauss, 2001:155 added emphasis)

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<sup>47</sup> Money and magic have gone hand in hand in anthropological theory notably in the works of Mauss (1990; 1994) and Godelier (1977; 1999). For money as a technology see Simmel (1990) Hart (2009) and Martin (2013). Also, as an aside, classicist Richard Seaford has put forward the argument that the monetisation of the Greek polis and the origin of tragedy go hand in hand. Money is linked to tragic consciousness; of two competing ideals of justice, e.g. noble birth and buying social station (Seaford, esp. 1998 & 2004; see also, Seaford, 2013).

Part Five: Concluding remarks

## *Chapter Nine*

### Class, ambivalence and privilege in British society

#### 9. Introduction

In this final chapter I want to elaborate upon this study's dominant theme and leitmotiv, the ambivalence of class, privilege and aspiration in British society. This has been the core theme of people's reactions to the Jack Wills brand and the nexus of social relations it weaves, from the patronage it employs to Oxbridge elites down to the aspirant consumer's documented in the previous chapter. This ambivalence articulated around a consumer durable may be productively read as speaking to the ambivalence in the British class system. And, crucially, ambivalence is inherent within the dialectic of the gentry.

As stated at the beginning of chapter two, gentry is an 'idealised position' in British society and the epistemological strategy that I employed, following Weber, was to come to a definition of gentry at the end of the study. At the end of that chapter I stated the brand-name ('Jack Wills') has an oxymoronic quality to it as it refers to *both* the aspirant and the aspired – just as gentry is oxymoronically defined as ignoble nobility (Nicolson, 2011). Gentry has been used in this thesis as a way to speak about, refer to and culturally name a feature of British consciousness of class (cf. Cannadine, 2000), a type of very British 'poshness' that is achievable but always out of reach.

'Gentry's' ambivalent structural position in the British class system, its standing between two stations, is also however its dynamic aspect. As Strathern (1992), Skeggs (1997) and Tyler (2012) have argued in various different guises, – kinship, gender and ethnicity, respectively – the British class system has a thread of ambivalence inherent within it. Furthermore, ambivalence in relation to class often takes the form of dis-identification with a

‘class identity’ (Savage et. al. 2001; Savage, et. al. 2010; cf. Skeggs, 1997:74ff). People, when asked about social class and self-identity, often refer to ‘what they are not, rather than what they are’:

That means that the term class is used to talk about others more than about self, more as an account of ‘the world out there’ than something which is directly relevant to the personal experience of any individual in the group. (Savage et. al. 2010:125-126)

In the case of Jack Wills and its classed aspects, people use the ‘brand-name’ to refer to said people ‘out there’ rather than themselves. To illustrate this, let me begin this concluding chapter with an ethnographic example of how ambivalence is articulated around the Jack Wills *brand* as a commercial entity. Out of this ambivalence I will reflect on how the brand exploits ideas of class and identity in British society writ large.

### 9.1. Ambivalence in (and out of) the store: an ethnographic example

I have only entered a Jack Wills store twice. And it was the same store, in Oxford, with two different informants, Andrew from the Oxford University Polo Club and Alexander from Durham who took his Law conversion course at Oxford Brookes. Owing to the evidence presented in thesis and the theme of ambivalence, it might be interesting to place my fieldnotes on these two store experiences next to each other and read them, as with all ethnographic writing (Marcus & Clifford, 1980), dialogically.

For those at Oxford, Jack Wills is what they state to be ‘too Oxford’ and they attribute these negative estimations to Oxford Brookes students, and for students from Oxford Brookes, such as Alexander, also state distances from the brand image Jack Wills proffers.

