



MCR History Talks: Alcohol and Drinking Cultures

In this final episode of the MCR History Talks series, Jessica and Adam talk about the history of alcohol and drinking cultures in the north west. They examine why the north has such a reputation for drinking, why gender and alcohol are so entwined, and if our attitudes to drinking have changed over the past two hundred years. Jessica and Adam are joined by Dr Gemma Outen from Edge Hill University, and Dr Craig Stafford from the University of Liverpool.

Adam Waddingham: Hello and welcome to the MCR History Talks - a podcast produced by the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, brought to you by the University of Manchester Postgraduate History Network. I'm Adam Waddingham.

Jessica White: And I'm Jessica White. And we're both History PhD students at the University of Manchester.

Adam Waddingham: This week: alcohol and drinking cultures. Jessica, how has lockdown changed your drinking habits?

Jessica White: Well, obviously during lockdown, a whole new culture evolved and we saw in the first opening weeks, the rise of the 'Quarantini', those cocktails made in lockdown. And I think as the initial boredom set in, people saw drinking as a required antidote to the potential endlessness of lockdown.

I certainly gave into that habit at the beginning, but then I inputted a new rule in my life, which was only Fridays and Saturdays. And I've kept that up now. I think the excessive drinking ebbed away as restriction measures eased, and especially when pubs and bars were allowed to reopen on the fourth of July.

Adam Waddingham: Definitely. And I think as both you and I saw on the fourth of July, the streets of Manchester were filled with young people who were juiced up and eager to carry on drinking the night away. I think so many young people were elated, basically, with the fundamental concept of our lives being reinstated in a sense, but this return was also demonised by the media - shock horror - by those who, I mean, understandably in a sense, were worried about a further spread of COVID-19.

Jessica White: Yeah and that is not new. The demonisation of drinking habits and alcohol, as we're going to explore in this podcast, has been happening since day dawn. Drinking has never been something that has been encouraged by the state and by culture in general.

Adam Waddingham: Exactly. So, this week we're going to be joined by two historians who look at drinking culture in the 18th and 19th centuries, and who really have a specialism in the north west and of the north west.

So, we're going to be joined by Dr. Gemma Outen, an early career researcher in gender construction and the 19th Century press. Her PhD considered the literature of the female temperance movements, and her monograph arising from that - 'Lips That Touch Liquor: Fighting For The Face Of Female Temperance' - is due for publication in 2021. We're also joined by Craig Stafford who gained his PhD in History from the University of Liverpool in 2018, for which he looked at female drunkenness in Lancashire, concentrating on the lives of women who were committed to Strangeways prison in the 1870s.

Jessica White: So, without further ado, here it is: the history of alcohol and drinking in the north west.

Hi all and thank you again for joining us for this discussion on alcohol and drinking cultures. It really is a great pleasure to have you here. So, with us today is Dr. Gemma Outen, who is an early career researcher from Edgehill University and Dr. Craig Stafford from the University of Liverpool.

Adam Waddingham: As Jessica just said, thank you all very much for joining us for this slightly different podcast to usual. Now, before we begin, it is worth saying that the focus of this is on pre 20th Century history and histories of drinking culture and temperance, and the dominant attitudes that come in this period towards drink and attempts to regulate alcohol.

Jessica White: So, both of you look at the 19th Century and I was wondering, Gemma, what would you say were the dominant attitudes to drinking over the 19th Century?

Gemma Outen: I mean, it's an interesting period, the 19th Century, because we've come from earlier on with the Gin Craze, which a lot of people know about obviously and Hogarth's propaganda - Gin Street, Beer Street, all of that sort of thing. When we get into the 19th Century, I feel like there's an interesting sort of split going on almost, and temperance and drinking, they sort of coexist together.

Craig Stafford: Yeah, when I was looking at my research particularly, I mean, the Victorian period is my era, if you like. But it's a long period, its 60 odd years. So, there's slight peaks and troughs, I suppose, in concerns about drink. But generally speaking, in the 19th Century, the Victorians have an obsession with drink. There's an obsession with drunkenness. So social commentators in particular are linking drunkenness to crime; they're linking it to an increase in disease and poverty. There's concerns about a growth in insanity due to drink, and also, concern about the growth in prison numbers.

