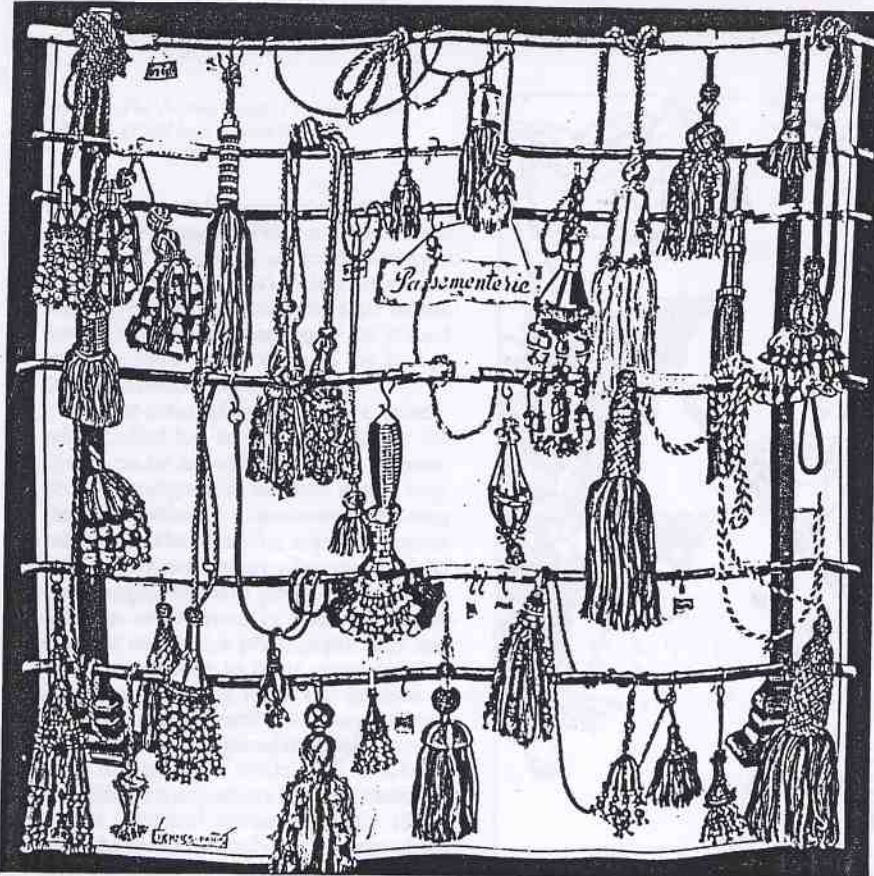


Plate 1. Couturier scarf, modern scarf by Hermes, 1980s. (Paul and Karen Rennie)



# SIREN FLAGS

Paul Rennie

The 20th century has seen the development of a hugely profitable fashion industry. Amongst its products, the square printed scarf is one of the most successful. Practically every woman in industrial societies will have a scarf in her wardrobe. The scarf, such as we know it, was *invented* as recently as 1937. Its remarkable and enduring success assures it a special place in fashion history. The combination of technological, economic, social and cultural factors that created the scarf, and have sustained its appeal, distinguish it as being a quintessentially 20th century artefact.

The industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries brought about a transformation in the production of textiles. By the beginning of the 20th century these improvements in manufacturing efficiency had wrought a profound shift in the market-place, and a ready-to-wear market began to emerge. It catered for the newly prosperous upper-working and middle-class populations. These were people, it should be remembered, who had until quite recently bought only a few garments each year. The consumer patterns of the 19th century could not have supported a textile industry as we know it.

This relatively conservative market meant that the evolution of fashion styles was, by today's standards, quite slow. Accordingly, there was a role for the textile and fashion designer as couturier, but not as someone associated with manufacturing for the ready-to-wear market. This, second, role would only begin to emerge during the 1930s.

The industrial manufacture of printed textiles depends upon two kinds of technology. The first is of looms, presses and machines and is thus a branch of engineering. The second is of dyes, inks and processes and is part of the chemical industry. Significant improvements were made in both these areas and this allowed the square printed headscarf to be manufactured in large numbers and in a wide variety of designs. In this context, the headscarf is very much of the 20th century and offers a rich and varied opportunity to collectors.