*Oxford, 16/4/2012 (Andrew)*



*Upon a visit to the Jack Wills store, to which we visited to check how many polo tickets had sold there (part of the promotional activity which Jack Wills asked the Polo club to engage in), the conversations turned to an amused mocking of the interior – indicating to the taxidermy pheasants on the wall, it was pointed out to me that the store itself is a homage to a heritage England which is remarkably ‘tourist’, another aspect of Oxford’s tourist façade to match its historic environment; joining in I looked up at the old books kept on the shelves artfully placed to look like family heirlooms: “Dickens”, I said, “what a surprise.”*

*It seemed this artful pretence of Englishness also became something we artfully joked with in order to place ourselves as disinterested; amid the tourists of Oxford and the young salesgirls, (who were admiring the presence of my informant – tall, well-spoken, handsome and wearing his Oxford University Polo Club hoody – in the store), the play at disinterest seemed to also play a status game: we didn’t want to be seen to be enjoying this, and indeed we couldn’t; this was the domain of ‘the teenage girl’ who, decked out in full Jack Wills attire, lived ‘the look’ not ‘the life’. Part of promotional activity, then, brings with it minute aspects of internal hierarchies within those “branded” with the Jack Wills brush: these quotidian aspects, of sponsored sportsman and the girls who hang his match-shirt onto the hangers for admiring tourists and “fans” alike, consist of minute plays of interest and disinterest as one becomes a personage in a wider play of commercialism intertwined with everyday life.*

\*

*Oxford, 8/8/2011 (Alexander)*

*Entering Jack Wills I notice how small this particular outlet is. The clothes are largely oriented toward the female orientated clientele at the front, and we have to fight our way through groups of girls crowded round skirts, all already decked out in Jack Wills. Alexander directs me toward a blue blazer, an item which he wants for going out, a look he has picked up during nights out in London while on his law course. One break-away teenage girl approached us; turns out she was a retail assistant. She looked hesitant as she asked, "Can I help you?" to which Alexander turned away and I was left to say, "No we're fine thank you." Unfortunately they didn't have Alexander's size and we left empty handed. But Alexander took me on a tour of Oxford, telling me about the area. A sunny day, he walked me around the colleges, pointing out elements of heritage.*

In these two excerpts, two things are clear in both accounts: the store is not identified with and the axis of dis-identification comes from the teenage girls which preside over it. These are not classed notions but rather, as literally experienced, they are (dis)identifications with a commercial entity which positions people, objects and images *in class symbols* and people as recipients of these objects-symbols. As such, people come to read themselves off against them: the Oxbridge Varsity Polo player dis-identifies with the façade of heritage as he enquires about the ticket sales for the heritage event he is a key participant of. The aspirant consumer turns away from the retail assistant who offers help with clothes, she being the wearer and he being the buyer. Furthermore the elements of heritage are mocked in store, but outside are cherished: with Alexander the heritage of Oxford is something he wanted to give me a tour of, and for Andrew the heritage of the polo is something he is actively involved with and, himself, a personification of. While these two informants are not of the same background, as noted in the previous chapters Andrew is upper-middle class and Alexander is middle class, they do share the same dis-identification with the store, even the brand itself.

This dis-identification, however, must be read in relation to the nexus of persons, objects and symbols within the store itself: the Oxford store becomes a figuration of the brand's ensemble of relations; it is out of these relations that ambivalence is generated.

As a commercial enterprise, the store is seen as the domain of the 'teenage girl' who is the avid consumer positively identifying with the brand itself. If this thesis were a study of the Jack Wills brand, i.e. the business, the only commercially viable entity would be the hordes of teenage girls who positively identify with the clothing and the zeal to which they acquire the latest items. And the gendered aspect of this argument would stretch back to a line of misogyny in the analysis of consumer capitalism; the feminine zeal for tawdry consumer products being a key driver of wealth creation when men started to inquire about the nature of economic growth in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, whose claim that private vices lead to public benefits, ironically set this misogyny against itself when he asserted that the moralising tone of those who decried so-called 'female vanity' ignored the economic gains to which it led to (Hundert, 2003:213-214). Is this why these two men dis-identify with the brand in their own way? Male pride and the longing for individuality when in their early twenties? Ultimately, no.

