



**One-day conference**  
**Public Drinking in the Nineteenth Century**  
**Saturday 22 February 2014**  
**Clifton Hill House, University of Bristol**

**ABSTRACTS**

**Session 1**

**The Gin Palace, Paul Jennings, University of Bradford**

This paper examines what is perhaps the most well-known of all types of English drinking place – the Victorian and Edwardian gin palace. It seeks first of all to chart the development of the institution from its late-eighteenth century origins to its full flowering from the 1820s and to its final architectural apotheosis in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period. That development is located in a range of social, economic, political, scientific and legal changes, from the growth of urban markets, changes within the drink industry, fiscal adjustments, to the perfecting of techniques for the decoration of glass. It will focus too on the gin-palace's customers, including its apparent attraction for women. This latter aspect of the gin palace was one which particularly attracted attention and the paper will focus on how the gin palace has been perceived and represented by a range of contemporaries, from temperance campaigners to novelists and journalists. It will conclude with a look at its representation into modern times.

**Private Sots in Public Places, Steve Earnshaw, Sheffield Hallam**

The nineteenth century largely understands excessive, repeated drunkenness to be a public affair, requiring intervention from the state, philanthropic institutions, medicine or the religious-minded. But when and how do we get to see the inner lives of ordinary, habitual drunkards, where consciousness may not be framed by questions of temperance and abstinence? William Cobbett's sermon 'Sin of Drunkenness, in Kings, Princes and People' (1823), while strongly arguing against alcohol, is yet one of the few discourses of the period to assign a metaphysical motive to drinking – 'drunkenness is a man's own act; an evil deliberately sought after' – and it is this unheralded strand – a 'will to drink' – that I would like to open up as part of a larger project on 'the Existential alcoholic', a figure that emerges in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The paper will take as its main reference points George Eliot's long story, 'Janet's Repentance' (1857), about the drunken wife of a professional man (also a drinker) in an early nineteenth-century English market town, and Zola's novel, *L'Assommoir* (1877), about the influence of alcohol and environment on a ménage à trois in nineteenth-century Paris. In doing so it will look at the more typical coverage of figures of gross inebriation, such as we find in Booth's *Life and Labour*, Parliamentary reports, and adaptations of Zola's novel, e.g. Charles Reade's hugely popular drama *Drink* (1879), and how Eliot's tale and Zola's narrative start to question these prevailing views, and offer new techniques of representation in doing so.

**Session 2**

**Policing Drunkenness in Victorian Cumbria, Dr Guy Woolnough (Keele University)**

Drunkenness assumed increasing importance as a 'problem' in the discourses of the nineteenth century. This is a bottom-up study to examine the extent to which the policing of drunkenness was informed by local cultures, rather than directed by policies imposed from above.

Drink related offences formed the largest category of charges coming before the courts, and constituted a significant part of the offending dealt with by police. This paper examines how the police in Cumbria managed drunkenness from 1850 to 1900. It is an empirical study of the primary sources of the police and the courts, looking particularly at Kendal, an important town; Maryport, a coal mining port; a large fair and two small towns. The policies of the Chief Constable are considered before the praxis of policing drunkenness at street level is analysed. After 1860, temperance was the norm for Cumbrian Methodists and non-conformists, who increasingly defined pub culture, as incompatible with respectability. It has been possible to assess the impact of temperance and Methodism upon the policing of drunkenness by comparing the data on arrests and summonses in two very similar Westmorland towns, Kirkby Stephen and Kirkby Lonsdale and at a nearby market. The analysis of this data shows that differences of rates of arrest in these locations are best explained by the influence of local cultures upon policing, rather than different patterns of drinking or policies imposed from above.

### **What Shall We Do with a Drunken Preacher?: Reading Mr Gilfil's Gin-and-Water, Dr Jennifer Diann Jones, University of Portsmouth**