So, there's concern about Strangeways. Walton jail one summer in 1871 is overcrowded, apparently, with female drunkards, so much so that the local bridewells have to have this overflow of female drunkards who have taken advantage of the hot weather, like what we've got now. So it's really, in many ways, it's an obsession of the Victorians.

But, we're really talking about public drunkenness. We're talking about working class drunkenness - there's a people who were being focused on by middle-class social commentators in particular.

Adam Waddingham: I was going to say, I think that's particularly interesting Craig. One of the things that you talk about in your research is Chief Constable Samuel Stephens. And I wonder if this is a crossover with some of the work that Gemma focuses on around the moralising attitude here in the sense of both cultures of policing drink and cultures of temperance, (they) seem to have at their root this very moral concern.

Gemma Outen: Yeah, very much so. In my doctoral thesis, I talk quite a lot at length about this split between legislative action and moral suasion. And I think Craig's right. It's predominantly the working classes who are the focus of this, you know: "they can't drink it, it's bad for them", sort of thing, in line with rises in self-improvement and rational recreation, things like that.

But very much, I think there is a distinction to be drawn between the legislative side of temperance, particularly, and concerns about bringing in the sort of prohibition-esque idea from the US, but also then this moral activism, which is what my research focuses on: "How do we convince these people not to drink because it's good for them?"

Although temperance does start as a radical movement, certainly by towards the end of the century where I focus, it has become this moralising thing. And this is where I think we get our views of middle-class as being something that's imposed on the working classes and the drunkards there, sort of thing.

Jessica White: Well yeah, Gemma you've written on the representation of alcohol and temperance magazines, which are used by these middle-class female organisations. And you look at the way in which children are the target of these didactic cartoons or stories around the evils of alcohol. So why do you think alcohol has for such a long time been demonized in British culture?

Gemma Outen: I think that if we look back at the effects it has, has had, you know, beer's always viewed as their sort of emblem of Britishness somehow. And then when you get, like I said, the Gin Craze, et cetera, it leads to poverty, degradation... But I think it's no coincidence that at the time, there's not a huge amount going on. Saint Monday's declining, things like that. People go to work, they go home. There's not really a lot happening. Whereas I think by the time we hit the 19th Century and certainly sort of 1830s onwards, rational recreation comes in, self-improvement; here's a big rise in this sort of nonconformist religious movement.

And I think those things all come around at a right time for temperance actually to explode almost and to become this idea of "we're going back against that demonisation; people shouldn't be drinking".

Adam Waddingham: Because there's another thing as well, I think, when you talk about that Gemma - if we use class as one of the lenses to look at this - I think one of the things that comes through from your work actually as well, Craig - is talking about how, when we think of state intervention, state agents, in this sense, you make the point, and I think it's quite a good one actually, around how police officers, particularly, the people at the front end policing this, were actually working class and (there were)

different approaches adopted in different localities. And I think there's something to be said potentially about the approaches in different areas.

Craig Stafford: Yes, certainly, in my research I look particularly at a comparison of Salford and Rochdale, and there's a definite difference in the way that drunkenness was policed in both towns. So, for instance, in Rochdale - and going back to your point about the moral sort of aspects of policing - Rochdale's Chief Constable really starts to clamp down on drunkenness, but generally speaking, I mean, police forces would only really arrest somebody if they were extremely drunk. So, if they were drunk and incapable, they were unable to look after themselves or get themselves home, or if they were drunk and disorderly, if they were being violent.

But in Rochdale, what we start to see, particularly after the 1872 Licensing Act, which makes simple drunkenness an offense - this is a very sort of vague sort of term - Rochdale's police start to arrest people for being simply drunk, just being a little bit tipsy. So where as before 1872, you could stagger home from the pub and as long as you weren't causing any problems you'd be fine; after 1872, they integrate this legislation and they start, and everybody, the number of people, men and women in Rochdale arrested for drunkenness and imprisoned for drunkenness sort of goes through the roof really.

Whereas in Salford, there's much more of a focus on violence. So, there's a lot of concern in Salford about the rise in common assault, the rise and assaults on the police. And this is all again linked into an increase in drunkenness. So, there's a definite difference in the way that the police address this issue, which is interesting for two towns that are sort of fairly close neighbours really.