It has not been my intention in this thesis to argue that positive identification with the brand is the source of its power (be it economically, socially or culturally). Rather the intention has been to investigate the sociality and identity of the social group which *the Jack Wills brand identifies* as worthy of representing the claims it makes for its line of clothing, its image and symbolic qualities, and the enduring classed notions of British society it evokes in its imaginary. As these two ethnographic encounters demonstrate, this imaginary is anything but positively identified with. Instead the entire argument has been concerned with articulating the ambivalence through the economic modalities of the brand: it concerns the continuum of *who are ascribed the image (patronage)*, exemplified by Andrew, *those who*

*aspire to the image (commerce)*, exemplified by Alexander, and the brand symbolised as a commercial vehicle by the ‘teenage girls’. Out of these modalities arise moral overtones (cf. Graeber, 2011), understandings and points of view on, purportedly, the ‘purpose’ of the Jack Wills brand. But also, out of this assumption of Jack Wills’ purpose, wider understandings of the British class system are articulated. Knotted together through this commercial amalgam of economic relations are a series of moral and normative assumptions about social class in Britain.<sup>48</sup>

## 9.2. Ambivalence: a relational approach to class and privilege

Hence the reason for such ambivalence does not arise from the association with the ‘female consumer’ in and of itself. Ambivalence arises in the way the modalities of the brand’s economic actions produce certain categories of persons in relation to one entity, the Jack Wills brand name. As a single entity or an ‘abstract singularity, as Lash & Lury (2007) call brands, which produces multiple meanings we can state, in line with class analysis of British society more generally, that

Ambivalence is ... not the product of confusion or ignorance, but actively and creatively produced. It is also a means of elaborating a distinctive social identity which recognizes the pervasiveness of inequality. (Savage et. al., 2010:137)

Andrew and Alexander are both actively performing their ambivalence with regard to their recognition as occupying a certain position in a wider classificatory set and the politics of stratification inherent within this. Yet here dis-identification arises not from the politics of classificatory *inequality* – i.e. not wanting to be the elite person looking down, or the aspirant

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<sup>48</sup> As Graeber says, economic modalities cannot be seen as clear-cut or essentialised: “These principles”, i.e. the moralities entailed in economic relations, “get tangled up in each other and it’s thus often difficult to tell which predominates in a given situation – one reason that it’s ridiculous to pretend we could ever reduce human behaviour, economic or otherwise, to a mathematical formula of any sort.” (2011:115)

wishing to ‘better themselves’ – but rather the fact and fear that Andrew and Alexander, as well as the participants in this study more generally, *may be seen as stereotypes*. Disidentification in the face of awareness of inequality and class classificatory politics is a feature of survey and interview based methodology (as found in Savage et. al. (2001; 2010) (cf. Payne & Grew, 2005)). Here the disidentification is founded in situated and relational (co-)experience of the Jack Wills brand. Because the Jack Wills’ marketing programme consists of a series of posh clichés – polo, skiing, etc. – and its symbols, objects and “image” are equally cliché – battered Dickens books, taxidermy pheasants, etc. – to be identified as a personification of said symbols is to be limited to a position of stereotypical British poshness; (and remember the ethnographic examples I gave come from Oxford, a veritable seat of British Arcadian fantasy).

In this regard, the stereotyping of persons that the brand positions people within becomes the axis upon which class politics and ambivalence takes root, situationally and relationally. In her analysis of working-class White women in the North West of England, Skeggs (1997) argues her informant’s claims to legitimacy, worth and value stems from the discourse of ‘respectability’. In the media discourse identified by Skeggs concerning her working class women, anxieties over ‘respectability’ comes from the representations of working class women being sexually deviant, morally corrupt and socially pathological. Skeggs notes “they [her white, working class female informants] have been positioned by the historical discursive construct of class and this has an effect on how they understand themselves and others.” (1997:5, brackets added) Identified stereotypically, persons become limited in the eyes of other people as ‘other people’s’ understanding of them does not extend beyond the mere appearances of classed categories and classifications. Stereotypes become dis-identified or distanced from in the cases here not, however, due people’s desire to *not* confirm to the lifestyle such stereotypes evoke but rather *because* participants are guilty of

seeing themselves *as* stereotypes because they figure in the lived experience of classed Britain distilled in the Jack Wills brand image (cf. Holquist, 2002:170f). They *re*-cognise that their presentation of themselves is *re*-presented at the level of a brand-image, an image which is 'public' and thus *de*-personalised, even *globalised*, in its account of British identity

