

Keep Calm and Carry On: Visualising The People's War in Posters
(British Home Front Propaganda Posters of the Second World War)

In 2016, the tourist gift shops are full of mugs, aprons, bags with the slogan 'Keep Calm and Carry On', or one of its many subverted versions. The poster was part of a series designed in 1939 for the Second World War, but came to prominence in 2008/9 alongside the economic crisis. It was 'discovered' by Barter Books in 2001, and resulted in the BBC questioning if it was 'the greatest motivational poster ever'? Why do people from so many corners of the globe recognise it, love it, and purchase it? Do they understand where this poster fits within the wider story of propaganda posters produced by the British government, designed largely for the British civilian population in the Second World War? This book will give that wider picture.

Following introductory chapters in which propaganda theories, poster design from the 1890s through to 1939, and the production and distribution processes of the Ministry of Information (MOI) are addressed, the book will continue with four themed case studies, examining poster foci in depth, each structured around its context and planning, design, and reception. The themes will address the 'imagined community' that people believed they were fighting for, industrial propaganda campaigns, a focus upon 'the enemy within' (particularly 'Careless Talk Costs Lives'), and those compromising the war effort through their sexual behaviour, putting themselves at risk of venereal disease.

The book will conclude by bringing us back from the past to the present, seeking to understand why wartime propaganda posters have intruded upon the public consciousness at particular points in recent decades. In particular, it will focus upon how the commercialization of history, and the development of the Internet have contributed to the popularity of Keep Calm and Carry On. An appendix will contain biographies of poster artists from the Second World War, collated alphabetically.

Abstract by Dr Bex Lewis for planned publication sometime 2017-2019.