Textiles can have patterns printed on or woven in to them. Simple, repeated and geometric patterns are the staple of hand-loom weaving and its craft traditions. Printing patterns on textiles can be done in a variety of ways. The oldest established way is by hand block printing. A second, industrial, method is by roller printing.

The printing method most often used in the production of headscarves is that of the screen print. Screen printing is an evolution of the old stencil method of reproduction. Ink is forced through certain parts of a screen mesh onto the material. This process

Plate 2. Alphabet scarf, French, 1950s. (Paul and Karen Rennie)



Plate 3. *The Alpine scarf, French, 1950s* (detail). (Paul and Karen Rennie)

has distinct advantages for both manufacturer and designer. For the former, it is a cheap and sure way of reproducing a design; the technical difficulties are minimised by the standard size of the screen; new designs can easily be printed using the same machinery and the cost of the new screens is relatively low.

For the artist designer also the screen-print method has several advantages: the design can be drawn to scale and the artist need not compromise his style in any way; the full freedom of expression in drawing can be reproduced easily; screen processes have incorporated many advances made in the lithographic and photographic professions, and nowadays a screen can be made as easily as a photograph; inks and dyes are available to meet every requirement and man-made fibres can be used as an economical alternative to natural fibres. The graphic and expressive possibilities of scarf design have made it particularly appealing to many artists and illustrators.

The technical advances of the 1920s made the invention and development of the scarf possible. Its commercial success, both then and now, comes from it being a fashionable, stylish and affordable accessory. The varied range of designs produced allow a personal choice of design to be made.