That being the case, the globalised brand-image has a figuration to it and is rooted in the relational situation individuals find themselves within. Ambivalence toward class identity and the privilege evoked by Jack Wills can be placed within this relational field, as explored it in the previous chapters. For Hillcoat-Nallétamby & Phillips (2011:206), "sociological ambivalence becomes a manifestation of contradictions which stem from social actors' transactional engagement with others." As we have seen it in the cases of Andrew and Alexander, as well as the chapters on patronage, gifts and commerce, the transactional processes that persons engage in with regard to the Jack Wills brand produces an ambivalence of its own which articulates wider, sociological, ambivalences concerning class and privilege in Britain.

The privilege of patronage is countered by the patronisation that it employs; such as the Oxbridge dis-identification with the Jack Wills brand (found in quotidian examples such as Andrew's above) yet nevertheless still recipients of its patrimony. The privilege of gifts has with it the antagonisms of those *not* gifted; such as in the case of the working-class Northern students and their use of Jack Wills as a way to vilify the, presumably, southern upper-middle class 'toffs'. And with commerce the purchase of products is read by others and the purchasers themselves as a coming to terms with aspiration and 'being someone that one is not'. All the modalities of distribution the brand has employed come with a moral and cultural contradiction. The contradiction is that the Jack Wills brand makes generalised, abstract and stereotyped claims about British society, privilege and those living this lifestyle. And yet the brand employs multiple, competing modalities of access, distribution and

identification with the same brand-name and therefore British society. People are caught in a nexus of relations – in this thesis presented through the economic modalities of patronage, gifts and commerce – which contradict each other and yet seek to *present* and *re-present* the same entity. This entity is the Jack Wills brand but, as I have been suggesting throughout, the corporation is a lens to (situationally and, therefore, partially in my documentation of it) view and drawn conclusions on British society and the young, professional elite ('gentry').

Jack Wills is a named entity in a discursive formation of class, privilege and negotiated acts of distinction. In this way, the function it has is to keep this discourse intact and allow people to imagine their class trajectory and position in almost poetic terms, i.e. through a brand-narrative. To illustrate what I mean, consider the analysis of F. Scott Fitzgerald's story of social aspiration and self-transformation, *The Great Gatsby* (1993), by literary theorist Michael Holquist (substitute 'Jay Gatsby' for 'Jack Wills'):

"Jay Gatsby," ...is less a name than it is a story. In so far as it is a name for a story, "Jay Gatsby" is structurally similar to mythic names, in so far as Hercules cannot be thought of without his labors or Odysseus without his voyages. "Jay Gatsby," as a name that is a story, dramatizes the central role of stereotyping in formation of the individual subject on the one hand, and on the other, the role of stereotyping as a dynamic in social and historical formation. Gatsby is the story of his career; in it we can see how history uses stereotypes, the formulaic categories of what might be called a poetics of the social, to form the subject as a link in the discursive chain. (Holquist, 2002:172)

I am claiming that Jack Wills is less a name and more a story that encapsulates the poetics of class, namely the dialectic of aspiration and ascription, inclusion and exclusion, and the narratives surrounding this. What this thesis has offered is a sociological account of the discursive creation and organisation of the realities of this mythology. Furthermore I have tried to show how this discursive formation around ‘Jack Wills’ has relevance to the study of social class as experienced through contemporary economic processes. This is not completely out of sync with British sociology. One case in point has been Sam Friedman’s (2014) call to study the process of self-transformation and experiential dimension to upward or downward mobility through poetic forms, giving the example of British comedian Russell Kane and his 2011 show *Smokescreens and Castles*. The case of Jack Wills is illustrative of an enduring history of mythologised privilege.

