

**MEDIA CALL**

**Overview: Press are invited to the preview of a new exhibition *Counter Culture: 175 Years of Shopping at Boots* at Lakeside Arts Djanogly Gallery, for a guided walk through the exhibits with curators from the University of Nottingham and from Boots Archive**

**Date: Thursday 2 May 2024, from 11:30am**

**Location: Djanogly Gallery, Lakeside Arts, University Park Campus,  
Nottingham,  
NG7 2RD**

30 April 2024

***Counter Culture: 175 Years of Shopping at Boots* – new exhibition reveals history of Nottingham's iconic brand**

'Health for a Shilling,' Cold Cream and Epsom Salts, No7 and home brew kits. The iconic products and adverts, from bygone days to the modern era, invoke memories for all of us of Boots.

To mark the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the very first Boots – a name which is inherently linked to the social and economic history of Nottingham – a brand new exhibition, exploring how shopping has changed over nearly two centuries, will open at Lakeside Arts' Djanogly Gallery on 3 May and will run until 21 July 2024, and is free to visit.

Part design show, part social history, *Counter Culture* explores the transformation of Boots from the neighbourhood Victorian chemist to the superstores of the 1980s and beyond. It will also show the shifting dynamics of high-street healthcare and retail experiences.

Boots is now a household name, but it rose from humble beginnings. In 1849, John Boot opened a small herbalist store on Nottingham's Goose Gate, offering an affordable alternative to traditional medicines. John valued a 'healthcare for all' approach, and by the time his son Jesse took sole control of the business in 1877 he had positioned Boots as the store which offered traditional medicines at greatly reduced prices.

The exhibition explores how shopping has changed through the lens of the local Boots store, showing the evolution in response to changing customer needs, cultural aspirations and patterns of everyday life. It considers the technologies, display techniques, approaches to advertising and architectural designs that have shaped modern shopping.

Richard Hornsey, Associate Professor of Modern British History in the Department of History, said: "For this exhibition we wanted to celebrate the history of Boots in a different way, by focussing on the Boots shopper. This is a celebration of ordinary experience and the factors that have shaped it over time."

Visitors can expect to see pharmaceutical and apothecary items such as 19<sup>th</sup> century carboys – decorative glass storage bottles which were used by pharmacists to signal their trade to  
Lakeside Arts, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD



passers-by; and specie jars, containing rhubarb, cascara and Bengal quince, which like carboys, were used to adorn prestigious chemist shops.

Also on display is a 19<sup>th</sup> century pharmacist's workbench which shows how the pharmacist would work before mass production, making up individual medicines according to each customer's needs. Great care was taken to finish and package up the medicines, and labels stored in drawers were used to tell customers about the contents and dosage.

The exhibition also traces the evolution of advertisements, with highlights including a 1917 print from the famous artist Mabel Lucie Attwell. It was hugely popular and led to a keen marketing campaign for 'Regesan' a new own brand range from Boots. The characters were christened 'Reggie Sam' and 'Betty,' and Attwell produced several art prints showing the pair in different health-related scenarios. Also on display is the 'Mummy says....' advertisement from the 1940s which showed how children were often sent on errands to their local chemists to buy items. The message in this advert is about trust and suggests that Boots pharmacists would never mis-sell a product, even to a child.

Professor Anna Greenwood, from the Department of History, and who is Principal Investigator working on an Arts and Humanities Research Grant (AHRC) on the history of Boots, said: "We are so excited to examine the history of a company which is so close to the hearts of Nottingham residents and is such an integral part of the fabric of British shopping habits."

Visitors are invited to trace the historical shift from counter service to convenience, and discover the changing relationships between shopping and leisure, and the pharmacist's evolving role in providing healthcare to the community. In the final room of *Counter Culture*, the visitor is invited to join the conversation and share their own thoughts on the experience of shopping – past, present and future.

The exhibition, celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Boots, cements a long and close relationship between the well-loved company and the University of Nottingham. Jesse Boot has long been regarded as not only a pioneer in business, but also for his philanthropic and welfare initiatives. In 1921, he gifted the land on which the University Park campus is built. Fittingly, the Djanogly Gallery stands on the site of Highfields Lido, which Jesse also donated to the people of Nottingham along with Highfields Park.

Sophie Clapp, Company Archivist at Boots UK, said: "This is a wonderful way to celebrate our 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary within our local community. The exhibition places the Boots customer at the heart of our retail innovations and shows that our enduring position on the high street, is due to the ways in which we have responded to their changing needs."