Printed silk squares do exist from the

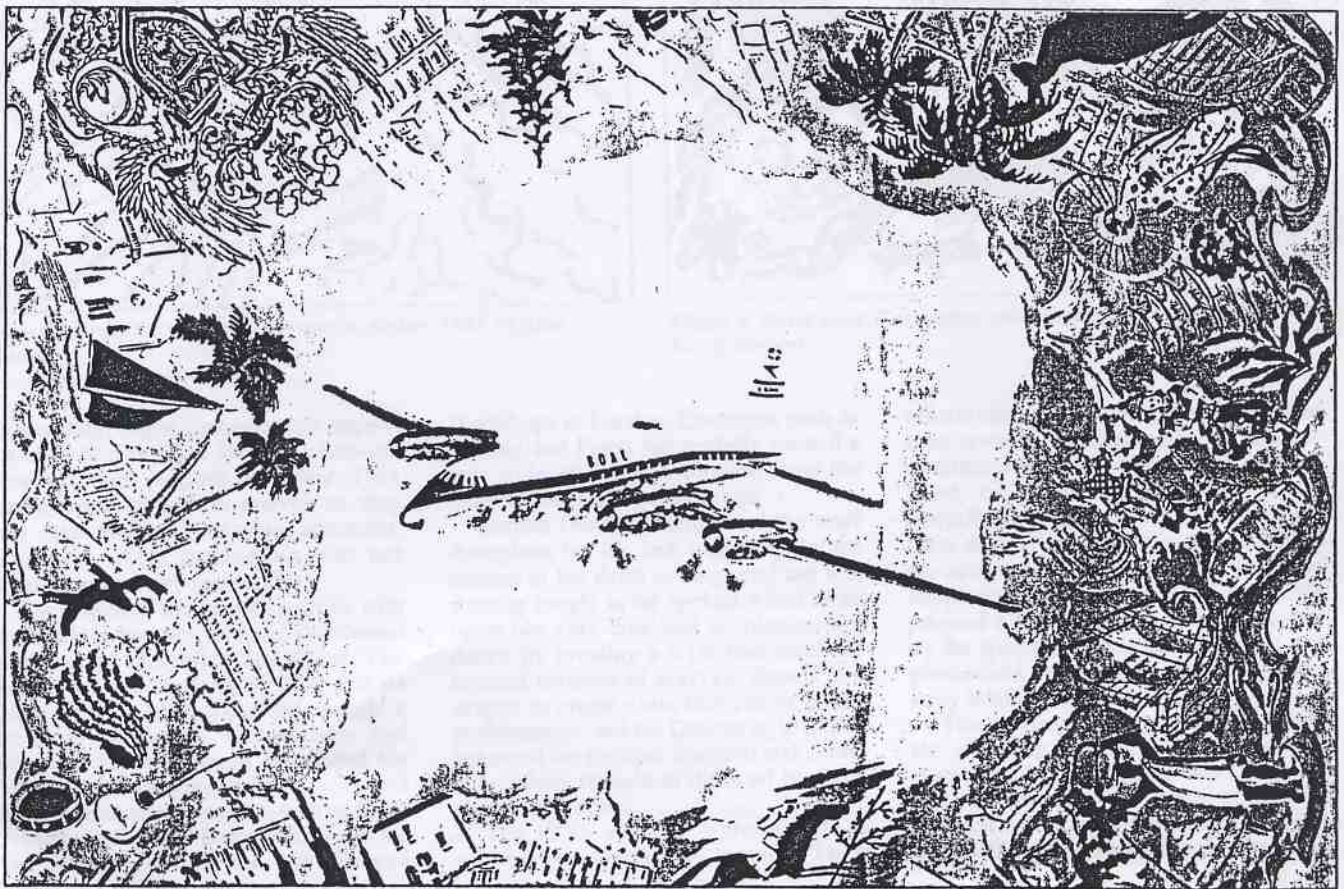
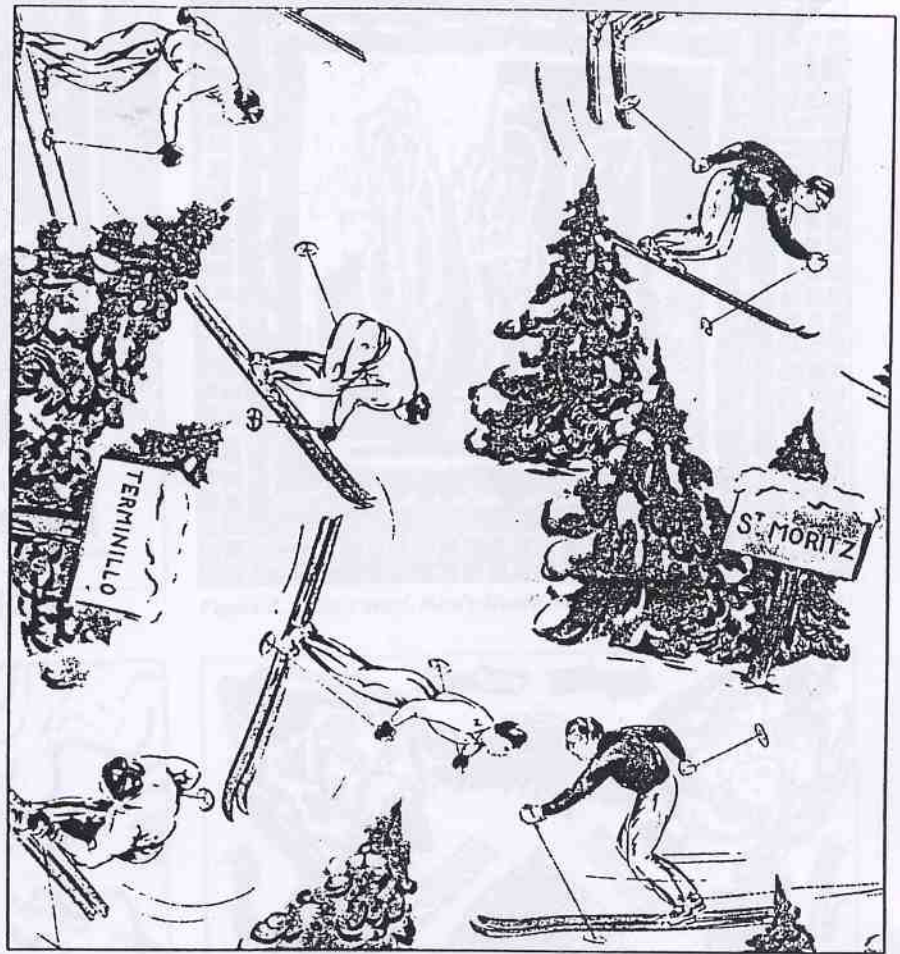