### 9.3. Gentry as a floating signifier

But if the ambivalence is so thoroughly entrenched in all of the accounts I have presented here, the question becomes: is ‘gentry’ (as an adjective and verb of classed identity and practice) or ‘the gentry’ (as a noun designating a social group) even viable? How much weight can a term which is used as a noun, adjective and verb have when those it pertains to dis-identify with it? I have not set out to claim that the Jack Wills corporation is an essentialist expression of ‘gentry’. Yet in the face of such ambivalence, for good reason this may be the interpretation the reader has. Where does this ambivalence leave the study of ‘gentry’? The answer pertains to how gentry figures in social class analysis more generally in British sociology, i.e. how it links into normative and culturally salient ideas about legitimacy, worth and inequality (social or economic).

In other areas of class analysis, ambivalence over respondents class identity can be read and grounded in various, relational ways: either social mobility producing



ambivalence(s) as mediated by mobility narratives (from working to middle class) (e.g. Savage et. al. 2010), or ambivalence over pride and dis-identification with stigmatised, spoiled identities such as the research undertaken on the white, working classes (e.g. Skeggs, 1997; also, Sayer, 2005), or furthermore, the ambivalence of class identity in the face of racial, colonial discourse (e.g. Tyler, 2012). While diverse, all these studies show a clear unified relation to ambivalence's 'pivot point': the dominant class and its values, taste judgements, practices and modes of thought, structure experience and set the terms for all claims to legitimacy, worth and acceptance – i.e. a line of thought that goes back to Pierre Bourdieu's landmark *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1986). This dominant class is (usually but not always) the middle class.

In this study, the dominant class has shifted not up the social ladder to a so-called 'upper class' (aristocracy and royalty) but rather to a higher level of abstraction. And this changes ambivalences' pivot-point as it's relational axis moves beyond the 'middle classes' as the seat of legitimacy and worth to somewhere else; this 'somewhere else' is where I wish to place 'gentry'. Gentry, as outlined and defined in chapter two, is not to be seen in terms of a 'who's-who' (i.e. a clearly definable group which can be located in surveys and electoral directories); it is a term best defined by its very ambiguity or ambivalence: open to aspiration but localised around pockets of social closure. As argued in chapter two, the abstraction of 'gentry' to designate this dialectic is open to institutionalisation in various social fields where capitals may be productively employed (cf. Bourdieu, 1986; 1977) but never fully localised in said fields in perpetuity. Such 'gentry' fields would be the literal field of the manor, estate or family seat; some still existence today; others being the public school, and others being the spaces traversed in this thesis (Rock, Salcombe, the polo sites, areas of the skiing, etc.). The institutionalised process of gentry, as the mixture of aspiration and ascription pertaining to notions national identity, race, class and status (and their intersectionality), belies the terms

lingering ambiguity and ambivalent usage. As such, I want to suggest that ‘gentry’ is a floating signifier of British society.

In British society, and sociology, the floating signifier most commonly identified is race, as found in Stuart Hall’s seminal ‘Race; the floating signifier’. Hall’s remarks on race as a floating signifier refers to how ‘race’ is a concept “which organizes the great classificatory systems of difference, which operate in human society.” (Hall, 1996:6) While not completely in line with what has been presented here, ‘gentry’ as a floating signifier has a similar quality. There is a clear notion of classificatory difference at work between those of which the term ‘gentry’ is applied and those defined against it. But more than issuing a classificatory scheme of difference between persons in British society, what I want to push forward more for ‘gentry’ as a floating signifier is the Lévi-Straussian (1966) take on the term (where the term originates under the name ‘zero-value’). For Lévi-Strauss, zero-values or floating signifiers are institutions which

have no intrinsic property other than that of establishing the necessary preconditions for the existence of the social system to which they belong; their presence – in itself devoid of significance – enables the social system to exist as a whole.  
(1963:159)