In George Eliot's fiction one of the primary goals of an effective preacher is to bring his community together and to foster sympathy among them. In order to do this he must find some common ground with parishioners whose lives are very little like his own. In *Scenes of Clerical Life* it becomes clear a preacher can effectively foster community by giving practical help and comfort to the needy, sometimes in addition to spiritual guidance, and by adopting some of the habits of his parishioners. In 'Mr Gilfil's Love Story' the narrator worries that by mentioning that Mr Gilfil, like his parishioners, drinks gin-and-water, he has 'run the risk of alienating all [his] refined lady-readers' (Eliot 81). He tries to mitigate this response by emphasising Gilfil's moderation and by explaining that he drinks gin instead of wine so he can save his money to help others (81-2); his charity and his ability to enter into the feelings of his parishioners inspires more 'gratitude and reverence' than doctrine or fine preaching ever would (75). However, in *George Eliot and Intoxication: Dangerous Drugs for the Condition of England* (2000) Kathleen McCormack argues that, like the more intemperate preacher in 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton', Gilfil's intoxication makes him an ineffective clergyman (48). While I agree with McCormack's readings of Barton, whose wine drinking helps to drive a wedge between him and his flock, in my paper I argue that Gilfil's drinking is not problematic and it in fact helps to bring him closer to his parishioners. His choice of drink does not diminish his spiritual authority, but rather it signals his understanding of the bucolic mind and habits in Shepperton and enhances his influence over the parish.

Works cited:

Eliot, George. *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2000.

McCormack, Kathleen. *George Eliot and Intoxication: Dangerous Drugs for the Condition of England*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000.

### **Public drinking and public control, David Beckingham, University of Cambridge**

This paper considers the impact that debates over public control of the liquor traffic had on the construction and regulation of public drinking. Drawing on the examples of municipal control in countries such as Sweden and Norway, reformers in Britain brought into sharp focus the relationship between spaces and habits of drinking in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Arguing that public control would generate funds for public benefit, these reformers sought to balance the social function of the public house and the apparent social cost of alcohol consumption. Though small scale, these experiments have been credited with informing the improvement of the British public house around the turn of the century. Certainly they helped open up critical space for thinking about constructive social and economic responses to problem drinking. But in this paper I want to examine

contemporary statistical assessments of these various Gothenburg schemes and ask whether public drinking was, in fact, less of a problem under public control.

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### Session 3

#### **The alternative world of the proud non-drinker: nineteenth century public displays of temperance, Annemarie McAllister, University of Central Lancashire**

While Victorian public discourse, habits, and material culture often focused upon drinking alcohol, there was also a very visible alternative. The total abstinence movement, from its inception in the 1830s, had inspirational leaders such as Joseph Livesey who advocated 'Eyegate' and 'Eargate' as key ways to recruit members and spread interest in this form of temperance. This paper will examine the many public displays during the period such as parades and processions, galas, bazaars, displays, public magic lantern shows and other performances, by adults in groups such as the Rechabites and children of the Band of Hope. These public celebrations of strength and identity were supported by material culture – not merely badges, banners and posters, but the urban landscape of towns, cities and even villages. Andrew Davison (2006) has explored the built heritage of the temperance movement and how it inscribed temperance visibly in public spaces. An alternative world is revealed in which the non-drinker could stay at a temperance hotel, drink at a temperance coffee or cocoa house, relax in a temperance music hall or temperance billiard room, travel with Thomas Cook's temperance tours, and of course receive instruction and entertainment at the local temperance hall. While the buildings gave permanent witness, public events provided peaks of spectacle. The public display of proud abstinence obviously reinforced identity and sustained members' interest, but also represented the 'alternative world' visibly and, as such, had a key role in spreading the message to the wider community.

#### **Radical Slurs: Drink and the Defamation of the Working-Class Poet, Francesca Mackenney, University of Bristol**

For the nineteenth-century working-class poet, intemperance seemed almost an occupational hazard. After a brief period of fame as a "peasant-poet", a "nightingale of the North" or any other such cultural novelty, the lives and literary ambitions of the vast majority ended in disappointment, poverty and alcoholism. When writers such as the Lancashire Weaver, Elijah Ridings, or the Airedale Poet, John Nicholson, could no longer find an audience in established literary circles and reading markets, they returned to the place in which the artisan had traditionally performed and engaged in political debate: the public-house. As the "golden age" of Romantic poetry drew to a close and the Chartist movement collapsed in 1848, many were forced, like Nicholson, to roam from inn to inn performing their poetry live, hoping to persuade their audience to buy their books, or at least get them a drink. The notoriety of working-class poets as what the Edinburgh Review described as 'literary mendicants' led to a widespread public debate on the apparent dangers of poetic aspirations among the "vulgar" and unlettered classes. In my paper, I will examine the social and economic conditions which shaped the working-class poet's relationship with alcohol, as well as the rhetoric and underlying politics of the ensuing debate. Focusing particularly on biographical notices and newspaper reports of these 'literary mendicants', I will argue that an alleged predilection for drink was used to defame the character of the working-class poet, to keep him in his social place and to discredit his politics as radical slurs.