A fascinating series of talks in connection to the exhibition will be running over the summer. In 1968, Boots launched a cosmetic range for teenage girls and their friends. [The Story of Boots' 17](#) – a talk by PhD Candidate Jack Moss in the Department of History held on Thursday 9 May at 1pm – will explore how 17's marketing campaigns captured the era's emphasis on self-expression, whilst simultaneously persuading girls to restrain their make-up use.

Few people know that in the 1930s and 1940s, Boots opened branches in New Zealand and Fiji. Postdoctoral Research Assistant Hilary Ingram from the Department of History, will tell the curious story of these Boots stores down under, their dedicated staff members, customers, and popular products, in [Dispensing Down Under](#), on Tuesday 4 June at 1pm.



Between the wars, multiple stores like Boots, Marks & Spencer and Woolworths became more integral in everyday life. A talk – [The Coming of the Chains](#) – by Richard Hornsey, Associate Professor of Modern British History, on Tuesday 16 July at 1pm, will explore how the chain store's scale and uniformity altered the shopping experience.

Details on all the bookable talks and gallery tours can be found [here](#).

*The exhibition [Counter Culture: 175 years of shopping at Boots](#) will run from Friday 3 May to Sunday 21 July at the Djanogly Gallery. Open Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 4pm; Sunday 12 noon to 4pm; and closed Mondays. Admission is free.*

—Ends—

More information is available from Richard Hornsey, Associate Professor of Modern British History in the Department of History, via [richard.hornsey@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:richard.hornsey@nottingham.ac.uk); Tim Rushby, Head of Audience Development and Marketing at Lakeside Arts, via [timothy.rushby@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:timothy.rushby@nottingham.ac.uk); or Liz Goodwin, Media Relations Manager for the Faculty of Arts, via [liz.goodwin@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:liz.goodwin@nottingham.ac.uk) or 0115 748 5133.

About the University of Nottingham

Ranked in the Top 100 globally and 17th in the UK by the [QS World University Rankings2024](#), the University of Nottingham is a founding member of Russell Group of research-intensive universities. Studying at the University of Nottingham is a life-changing experience, and we pride ourselves on unlocking the potential of our students. We have a pioneering spirit, expressed in the vision of our founder Sir Jesse Boot, which has seen us lead the way in establishing campuses in China and Malaysia – part of a globally connected network of education, research and industrial engagement.

The University is among the best universities in the UK for the strength of our research, positioned seventh for research power in the UK according to [REF 2021](#). The birthplace of discoveries such as MRI and ibuprofen, our [innovations](#) transform lives and tackle global problems such as sustainable food supplies, ending modern slavery, developing greener transport, and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

The University is a major employer and industry partner – locally and globally – and our graduates are the second most targeted by the UK's top employers, according to The Graduate Market in 2022 report by High Fliers Research. We lead the [Universities for Nottingham](#) initiative, in partnership with Nottingham Trent University, a pioneering collaboration between the city's two world-class institutions to improve levels of prosperity, opportunity, sustainability, health and wellbeing for residents in the city and region we are proud to call home.

About Lakeside Arts

Lakeside Arts is the University of Nottingham's public arts centre presenting a programme of visual arts and museum exhibitions, theatre, dance, children and families' productions, workshops as well



as a learning programme for everyone. Its venues include the Djanogly Gallery showing temporary exhibitions of contemporary and modern art; the University Museum which has a permanent collection of archaeology; the Djanogly Recital Hall which stages concerts by internationally renowned soloists and chamber ensembles; and the Djanogly Theatre presenting UK and international touring work as well as producing and co-producing new theatre and dance.

#### About Boots

Boots is the UK's leading health and beauty retailer with over 52,000 team members and around 2,000 stores, ranging from local community pharmacies to large destination health and beauty destinations.\*

Boots serves its customers and patients for life as the leading provider of healthcare on the high street and the UK's number one beauty destination. It offers an unrivalled depth and breadth of products, which incorporates its extensive own brand range and innovative portfolio of brands, including No7, the UK's No1 skincare brand, Soap & Glory, Liz Earle Beauty and Sleek MakeUP.

2024 marks the 175th anniversary of Boots. Founder John Boot opened a herbalist store in Nottingham in 1849 to offer an affordable alternative to traditional medicines. His son Jesse expanded the business to become a modern retailer and the biggest chemist in Britain and Jesse's wife Florence was integral to establishing Boots as a beauty destination. Throughout its history, Boots has listened, learned and innovated and continues to challenge itself to improve its products and services every day.

Boots is part of Walgreens Boots Alliance, which is a global leader in pharmacy-led, health and wellbeing retail. More company information is available on [boots-uk.com](https://www.boots-uk.com).

\*Figures accurate as of 29 February 2024.



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