

CHAPTER 9

DRINK AND POLITICS

A key argument in this thesis has been that drink and drinking places were of critical importance in the lives of the working class in Norwich, as in other urban centres in industrial Britain, throughout the nineteenth century. This personal and social dependence on the consumption of drink and the leisure-time use of public houses and beerhouses by the working class had significant political consequences in a period when perhaps the most critical issue was the relationship between the ruling elites and the masses. The memory of the revolutionary events of 1789 and the subsequent destruction of the French monarchy and aristocracy was to haunt those who held power in Britain at least until the middle of the nineteenth century and concerns about social instability were evident throughout the Victorian period and beyond, despite the degree of social cohesion that had been by then developed.¹

Much of this instability was due to conflict over the right to vote in elections for local and national government. Industrialisation and urbanisation had led to pressure to extend the right of suffrage, with its symbolic value of registration within the ‘political nation’ and its cultural stamp of respectability. The first Reform Act (1832) had met this challenge, prompted by demonstrations and the fear of violence from the masses, by widening the suffrage to include more of the ‘respectable middle classes’ through the £10 household

voting qualification. It was a measure intended to be permanent but its chief framer, Lord John Russell, had by 1848 accepted that further reform was the only means to avoid revolution in the future.² Since it had been the experience of the Chartist movement in the late-1830s and 1840s that had led to this new readiness to extend the electoral system to secure effective government, the analysis in this chapter begins with a study of drink, politics and elections in early Victorian Norwich in the context of Chartism.

Chartism surfaced between 1837 and 1839, and was most active in 1842, 1844 and 1848. It was the channelling into a series of demands for political rights – above all, universal manhood suffrage – of ‘a large number of grievances and experiences of oppression’ felt for some decades. Politicised in the reform agitation of 1830-2, most working class leaders had high hopes of the reformed parliament. They looked to the government to intervene to protect the wages of craftsmen, to overhaul the poor relief system, to legislate for factory reform, above all to protect them from oppression. By 1837, their disillusion has led to the demand for universal suffrage.³ Membership of the political nation through enfranchisement had become the talisman through which this exploitation could be ended and their grievances put right. Chartism was an indication that key elements in the working class were no longer prepared to accept an old order, shaped by deference to social superiors who used the working-class dependence on drink and drinking places to their own political and party advantage at election time through bribery, treating, and the control of organised gangs of ‘roughs’.

How significant a force was Chartism within Norwich? Dorothy Thompson recorded that there were 6,646 signatures from Norwich to the first Chartist petition as listed in the *Northern Star* in June 1839. Since the population of Norwich in 1841 was 62,344, this is a

significantly high percentage (10.7 per cent), comparable with Bradford in the industrial north with its 10,049 signatures from a population of 105,257 (9.5 per cent). Although such figures need to be used with caution, they do suggest that Chartism had become important for sections of the working class in Norwich in making their personal, social and political meaning in the early Victorian period. Thompson noted that Norwich experienced a 'church occupation' in the summer of 1839, and the founding of a Chartist 'church', a Democratic Association and a Female Radical Association. Three hundred membership cards of the National Charter Association had been taken out, far fewer than the 1500 in Bradford but still indicative of a degree of local Chartist strength.⁴ Fortunately, the survival of local historical material has provided the opportunity to gain more understanding of that strength, the link between drink and politics in Norwich in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the degree to which Chartism threatened traditional electoral practices based on social deference and the manipulation of the working-class dependence on drink.⁵

It is most significant that for much of the Victorian period and for centuries before, local and parliamentary elections took place in a context shaped by drink. Brian Harrison has suggested that it was not until the 1880s that elections began 'losing their festive air and assuming their modern austerity'.⁶ In Norwich, a link is apparent between drink, elections, and the struggles for power and political advantage within the governing elite throughout the century. Writing in the mid-Victorian period, A.D. Bayne claimed that under the old corporation, prior to the Municipal Reform Act (1835):

'Ward elections were so often contested, that bribery, treating, and intimidation, were quite common, and the corruption of the freemen and lower classes was universal ... they were considered as trials of strength between different parties; and if they happened at a period when a general election was anticipated, an enormous sum of money was spent on treating and bribery'.⁷

Bayne saw such conduct as the enemy of 'progress'. He was aware that similar practices continued in his own generation as was Joseph John Gurney, the Quaker banker, who was so moved by the defeat of the Whig candidates in the 1833 Norwich parliamentary election that he subscribed to the unsuccessful parliamentary petition against the returned members alleging bribery and wrote a letter in the Norwich papers justifying his action. However, as Gurney concluded: 'I entirely lost ground by it in my true calling, that of promoting simple Christianity among all classes'.⁸ To challenge the *status quo* was to confront the forces of tradition and inertia and those traditions were dependent on alcohol.

Nevertheless, a case can be made that treating and bribery and the other corrupt election practices that took place within the drink culture of the working class provided a contact between the elite and the citizenry, voters and non-voters, which helped make society more cohesive. Contrary to what some contemporaries thought, drink and the drinking place may be seen as important factors in the development of the political and social cohesion which was recognised as a hallmark of British society in the later Victorian period.⁹

Paradoxically, it may be argued that the institution of the drinking place which was regarded as less than respectable by the ruling elites, for some a social menace to be legislated away or for others at best a source of profit to be carefully licensed and policed and never visited in person, helped preserve these same elites in power.

The forces of inertia were very powerful. Bayne's account of the proceedings of the Royal Inquiry into the State of Municipal Corporations in Norwich in November 1833 revealed the extent and prevalence of corruption.¹⁰ Joseph John Gurney claimed:

'I can assure the commissioners that they have no notion of the sin, guilt, wickedness and poverty, which local elections inflict upon this city'.

