

Stanley Parkes – Crabtree Artist

An appreciation

by

Keith Watkins

In 1955, when I started at Crabtrees, the Advertising Studio was situated at the end of the office wing (part of the original factory building), and later occupied by Production Engineering. It was staffed by Stanley Parkes, photographer John, and Mr Miner, an elderly and highly skilled man who, in the early days of lithographical process, had drawn Walsall saddlery products directly on to stone.

Stanley (known to everyone as Stan), besides painting covers for the company sales magazine 'The Crabtree', did photo re-touching and product illustration, he also taught two evenings a week at Walsall School of Art in Goodall Street.

At that time, the company's Head of Advertising was Reginald Cox, a touch eccentric. His office was some distance from the Studio and near to Mr Crabtree's office. Here also worked Cedric Sleigh who did some copy writing and managed the printing side. Cedric told me that it was he who came up with the slogan 'Off to another good start' – used for advertising the Crabtree B15 contactor range.

I had a Drawing Office apprenticeship which, beside Technical College, included a little experience in technical illustration and perspective drawing. For these classes I attended Walsall School of Art for two evenings a week. I was under the tutelage of affable Cyril Riley (who chain smoked 'Senior Service' cigarettes) for perspective, and Stan Parkes for technical illustration.

Stan's class also included commercial art and fashion drawing students. It was wonderful to watch him work. With a filthy stub of a 2B pencil, a few hard lines and a smudge of his thumb, he could draw magic from the paper.

Sometime in the mid-sixties Stan left Crabtrees to take up a full-time teaching post at Walsall School of Art. He was a clever, encouraging and inspiring teacher. Today, perhaps 50 years later, ex-students of his speak of him with affection and respect.

The work he did for 'The Crabtree' covers was outstandingly good, and, I always think, influenced by the work of Frank Wooton, whose 'Lucas' adverts were famous in the fifties and sixties. I know Stan admired his work.

One of the cover illustrations for 'The Crabtree', pictured a planet, I think Mars, and Stan had nasty shock when he accidentally dropped a splodge of red paint on to the almost completed image. His skill however enabled him to take advantage of this and to work it into the composition - which he considered to be improved.

Before Stan retired, the Art School had moved into the old Chuckery School premises (on the opposite side of Lincoln Road to Lincoln Works). During my lunch break I would go across to see their yearly end of term show, and I think it was here I first heard of Stan's impending retirement. I got permission to take one of the original illustrations that hung in the Buying Office corridor, to present to him, and I decided to take the one he did of the Roman Baths at Wall (near Lichfield). I had established that this was his favourite work and he was delighted to receive it.

Stanley Parkes died in 1996, having influenced the lives of many students.

The end