And for Lévi-Struass, floating signifiers present a problem for analysis: “this is the problem posed by the existence of institutions having no function other than that of giving meaning to the society in which they are found.” (1963:159)

Gentry has no other function than giving meaning to (a certain vision of) British society. This is something that I have intimated throughout: the symbols, the lifestyle and the enduring institutions associated with the Jack Wills brand are all articulated around notions of

‘gentry’. But the term is not positively charged with significance to those within the study, nor would anyone in the study adopt it as their title. And yet the term remains. Unlike ‘Fabulously British’, which has an element of appeal to those either shopping or being gifted the Jack Wills attire, ‘Outfitters for the Gentry’ seems to have no explicitly positive or negative function for those involved. All is ambivalent. As such, as Lévi-Strauss (1963:159) states with floating signifiers, “it’s significance remains ambiguous.” The ambiguity, or ambivalence, of gentry is found in the social relations that pertain to the study – the ascription of certain persons to the brand-name and lifestyle, and the aspiration of certain persons to the lifestyle expressed through the brand-name. When it comes to ‘solving’ the problem of floating signifier, Lévi-Strauss suggests their analysis leads the analyst to confront the fact that they, floating signifiers, express strong ideological statements about the society they pertain to. That is, ideology in the sense of the proper relations between persons, to the proper way of life and the value and worth of individuals.

Taken in this direction, gentry as a floating signifier is not so much a term used to discuss class but rather how elite identities are articulated around an ideology or utopian notion. It is ‘gentry’ as a utopian feature of British society that I want to conclude with. Having established the inherent ambivalences surrounding the Jack Wills brand, the assumption that gentry is of significance as a measure of inequality (class analysis as stratification, e.g. Savage et. al., 2013) or as an analysis of inequalities and lived experience (class as unequal identities, e.g. Skeggs, 1997) is a moot point. Gentry is more understandable once its ambivalence becomes read at the level ideology; it is at the level of ideology that ‘gentry’s’ intersection with all aspects of class becomes intertwined into a totalised vision of a ‘perfect society’.

#### 9.4 *Et in Arcadia Ego*: Jack Will's ideology and utopia

To push for an interpretation of the Jack Wills brand evoking ambivalences from the perspective of ideology over an analysis of social class, and its cognates (gender, race/ethnicity and sexuality), is to make apparent the fact that the Jack Wills brand's corporate programme (and the evidence presented in this thesis) suggests something incongruous to the social reality in which it takes place. Such incongruity of a gentrified vision in the domain of commercial activity is precisely where this ideological interpretation gets its force. Utopian thinking is defined by such incongruity of desired states of affairs and the social realities in existence (Mannheim, 1936:173). What do the ideologies espoused by Jack Wills tell us about the utopian ideals of 'gentry'?

The gentry utopia and its ideology can be summed up in its Latin motto, *Et in Arcadia ego*. This is the closet the elite British imagination has come to a dream of utopia. Arcadianism, the name given to a vision for the perfect Britain, may seem arcane and few people today outside of this elite world would know or have an idea of what it means or the Latin motto that underlines it. Adam Nicolson, however, gives a very neat description that brings it right up to date for both the British present and its sociological significance: Arcadia is "a lost world, an ideal and unapproachable realm of bliss and beauty" and for those places wherein it became ideologically elaborated – notably aristocratic estates – the social world was "profoundly hierarchical and... distrusted the idea of the market and would have loathed any suggestion, if anyone had made it, that market forces would somehow create social goods. ...Anti-change, anti-state, anti-market, anti-equality and anti-individual: the first English Arcadia, in other words, set its face against the forces of modernity." (Nicolson, 2008:1-2)

