

Guinness Advert, 1949. (Billboard, December 1948, Elephant & Castle, London)

This black and white photograph in landscape format shows a man in a long black overcoat and peaked cap, reading a newspaper as he stands in front of a large advertising hoarding, about eight metres wide and four high.

The poster is in cartoon style, showing a balding man running to rescue his bottle of Guinness which is about to be scooped up by a crane claw. To the right, the jaws of the claw descending from above are closing around lunch items left on a crate - a beer bottle and glass, and a bundle tied up in a handkerchief - presumably some sandwiches. The man's flat cap flies off behind him as he runs, his hands are outstretched, showing his muscular forearms, and his legs extend forward and back like those of a champion hurdler. The claw is operated by another man in the cabin of the crane just visible at the right-hand edge of the image. Above, a caption expresses the desperate man's thoughts: 'My Goodness, My GUINNESS' (with GUINNESS in capital letters). The illustrator John Gilroy created a series of advertisements like this one depicting pints in peril, as well as creating the iconic images of toucans, seals and other animals that are associated with the Guinness brand.

The real life man reading the newspaper stands between the hurtling builder and the closing jaws of the claw – but his face is partially hidden by the upturned collar of his coat and he seems oblivious to the drama at his back. The hoarding is set low down, just above ground level, and recedes away from the viewer from left to right, emphasising the direction in which the words of the slogan and the man both run.

To the right of the hoarding, the edge of a monumental stone pillar is just visible, along with a brick archway with half open double doors that oddly duplicates the shape of the crane claw, blurring the lines between advert and real life.