Jessica White: I bet the records for those arrests are absolutely fascinating.

Craig Stafford: They are, yeah. I mean some of the sort of newspaper reports are really...they made good copy, let's put it that way, let's be honest; some of the descriptions of what people are up to is, um..We can look at it from the hindsight of 150 years into the future and find it perhaps a little bit amusing now and again. But I think if you were a policeman in the middle of Salford on a Saturday night, it probably wasn't a great deal of a fun.

Adam Waddingham: Is there something to be said here in terms of how these spikes in temperance activities - I'm thinking of these moments when temperance really takes hold - is seen as moments when people are turning to drink in different ways. So, we've had this Gin Craze. Is there a correlation with how temperance movements react or is it just a much more general perception of an increase in drinking?

Gemma Outen: I certainly think it's the perception. In the same way throughout the century. A lot of my work focuses on print culture as well and a similar thing happens with crime, for instance - you know, there's more reporting of crime in the period. There's this perception that crime increases. Actually, if you look at the statistics, it wasn't particularly increasing by a huge amount, if at all. And I think a similar thing happens with drinking. The conversation opens up because of the rise of the temperance

movement and things like this. I don't think - and I'll be honest, I haven't done the statistical research to back that up - but I'm pretty sure there's not this huge increase in drunkenness. You know, Britain as a culture has, historically, always drunk a lot.

I'm not sure this has a massive increase in the 19th Century, although Craig, you've got more of a record-based approach than me. You may differ on that.

Craig Stafford: No not at all, I think that it's funny that at the end of the 1860s, that there's very little debate in the local press that I've seen about drunkenness. And then it's as though a switch gets turned on in sort of 1870-71, which I think sort of taps into national debate: drink becomes very much a party-political issue. There's a divide between the Liberals and the Tories over the drink issue. And it's as though police statistics are suddenly seized on and all of a sudden there's temperance advocates writing into the newspapers complaining about drink. There's lists of people being arrested for drunkenness and prosecuted appearing in the papers. It's almost overnight and it's very strange. It's difficult to pin down exactly what caused it, but there's something going on. You might be able to help me out on that bit.

Jessica White: Gemma raised her hand.

Gemma Outen: I think because of print culture, there's a huge rise in the mid-century on just the sheer number of periodicals, newspapers and things around. And I think a lot of it comes down to.. they have to fill the pages. So, we get a huge increase in people writing in to newspapers and magazines but also..Yeah, people have to write to fill these, you know? The expansion in the press and the periodical press is huge at the end of the century because of the reduction in stamp duty and paper tax being abolished, and things like that. So, I think a lot of it comes down to (the fact that) they had to fill the pages.

Jessica White: They were making the news.

Gemma Outen: Yeah.

Adam Waddingham: And I think there's something really interesting here - and it's touched upon, I think, by all of your work actually - on the importance of gender and when we come to think about the demonisation of drink, women were, and still are actually, particularly vilified when it comes to talking about drink and drinking cultures.

Craig, you in particular looked at female drunkenness in Lancashire.

Craig Stafford: Yeah.

Adam Waddingham: What do you think, if anything - is there a strong link between gender, drinking and alcohol cultures?

Craig Stafford: Yeah, very much so, certainly in the Victorian period and even probably before to be honest. But women..I mean, to the Victorians a drunken woman was seen as much worse than a drunken man.

They were 'doubly-damned' is the phrase that gets sort of thrown about a bit. It's that they were traitors not only to society by engaging in this very unrespectable pastime, but they're also traitors to their sex. So, if you think of a Victorian woman, the image of the angel in the house, she was a wife, she was supposed to be a mother. She was holding the domestic scene together, if you like. And so to go against this, by going into the pub and getting drunk was seen as abusing and turning against her societal role, if you like. So, for instance, you get the Bishop of Manchester in 1874: he's chairing a meeting of the temperance society in Manchester and he says a drunken woman is 10,000 times more degraded than the drunken man. And this gets lots of cheers and applause. So it's very much ingrained in certainly middle-class male thought and perhaps even female thought, that women shouldn't be engaging in this kind of behavior at all.