It would be slightly too far-fetched to suggest that the Jack Wills corporation has a *conscious* or *explicit* ideology of Arcadia at its branded core. Of course no information to this

effect has been supplied in this thesis. Yet the ideology of Jack Wills *is* distinctly conservative. It longs for a lost world that is intimately seen as having ‘come once, gone now’ as it draws upon arcane and archaic symbols in the face of modernity; its use of heraldic insignia and patronage of ancient institutions and the central categorical use of the term ‘gentry’. What *has* been demonstrated, also, is ethnographic material that does in fact illustrate leitmotifs of an Arcadian project, notably the central argument supplied: *the Jack Wills brand is a marketed commodity that actively distains the market as the arbiter of distribution*. Instead the brand is in favour of a concern for elite stature found in the role of patronage and gifts that *strengthen the social bonds of persons around a central ideal of gentry life-style*. For the virtues of Arcadia are precisely that of communal activity toward common goods but unequally distributed (Nicolson, 2008:3) and the central principles of Jack Wills allocation of branded goods is profoundly anti-modern. Over and above the financial solvency of the brand, the sociological consequences put in place in this corporate activity gives rise to sentiments that are distinctly centred on an ideal of British identity through this political economy of gifts and patronage as the suppression of commerce. Jack Wills’ ideals are, therefore, paradoxical, i.e. inherently ambivalent.

The contradiction at the heart of this thesis has been how the Jack Wills brand requires persons whose social identity is mutually compatible to the branded slogans of *Fabulously British* and *Outfitters to the Gentry* while at the same time it requires non-compatible persons to actively identify with these persons as worthy of aspired station and the possibility of achieving this. The brand’s practice is both *real* and *ideal* as it puts in place real, living and existing persons in practices and orchestrates its activities around these persons – holidays, skiing, polo etc. – while also turning these persons into ideals, as figures of a branded imaginary world that people are asked to wilful identify with and engage in. Despite being a dream of a perfect world, the problem with Arcadian fantasies is that they

take place ‘in the world’ (not in a far off foreign land; rather the ‘here and now’). Arcadia is the world *now* as it was *then*. Real people inhabit Arcadia and others, as a rule, are excluded:

The essence of Arcadia is that it belongs to the winners. It is beyond all conflict but it is only beyond all conflict because all others have been defeated. ...This is its central paradox: its peace is achieved through a form of violence and imposition. It relies, at its heart, upon acts of exclusion. (Nicolson, 2008:17)

We have documented Jack Wills’s central paradox as demonstrating acts of violence and imposition. The patronage they supply has led to and is open to physical violence between people; and we’ve seen this is manifest in the symbols of gentry and the Jack Wills name as standing for a certain form of Arcadian project of exclusion. Yet, Arcadia remains as much an ideal as a put in place ideology manifest in real social acts.

The reason for this strange duality between real and ideal is because as an ideal, Arcadianism, as a conservative ideology, is always ‘too late’. It arises as a dream once the forces of progress, change and liberal future-orientated optimism for a ‘new world, a new way of doing things’ and arranging social relations arises: “whereas all progressive groups regard the idea as coming before the deed” for the conservatives “historical reality becomes visible only subsequently, when the world has already assumed a fixed inner form” (Mannheim, 1936:207-208). Jack Wills’ ideology of patrimony and mutual gifting between the core-personages of the brand-name set against the market forces of commodity purchase is precisely such an ideology of deeds (actions and acts) coming before the idea. Starting from Salcombe and the initial deed of a network of public-school and university elites of the professional middle classes, the gentry ideal of ascription was born and gave rise to aspiration once it turned these goods of the social group into the province of purchase from those not connected to this social network. The explicitly elitist ideology of ‘free to those who can

afford it, very expensive to those who can't' is Arcadian (sec. 7.1); it is set against the monetary 'disembedding mechanism' as Giddens would call it (1990:21). Because of this, Jack Wills could be said to share with Arcadian projects a sense of returning to the past: "Arcadia can, in that way, be seen as portraying a world in transition, one which both enshrines the old world, the custom of the manor, and dramatizes the forces of modernity which are threatening it." (Nicolson, 2008:154) Indeed, Jack Wills seeks a place to dwell against the forces of modernity as it comprises to implement an economics of archaic, embedded relations of distribution, ironically founded in modernity's central feature of 'the market' (cf. Slater, 1997:33ff). While monopolising lifestyle enclaves of British society and seasonal pursuits, the place is only really significant if the *people* are present as an elaboration of a *network*.