Plate 4: *Travel scarf, BOAC, 1950s* (detail). (Paul and Karen Rennie)

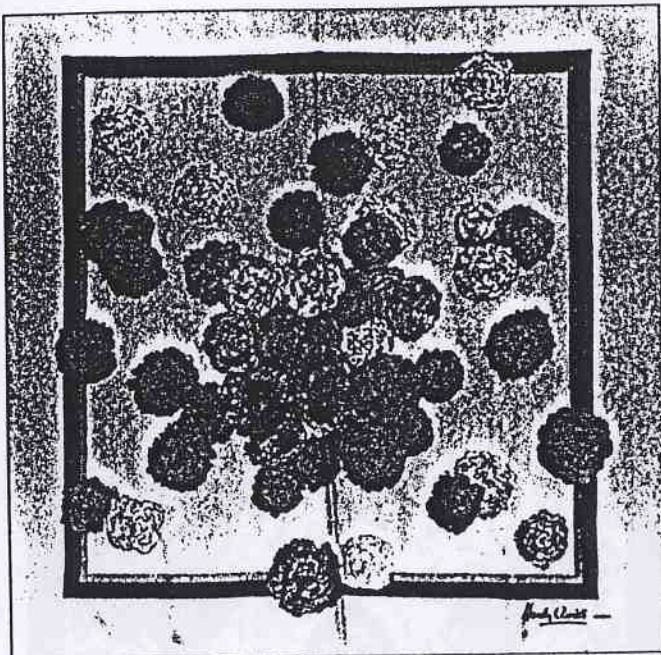


Figure 1. Couturier scarf, Hardy Amies, 1950s. (Paul and Karen Rennie)



Figure 2. Artist's scarf, Henry Moore for Ascher, 1947. (Ascher Estate)

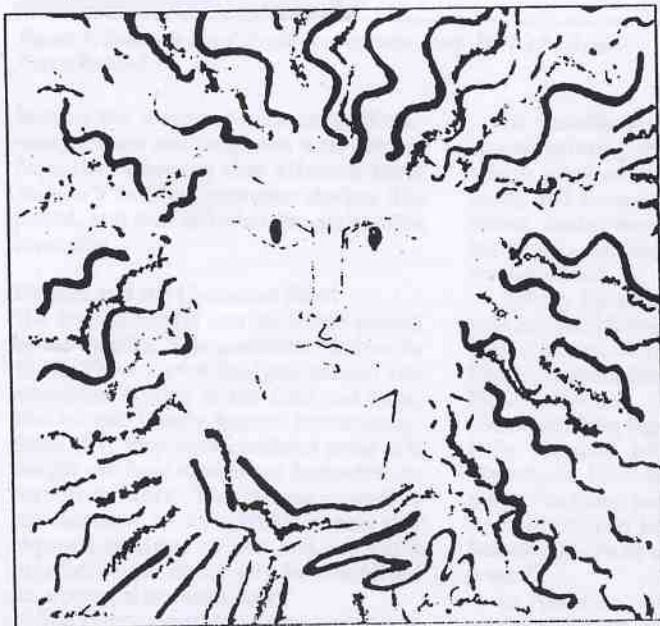


Figure 3. Artist's scarf, Jean Cocteau for Ascher, 1947. (Ascher Estate)