Jessica White: And Gemma you've also looked at gender. What I love is, you look at girlhood and this period between being a woman or a young woman and a child. Why were young girls in particular targeted in the temperance press when it came to fighting the vice of drinking?

Gemma Outen: So they were sort of targeted by the groups that I look at; the British Womens Temperance Association; the Womens Total Abstinence Union - the groups that I consider. Quite simply, temperance was ever declining, essentially. So, although there are a lot of temperance groups around and particularly female temperance groups around as well, that I look at, they had one eye on the future. Temperance begins to decline as we hit sort of the end of the 19th Century and I think they targeted young women, trying to bring them into their organisation simply to try and continue their work. So, they have specific parts in their periodicals which are aimed at these women, these young women and girls and, and things like that, trying to keep them involved in the movement essentially.

But I think there's something interesting in temperance as positioned as a moral duty. So therefore, it was okay for women to be going into sort of slum areas, things like this and to go and visit drunkards if you will, and to try and reform them and things. And I think there's something quite clever there.

And I argue in several pieces of my work that actually the temperance movement is almost a precursor to the sort of women's liberation movement. It allows them to open up those fears, those avenues of exploration for women's work. And it becomes normalized that women are able to go out into - you know, we all know the breakdown of the public private sphere is not accurate - but it allows them to expand their areas of influence in quite an interesting way and to move into political avenues, you know? Yes, it's moral versus legislative, but there is a huge amount of crossover. I think the relationship between gender, drinking and also temperance is a really complicated one, but it's one that's really, really interesting actually.

Jessica White: Yeah, definitely. And now that you say that it's actually that they're buying into the gender stereotype by trying to be upstanding women, but as you say they are breaking some traditions by going out there interacting with these 'dangerous female drunkards'. It is fascinating stuff.

Gemma Outen: Yeah.

Adam Waddingham: And I also think as well there's a point that comes through with your work, Craig, around these traditions of people corral. I think one of the things you talk about there is the tradition of paid factory work, being different in Manchester compared to Liverpool. And I think that takes us into another aspect to all of the work in the sense of the north west actually as a region itself. Is there anything unique in how we're looking at this - the north west alcohol and drinking cultures?

Craig Stafford: Yeah, I think there is actually. Certainly, Lancashire gains a reputation, particularly in the London press, as being a very violent drunken, lawless place. And I think you're right in that it's to do with this factory culture, the sort of employment status in Lancashire. I mean, not all Lancashire was industrial, not by a long way, but places like Liverpool, Manchester, you know, the sort of satellite towns if you like around Manchester, the mill towns; there's concern about female employment, as there has been for a long time throughout the 19th Century, that women are being supposedly corrupted by working with men. Again, they're being dragged away from their general gender role if you like. But yeah, Lancashire does tend to get this reputation of being a drunken place.

I mean, the Pall Mall Gazette calls it 'a plague of no ordinary magnitude' in Lancashire. The Times seizes on the drunken statistics, and basically says the Lancastrians have 'a propensity to get just as drunk as they can, whenever they can'. And I think it is tied into this industrial sort of mindset if you like, in certain parts of the county. Whether it was true or not, I don't know. I don't think it was, I think it was an exaggeration, but certainly the London press sort of seize on this and Lancashire gets this reputation for being, like I said, a drunken place.

Jessica White: And Gemma, with regard to the temperance movement - do you see anything in the north west, which differs from the rest of the country?

Gemma Outen: There's a huge concentration of temperance groups in the north west, which is interesting as it's perceived as this really drunken place...

(group laughs)

So, if you know the sort of satellite towns of Manchester, you know, Atherton has its own branch, Ancoats does, the city centre of Manchester does, Tyldesley does. There's huge local groups, essentially. But it's interesting that you're talking about that sort of factory idea, because I looked at the Ancoats branch of the British Women's Temperance Association, and I have the names and addresses of these women so I can find them in the census and things. And largely these women were married to ex congregational ministers, as we might expect; they had domestic help - it's firmly sort of backing up the idea that it's a middle-class movement. Whereas in the Ancoats branch, the President was married to a man who was a warehouse man. And the Secretary was a weaver who was working as a weaver. So, they didn't have domestic help, so that then takes that idea that it's firmly a middle-class movement away, actually. It's interesting that I think in Manchester there's perhaps more of a movement, again, of that self-improving idea. These women were not middle-class imposers of temperance on the working class, actually. I think they were themselves, you know, certainly all working class or upper working class, and a group of women who were trying to do good things.