#### **'The coachman with the hoarse voice [...] took an imperial pint of vinegar with his oysters, without betraying the least emotion': Extreme drinking as performance in the Dickens pantomime, Jonathan Buckmaster, Royal Holloway**

One of the most familiar routines of early nineteenth-century pantomime (a popular yet relatively unexplored cultural practice), was that of excessive drinking. The principal performer in such displays of public indulgence was Joseph Grimaldi's clown, who played superhuman drinkers like 'Guzzle, a Drinking Clown' and the comic Tartar 'Munchicow, a very gifted Eater [and] Drinker'.

In this paper, I situate such pantomime routines as a theatrical and pre-Victorian basis for Charles Dickens's laughter. I will explore his imaginative engagement with the pantomime clown, who he reconfigured in his fiction through his own excessive drinkers. Comic figures such as Daniel Quilp and Bob Sawyer use the occasion of drinking in company for theatrical displays of consumption, often drawing other characters in as an unwitting audience for their antics. Some figures are revealed as inherently clownish in nature, and use these drinking routines to demonstrate a pantomimic rejection of ordinary laws of biology, while others use drink as an enabler or catalyst for their transformation into a clownish figure.

I will also demonstrate the multivalent nature of this trope as used by Dickens: it not only places his work further into a tradition of popular entertainment through adopting the same themes and practices, it also moves Dickens towards a Bakhtinian universal comedy of the bodily grotesque – such superhuman displays of an ordinary activity, the clown actually reminds us of what makes us all human.

## Session 4

### From Beer to Modernity, Ed Lilley, University of Bristol

This paper suggests that artists and writers in nineteenth-century France identified beer as a specifically modern drink. If they wished to celebrate, or comment on, the specific circumstances of the contemporary environment, beer was the beverage of choice, a sign that readers and viewers of the time would have interpreted as representing the new. In arguably the most famous short story of the period, *Boule de suif*, Guy de Maupassant created Cornudet, identified as a 'democrat', whose rallying cry of 'Pale Ale and Revolution' integrated radical politics with the new drink. The committed republican painter Edouard Manet also favoured beer as an indicator of the up-to-date and the political. His best-loved painting in his lifetime, *Le Bon bock*, was seen by contemporaries as depicting a specifically Alsatian beer drinker, patiently (but perhaps threateningly) awaiting his reintegration with France following the demoralising loss of the province of Alsace in the Franco-Prussian War. Manet, ever the innovator, further shows the potentially contentious subject of women drinking beer in public in a positive light, adding gender politics to an already complicated brew. Works by other artists and writers, which will also be considered, reinforce these well-known examples.



John Grand-Carteret's beautifully-illustrated work of 1886, *Raphaël et Gambrinus*, takes the topic to a new populist level, linking one of the most famous artists of the Renaissance with a mythical Flemish king who was an honorary patron saint of beer. Significantly subtitled *L'Art dans la brasserie*,

it celebrates the decorators of beer halls as noteworthy artists, suggesting a cultural inclusivity that is once again a signifier of the modern.

**'A man may drink many pots therein': drink and disorder in Arthur Morrison's 'To Bow Bridge' (1893), Mary Lester, Unaffiliated**

In 1893 Arthur Morrison published a series of fourteen stories in the *National Observer*, vignettes of life in London's north-eastern suburbs. This paper will look in detail at one of these tales, 'To Bow Bridge', in which the narrator describes a short tram journey late at night as drinkers move from the closing pubs of metropolitan Essex to fit in a last hour's drinking 'over the border' in the County of London.

Morrison's fiction fits with that of contemporaries including Pett Ridge, Moore and Gissing who explored – and helped explain to others – the rapidly expanding suburban expanse of late Victorian London. 'To Bow Bridge' shows not only the disorder, singing, vomiting and excitement of the drinkers heading towards town to squeeze in the extra drinking before making the return journey, but also the sedate, embarrassed, tired shift workers and families heading westwards towards home at the end of a long day. Morrison is painting a picture of more than one type of suburbanite inhabiting the public space. In just five pages the story raises questions of gender, class, respectability and local identity, without apparent judgement on one side of a moral argument or another, all situated in a real – and recognisable – part of east London.