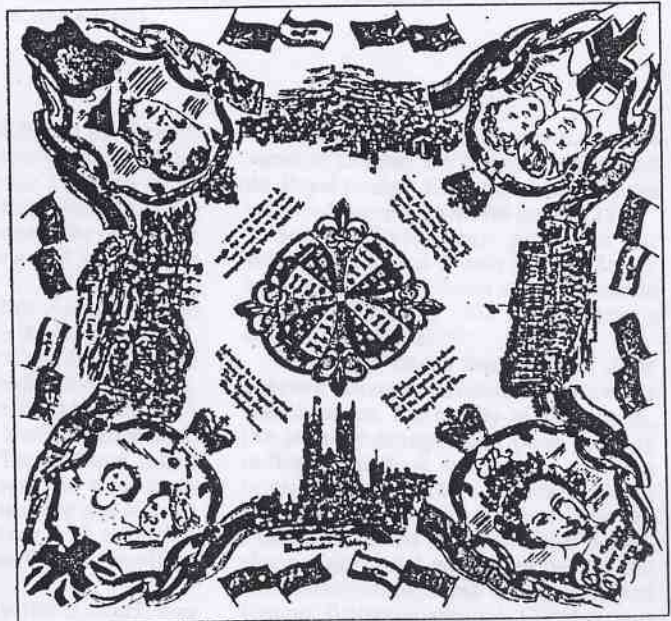


Figure 4. Royal scarf, Coronation commemorative, 1953. (Paul and Karen Rennie)

19th century. These commemorate important state occasions or military victories. However, their purpose is unclear. They may be handkerchiefs or scarves; or, they may exist simply as luxurious souvenirs. Whatever, their production was not widespread and very few survive.

The origins of the modern scarf lie with the Ballets Russes and the combined influence of Diaghilev and Bakst. The Ballets arrived in Paris in 1909 and its bright clashing colours perfectly caught a mood of exoticism, Orientalism and freedom. The scarves of Bakst and his colleagues were long painted silks and these were taken up by artists such as Sonia Delaunay and Raoul Dufy in Paris and the Bloomsbury artists of the Omega

Workshops in London. Couturiers such as Fortuny and Poiret successfully created a new style, drawing inspiration from the Orientalism of the visiting troupe.

Isadora Duncan championed the scarf throughout her life and, especially, by the manner of her death (a long scarf she was wearing caught in the spoked wheel of an open top car). She had revolutionised dance by creating a style that used the layered textures of scarves, shawls and drapes to create extra movement in her performances, and the Duncan style further enhanced the creative, liberated and daring associations brought to the scarf by those choosing to wear it.

The 1920s and '30s were periods of rapid emancipation for women. Their

efforts during the First World War had been rewarded with suffrage. The struggle continued on many fronts with a small band of reformers arguing for a liberalisation of dress codes. Just as the 'new woman' of the 1890s had eschewed the accepted styles in favour of reformed simplicity, the new woman of the 1930s adopted a free, liberated style accentuated by the sporting of trousers. This style was personified by the pilots and adventurers Amy Johnson and Amelia Earhart.

Trousers became firmly associated with the growing emancipation of women during the Second World War. The war-work of women in factories necessitated the wearing of overalls and the scarf, often made of a modern synthetic material,

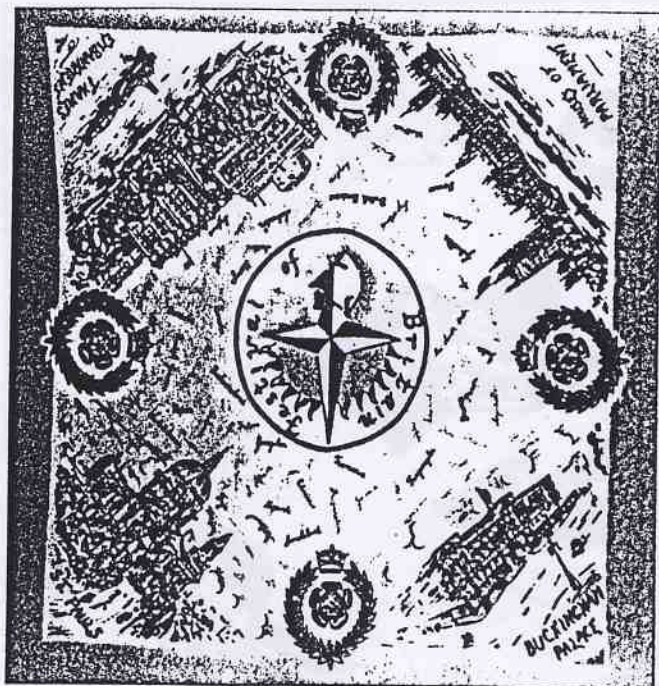


Figure 5. Souvenir scarf, Festival of Britain scarf, 1951. (Paul and Karen Rennie)