Jessica White: I wonder if there was something we haven't really touched too much on - the financial interest behind temperance, particularly in industrial areas. Factory owners were really concerned about drinking impacting on the production of their material.

So, there's almost a moral component to temperance and behavior, but there's also a huge financial element. And I wonder if that perhaps is why it's in the north west that we see temperance and alcohol becoming a concern.

Gemma Outen: Perhaps. I mean, there's the famous instance you know, in Birmingham, of the chocolate factory with this sort of model village set up with no pubs and treats its workers this way and encourages everyone to be temperate. So, I think certainly there is something there that, you know, it's in the factory owner's interest as well. Decline in drunkenness means your workers are going to be more present, et cetera. I mean, Saint Monday has declined by this point, obviously, and I think again, it's in line with this idea that Industrialization drives certainly models of temperance and people are behaving themselves a little bit more, I think

Jessica White: Definitely.

Adam Waddingham: I was going to just pick up on the financial aspect a little bit with Craig's piece, actually, I just wonder if it's something worth saying in terms of..one of the things that comes through is this link between alcohol consumption and disposable income. And actually, there's also this flip side to it as well, because it is also then linked to poverty as well. So, you end up with this converse situation of alcohol being linked to people with disposable income, as well as being linked to poverty. And I wonder if there's just something worth saying about that.

Craig Stafford: Yeah, the women I looked at who ended up in Strangeways are all from really poor areas of Salford and Rochdale and Manchester; places like Ancoats was one; Angel Meadow; Chapel Street; Greengate - all really poor areas of town, if you like. I don't believe, I've not done a great deal of work on the cost of alcohol. But I believe it was fairly low and fairly static throughout my period. I mean, I might be wrong on that, but I don't think it was particularly expensive.

And to be honest, if people did have disposable income - I mean, a lot of women that I looked at were married - it was probably their only way of getting any sort of leisure time or enjoying themselves out of the home. So really, any sort of extra cash that they had would probably go down to the beer house, or the pub. Beer houses in particular were a very cheap way of getting drunk very quickly. They had a reputation for selling booze cheaply so you could get drunk on not very much. But yeah, I mean, it's interesting that we talk about poverty, the debate in Victorian times; did poverty cause drunkenness or did drunkenness cause poverty? I'm not sure that that was ever really answered by the Victorians. And it's still talked about today (!) But yeah, it was mainly poor people who were picked up by the police and poor people who were imprisoned. And I think it was just a case of whatever little money they had they just went to the pub because that was their release at the end of the week, and I think that was it.

Jessica White: Gemma, how do you think attitudes, or have attitudes towards drinking, changed since the 19th Century?

Gemma Outen: To today? Oh, I think there's still this view that Craig was talking about earlier of female drunkenness being seen somehow as worse than male drunkenness. We all know there's the pictures that are famous amongst drinking historians, and you get the women on the benches nowadays that are splashed over certain tabloids and things like that - "look at them, look at how they're behaving!" Um, and it's no different to me to how we were vilifying women in the Victorian period for drinking and for, you know, for that moment of escapism et cetera. I'm not condoning heavy drinking or anything like this, but to me that sort of moralising, looking down at people for getting drunk or for choosing to drink, that doesn't feel like it's changed very much. And I feel like there's, especially now what we see in COVID era, there's this tone of people who are seeing, you know, going out -following the rules but going out, drinking on a weekend - they're somehow blamed in all of this, I think, for spreading COVID, et cetera. So I think that 'holier than thou' moralising tone is still very much present when it comes to attitudes about drinking, gender and of particularly young people, I think, certainly.

Jessica White: Yeah, definitely. Craig, do you have anything to add to that?

Craig Stafford: Only so far in that I think that perhaps there's more of a health focus these days, perhaps more than there was in the Victorian era. We're a lot more aware now of how many units we should or shouldn't be drinking on a weekly basis.