This sort of realist fiction had an ambiguous place in the contemporary debates about alcohol consumption, and exists within the broader journalistic, medical and local authority narratives of disorder, temperance and regulation. The paper will also briefly explore public drinking in Morrison's other fiction, and in other sources about this part of London in the period, as well as the effect of writing humorous fiction as part of a serious socio-political debate.

**Death and the Alcoholic: Public Discourses of Alcoholism in the Brontës' Novels, Pam Lock, University of Bristol**

This paper discusses the symbiotic relationship between the Brontës' novels and public discourses of alcoholism in the 1840s. I focus on three novels: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). The harmful drinking in these novels is commonly interpreted autobiographically in relation to their brother Branwell's problem drinking. However, this paper argues that the pivotal role of alcoholism, as it came to be known, in the Brontë sisters' writing is a product, not only of personal experience, but of prominent medical and social discourses of harmful drinking.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the period in which the three novels were produced and published (1847-8) represents a peak in the active public discourse on problem drinking. New and contradictory medical and religious approaches to the figure of the individual in cases of habitual drunkenness featured commonly in newspapers and journals, published sermons and political rhetoric. The conflict represented by the polarities of these theories, habitual drunkenness as either vice or disease, produces tensions in all three of the novels in this paper. For example, Anne Brontë's Arthur Huntingdon is both the undisciplined playboy lacking the self-control to regulate his propensity for drink and also

the afflicted son of a hereditarily dissipated family whose organ of veneration, left unchecked, phrenologically dooms him to a life of self-destruction.

This paper examines the decline and deaths of the alcoholics Arthur Huntingdon, Hindley Earnshaw and Bertha Mason within the larger public discourse on alcoholism, its causes and treatment.

## **Session 5**

### **Dr Granville's Thunderbolt: Drink and the public sphere in the life of one nineteenth-century doctor, James Kneale, UCL**

In 1891 Dr Joseph Mortimer Granville wrote a series of letters to the Times that amounted – as he later admitted - to ‘a plea for the use of more alcohol’. Though he was denounced by the British Medical Journal, this London gout doctor and popular writer provoked a month-long debate on the merits and dangers of moderate drinking that drew in doctors like Charles Drysdale as well as William Booth of the Salvation Army. Granville is almost entirely forgotten now, though he was relatively well known towards the end of his life, and his ideas remind us that public opinion on drinking was not solely shaped by the dogmas of temperance and trade.

Granville's career was highly unorthodox, though common themes emerge to help explain his arguments for ‘rational drinking’. He was very much a creature of a nineteenth-century public sphere transformed by a growing state, cheap print and a widening electorate: he had been a hospital and workhouse surgeon, helping to found one of Bristol's hospitals; the editor, briefly, of a conservative newspaper, and then a popular medical writer; a statistician using public knowledge to explore social problems and their solutions; an experienced navigator and manipulator of public opinion; and a tireless self-publicist who received both mockery and praise from the satirical press. While he might not have been a very ordinary man, Granville's chequered career in and out of the public eye reminds us that what the public made of drinking in the nineteenth century could be a good deal more varied and unexpected than the usual arguments between temperance and the licensed trade.

### **The half life of the Victorian saloon? Change, continuity, and public drinking across prohibition in Ontario, 1880s-1930s, Dan Malleck, Brock University**

In Canada and the United States, generally the period of early twentieth century prohibition is a significant benchmark in the regulation of drinking. Most discussions of liquor regulation use prohibition as an ending point, a starting point, or a period of examination itself. But how much of a change was prohibition? Did the system that emerged really mark a fundamental restructuring of drinking?

This study tests the hypothesis that, rather than representing a fundamental change in the way governments managed the sale of liquor, prohibition is best considered to be a brief deviation in the otherwise gradual transformation of the relationship between the state, the liquor industry, and the public. It uses as a case study the province of Ontario, Canada, from

the mid-Victorian period to the 1930s. This period spans the growth and expansion of the temperance industry and the liquor industry, repeated attempts to institute prohibition before it became law in 1916, and the end of prohibition and the beginning of public drinking. The paper's focus is on the regulation of public drinking, that which took place in pubs, saloons, taverns, and hotel beverage rooms throughout this period. It asks the simple question: how much did the public drinking space change between the pre- and post-prohibition periods? As an additional question, it asks how did the role of the state change in managing the sale of liquor for public consumption?