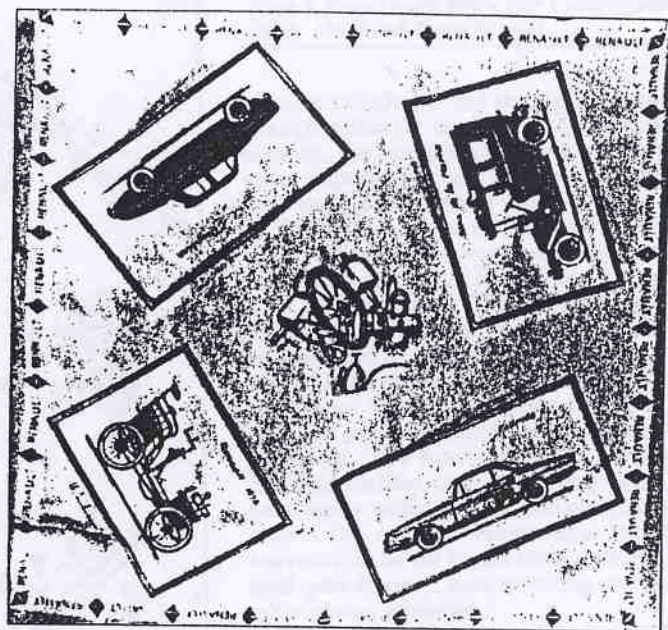


Figure 6. Motor scarf, publicity scarf for Renault, 1960s. (Paul and Karen Rennie)

became the preferred accessory. Work-wear, trousers and dungarees were exempt from the rationing that affected most women's fashion garments during this period, and this afforded the style extra popularity.

#### Hermes and the Couturier Scarf

The first successful scarves were printed by the Parisian harness-makers Hermes in 1937. Their *carré* designs reflect the equestrian origins of the firm and belts, buckles and tassels feature prominently. Since 1937 they have produced some 800 designs and have established themselves as market leaders. The Hermes scarf is representative of a particular market that requires quality, colour and a certain panache. It can reasonably be considered the archetypal couturier scarf.

The Hermes scarf has many imitators at all levels of the market. The luxury of its silk twill, the quality of its printing (with up to 40 screens) and the refinement of its designs make it unmistakable. Its status as a classic has attracted an international following.

#### The Artist's Scarf

The Hungarian born Zika Ascher and his wife Lida created a series of scarves designed by the great artists of the day. This second type of scarf – the artist's scarf – has a special appeal. It is beautiful, it is functional, and it is a signed limited edition print.

Ascher moved to London just before the outbreak of the Second World War and established a textile design studio. His priority was to apply the fine arts to everyday life. He started by supplying couture houses with finely printed silks and it was only in 1946 and 1947 that he started to produce artist's squares.

He was able to capitalise on advances in screen-printing technology at this time which allowed an artist's design to be easily and accurately transferred onto the screen. Ascher then oversaw the printing to the artist's specification and in a strictly limited edition.

Among the artists that Ascher worked with are the following – Alexander Calder, Jean Cocteau, Robert Colquhoun, André Derain, Barbara Hepworth, Ivon Hitchens, Henri Matisse, Henry Moore, Ben Nicholson, John Piper, Graham Sutherland, Felix Topolski, John Tunnard and Julian Trevelyan. Editions seem to have been printed on either twill or crêpe and to have been limited to between 175 and 600. Second editions of some designs have been printed.

In America, the artist's scarf was produced by the design studio of Brooke Cadwallader. He is credited with being the first 'name' designer in American scarves and of turning the scarf into an indispensable accessory.