And this network is knotted together by the corporate narrative, ideology and purposes of the brand to 'outfit a few, let the majority 'buy in''. The aesthetic the Jack Wills brand employs and their brand strategy is inherently contradictory; and the result is ambivalence for all those involved. What of such ambivalence as a consequence of the ideological project the brand has set itself? We may conclude with the lines of Frederic Jameson in his *Political Unconscious* (1983), (heavily influenced by Lévi-Strauss' analysis of floating signifiers), that "the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions." (1983:64) We can all dwell in Arcadia with Jack Wills, yet some are more welcome than others: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." (Fitzgerald, 1993:193)

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## Appendix 1: Interviews & Ethnographic Methodology

Table 1 : List of informants & interviewees (all pseudonyms)

Name	Field Site	University	Relation to research (interviewee or informant)	Class Identity (lose description)
Andrew	Oxford / Guards Polo Club	Oxford	Interviewee & Informant	Upper-middle class
Ed	Oxford / Guards Polo Club	Oxford	Informant	Upper-middle class
Charlie	Druids Lodge Polo	Cambridge	Informant	Upper-middle class
Tom	Druids Lodge Polo	Cambridge	Informant	Upper-middle class
Nick	Druids Lodge Polo	Cambridge	Informant	Upper-middle class
Katie	Druids Lodge Polo	Cambridge	Informant	Upper-middle class
Phoebe	Druids Lodge Polo	Cambridge	Informant	Upper-middle class
Kate	Druids Lodge Polo	Cambridge	Informant & Interviewee	Upper-middle class
Harry	Druids Lodge Polo	Exeter	Informant	Upper-middle class
Alfie	Druids Lodge Polo	Exeter	Informant	Upper-middle class
Jane	Druids Lodge Polo	Exeter	Informant	Upper-middle class
Hugo	Druids Lodge Polo	n/a	Informant	Upper class
Camilla	Rock	Exeter	Interviewee & Informant	Upper-middle class
James	Rock	Exeter	Interviewee & Informant	Upper-middle class
William	Rock	Nottingham	Interviewee & Informant	Upper-middle class
Indie	Rock	n/a	Interviewee & Informant	Middle-class
Robo	Rock/ Austria / Guards	n/a	Interviewee & Informant	Middle-class
Ben	Nantucket / London	Oxford	Interviewee	Upper-middle class
Alexander	Durham / Oxford	Durham / Oxford Brookes	Interviewee	Middle-class
Laura	Exeter	Exeter	Interviewee	Middle-class
Jack	Exeter	Exeter	Interviewee	Middle-class
James	Exeter	Exeter	Interviewee	Middle-class
Katie	Exeter	Exeter	Interviewee	Middle-class
Fred	Exeter	Exeter	Interviewee	Middle-class
Jo	Exeter	Exeter	Interviewee	Middle-class
William	Austria	University of the West of England	Interviewee & Informant	Upper-middle class
James	Austria	University of the West of England	Informant	Upper-middle class
Michael	Cambridge	Cambridge	Interviewee	Middle-class
Francis	Exeter	Exeter	Informant	Upper-middle class
Lizzie	Exeter	Exeter	Interviewee	Middle class

### Description of fieldwork activities

The fieldwork for this thesis was undertaken around three primary sites whose activities came to form the ethnography and its interpretation. Based around the Jack Wills Season and around the corporate interest in the participants, the field sites include : Druid Lodge's polo club (Wiltshire), which is the frequent destination of Cambridge Polo Society; Rock (Cornwall), which is the most exclusive and elite holidaying destination of Jack Wills' Season; the Austrian alps where Jack Wills played host the après ski events each day for the Main Event Week, and finally the Guards Polo Club (Berkshire) which bring together the polo societies, Seasonairres and also the aspirant consumers. Alongside this ethnographic endeavour, I conducted interviews both 'in the field' and outside it (Table 1).