I think there's still probably.. People still look down their noses perhaps at Deansgate in Manchester on a Saturday night or certain areas of, you know... Soho was in the news quite a lot recently about people going out. But I think that was mainly due to COVID. But yeah, I mean, drinking is still very much a focus of moralising perhaps more now, we're looking more at the health risks than perhaps was the case back in the 19th Century.

Jessica White: Yeah, I think I've come away from this discussion, knowing that there has been, as Gemma has said, there are still lots of continuities with how we in British society interact with drinking, both the excessiveness of it, but also attitudes towards that excessiveness.

Adam Waddingham: Certainly. And I think we'd both like say thank you first of all, to Craig and to Gemma, for taking part in this discussion today. Thank you, because I think it's given us a really great insight into the history of drinking itself and the attitudes that come with people drinking and the movements around stopping drinking actually.

And dare I say it?... I think it is fast becoming one of my favorite fields of history. There we go.

Just to be a purely interactive podcast for the purposes of the listeners out there as well, I wonder if it's just worth saying, if anyone has a favourite drink?

Gemma Outen: I will always favour a Gin and Tonic, I'm going to be honest with you; which is interesting with the histories of Gin, et cetera. But yes, Gin and Tonic is my preferred drink of choice.

Adam Waddingham: Fantastic. And Craig?

Craig Stafford: At the moment, I'm going through a phase of, I've discovered the 'hazy IPA', which is something that's - especially in this weather - it's very nice, yeah.

Jessica White: Me too! I won't mention any brands but I'm very into my cloudy IPAs.

Craig Stafford: Yeah. There's a couple of brewers in Manchester, craft brewers in Manchester - they're doing very good work. (laughs)

Jessica White: But as Adam knows, I always favour a Gin and Tonic.

Adam Waddingham: I'm going to throw one curve ball in there: Gin and Ginger. I feel like that is my duty, my apologies but... (laughs)

Thank you to Craig and Gemma. Thank you very much for taking the time to join us. It is really appreciated.

Jessica White: Thank you.

Craig Stafford: Thank you very much.

Jessica White: So Adam, do you know anything more about alcohol?

Adam Waddingham: I'm just grabbing a drink. It's not alcoholic - it's just water. So, I thought that was fascinating. That was really interesting in general and Craig talking there, yeah, I feel like I've learned quite a lot there in the sense of both attitudes to drink, attempts to regulate drink.

And the kind of the thing that stood out for me though, was just how individuals are involved in this, as much as broader ways of thinking about history in the sense of moralising attitudes actually; the individuals involved. Both Gemma and Craigs work - Craig talking about working class police officers having to police this. It really brought home actually the continuity and the changes.

Jessica White: What I really liked as well is that we had both sides of the story. We had the drinking side and the temperance side. So, the practices and the response, which I think is fascinating because I think we still have that duality today, don't we?

Adam Waddingham: And also, I think it's a really important part, you know, if you talk about this period, particularly up to the 20th Century, alcohol plays such a huge part. I feel that teetotalers have been overlooked in a sense, as much as we talk about consumption, we should also talk about how people reacted against that as much as for it.

Jessica White: [00:29:47] Definitely. And I think teetotalers have often got a bad reputation for being..you know, rule followers who just want to destroy all the fun. But actually, I think the modern-day teetotalers are really the state, medics; the NHS - as Craig said, in terms of creating these units of alcohol. The teetotal brigade has literally just, it's just changed shape as opposed to disappeared.

Adam Waddingham: Really, yeah. Even to the point that Gemma was making around gender as well, in the sense that, again, picked up a little bit by Craig, in terms of talking about who was involved in these movements and actually who's being arrested and who's involved in the movements against that. I think that pulls out some fascinating points about how we think about history as a broader concept.

And how we attach these values to thinking about working women, but then also not going the next step and thinking about how leisure pursuits tie in with that same type of work and how then things like drink feed into leisure and work.

Jessica White: And also, how women are educated about drink. So, thank you for joining us for this week's podcast. And thank you, Adam. Bye bye.

Adam Waddingham: Bye

This podcast was produced by Jessica White and Adam Waddingham for The Manchester Literary & Philosophical Society, and was published in August 2020.

The Manchester Literary & Philosophical Society would like to warmly thank Jessica and Adam for their contribution to our e-programme.