Prices for these kind of scarves are relatively high: they are sold through art galleries and have become a part of the established print market.

#### The Illustrated Scarf

The vast majority of scarves, produced in abundance since the early 1950s, are illustrated scarves. These can conveniently be categorised by subject-matter into any number of genres. The most popular with collectors are those with Royal, travel and propaganda images. Scarves drawn with popular cartoon characters are also collected.

Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953 was an event marked by the production of innumerable mementoes. Not surprisingly a very large number of scarves, of many

varied designs, survive. Mostly they show views of London, the Commonwealth and the Royal cortège. Even the stately Hermes produced a commemorative scarf in 1953.

Scarves have been produced for subsequent Royal events but not in the same number. No doubt the fashionable status of scarves in 1953 assured them a commercial success.

There's no doubt that many of these scarves were produced by souvenir manufacturers. The quality of the material, the popular designs and poor printing indicate that these scarves are a distant relative of the picture postcard. Some scarves, for example, survive from the Festival of Britain in 1951. These usually show sights of London including the futuristic South Bank along with the famous Britannia symbol. Comparisons with the coronation scarves of two years later will often reveal a particular house style in illustration and design.

The World's Fair of 1937 in New York was also commemorated by the production of scarves. Given the history and development of the scarf these would be amongst the earliest examples it is possible to find.

The alliances and victories of the First World War were commemorated by the issuing of printed cotton handkerchiefs. These often have decorative arrangements of the allies' flags along with patriotic messages. The typography and design of these items show them to have been the work of jobbing printers, and their style is the same as that which makes the lettering and printing of the 19th century so appealing.

By the beginning of the Second World War improvements in technology and marketing had made it possible for patriotic scarves to be produced on a very large scale. Scarves were often exchanged by



Plate 5. Travel scarf, White Star Cunard, 1950s. (Paul and Karen Rennie)

wartime sweethearts and show the Anglo-French alliance, the Anglo-American alliance, the liberation of Paris or some other important event. Ultimate victory was also celebrated in this way.

The exotic origins of the scarf reveal themselves in the scarves issued to passengers on transatlantic liners, cruise ships and aeroplanes. These often have a lively colouring and a recognisably cosmopolitan design. Scarves were always available to the lady passengers of big ships. They were ideal for promenading on deck and made a distinctive souvenir of a long trip. The scarves issued by the National Airlines date from a time when passengers walked out to the aeroplane across the runway. Nowadays, these souvenirs of far-off places remind us that, until quite recently, such travelling was an extraordinary adventure.

The processes of screen-printing lend themselves to the reproduction of fluent and spontaneous brushstroke. It's not surprising then that the medium has been exploited by many skilled draughtsmen and cartoonists. Humorous scarves exist in every genre and style of production. At heart, the manufacturers of these things understand that the scarf is a joyful celebration of places, people and good times. These unsigned scarves are the social and material ephemera of the 1940s, '50s and '60s. They are genuinely populist in design and belong to that group of artefacts which includes posters, comic books and toys, and which reveal popular culture at its most vibrant and colourful.

Making a collection of scarves is still quite easy. Only the best known names have, so far, been documented and it is still possible to find interesting decorative scarves of any genre in markets, small shops and country auctions. The types of scarves mentioned above tend to have a following and so a more esoteric choice of genre may be advisable.

Scarves can easily be stored. A simple clip-frame will allow the display of part of a collection and this makes an effective back-drop for the display of other items. The printing of some scarves, especially those on synthetic fabric, can be fugitive and it is best to keep them out of direct sunlight.

The Victoria and Albert Museum has many scarves as part of its textile collection. An introduction to the history of the scarf can be found in *The Scarf* by Andrew Baseman, New York, 1989.



Anglo-French friendship scarf by Edward McKnight Kauffer. (Private c.1942)

Paul and Karen Rennie are specialist dealers in British Art and Design from 1900. Their gallery is at ~~Shad Thames~~, ~~Butler's Wharf~~, London SE1 (tel. 071 557 8056) and they stock a selection of scarves.

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