For progressives like Gurney, corruption had become one explanation for the economic decline of the city in this period. Henry Willett argued that:

‘the local elections were an injury to the lower orders, notwithstanding the money they received. There was less work done on account of these elections. Party had a very injurious effect on the trade of the city.’

Many journeymen weavers were included in the quite large constituency of freeman voters in Norwich and elections at times of economic distress provided them with the opportunity to vent their frustrations and secure some financial return for their vote. A Norwich manufacturer, John Francis, made explicit the link between the anti-corruption cause and the industrial interest, claiming that ‘the local elections prevent capital being employed, and disunited the people.’¹¹ Yet the majority in the Corporation who included gentlemen brewers like Peter Finch were resistant to the Commission, viewing it as illegal, unconstitutional, and ‘hostile to the cause of civil liberty’.¹² Although these traditionalists were unable to prevent the passing of the Municipal Reform Act (1835), their views and those who followed their politics in later generations, ensured that various corrupt practices did continue. The persistence of such practices in Norwich and elsewhere in Britain suggests that they were serving a social and political function for both members of the urban elite and the working class and so contributed to social cohesion.

Understanding more fully the nature of pre-Victorian elections and their links with the drinking culture of the working class sheds further light on the reasons for the longevity of these practices. A memoir of a Norwich citizen, Professor Edward Taylor, published after his death in 1863, detailed the circumstances in which he was elected a common councilman in 1808.¹³ The ward election described is a ritualised, quasi-military contest, a carnival of alcoholic excess and misrule that involved elector and non-electors alike. There are parallels to be drawn with the rivalry between opposing supporters of football teams

nearly two centuries later that provide the opportunity for the displacement of negative emotions on an opposing group:

‘The combatants would have scorned such mealy-mouthed appellations as “conservative” and “liberal”, or indeed any other name but that of the colours under which they fought. They were “blue-and-whites”, or “orange-and-purples”; the former being what would now be called the “liberal”, and the latter the “conservative” party. To be a blue-and-white or an orange-and-purple, was to be an angel or a devil, as the case might be ... Great was the potency of colours: though not supposed to be worn at municipal elections, they were a rallying cry... Even housemaids and children concealed them about their persons, in readiness to show them slyly from some window, both to encourage their friends and exasperate their enemies, whenever a procession passed.’¹⁴

Physical intimidation, abduction and drink were also part of this extraordinary ritual:

‘Great was the preparations for the contest. A sort of civic press-gang prowled the streets by night for the purpose of “cooping chickens”, which ... means carrying men off by force, and keeping them drunk and in confinement, so that if they could not be got to vote “for”, it will be impossible for them to vote “against”. If they could not be safely secured in the city, they were “cribbed, cabined, and confined” in wherries on the river, or the broads, or even taken to Yarmouth and carried out to sea. When the day of battle came, great was the shouting, the drinking, the betting, the bribery, and the fighting, till the largest purse contrived to win the day. Of course the dirty work was done by dirty men.’¹⁵

Bayne condemned these practices and deplored what he saw as the spurious justification that it was ‘Better to do a little evil then surrender a cause essential to the welfare of the state’. His was a voice representing the spirit of ‘improvement’ and ‘progress’ in Victorian Britain that did eventually succeed in establishing in most places corruption-free elections by the turn of the century. But the resistance to change was considerable and prolonged and had its own social and economic reasons.

These reasons were shaped by the need for the urban elites to have an effective relationship with the working classes who comprised the citizenry of their towns and cities and whose grounds for grievance were various, including poor living and working conditions, low wages, and occasional lack of employment. A culture of deference had been developed that did much to protect the powerful and was sustained throughout the century but did not remove the fear of urban unrest and agitation. Elections were an opportunity for the elite,

in pursuit of their own interests, to channel the energy of those urban masses through manipulation, using the two most powerful currencies of the times: money and drink. In doing so, the social fabric was drawn tighter; society became more cohesive.

The working class acting in concert was a formidable force. John Vincent has shown how working-class non-electors could intervene effectively in contests for example through boycotting tradesmen.¹⁶ His analysis, however, does not explore fully the reasons why the working class were involved in elections in the first place since most elections were not fought over issues that would concern them directly. What had they to gain? In fact, corruption in municipal and the less frequent parliamentary elections did work to their advantage since working-class leaders could supplement their income through acting as organisers on behalf of members of the elite who were seeking office, and those who were eager to enjoy the traditional free drink and entertainment were also given their opportunity. It was a system that had a social value in the context of nineteenth century urban Britain although the new public morality that had been developing throughout the period was eroding that credibility, and legislation from Westminster in the form of the Ballot Act (1872) and the Corrupt Practices Act (1883) eventually led to its demise.

However, H.J. Hanham concluded that by the end of the Victorian period:

‘Even the most stringent legislation had clearly not killed corrupt practices, and it was some years before public opinion finally did so.’¹⁷

Norwich was one of ten constituencies that were still, according to Hanham, ‘more or less corrupt after 1885.’¹⁸

Election corruption had a social value in so far as it ensured regular contact between the governing elite and the urban masses, especially its leaders. It was one of the principal means of social control. When in March 1839 John Dover, a weaver and beer-house keeper

and by then a leading Chartist in Norwich, was brought before John Marshall, the mayor, to answer charges, he was accused during cross-examination of being 'a noisy fellow'.

With a lack of deference that contemporaries would have associated with the radicalism of Chartism, Dover replied:

'I know I am a noisy fellow. I have been noisy for the Whigs, and you Mr. Marshall have paid me for making a noise for them'.¹⁹

This courtroom episode provides rare specific evidence that a leading Whig member of the Norwich elite had employed a working-class leader for political ends. The radicalism of Chartist objectives, however, threatened to break this link between the elite and the masses and upset the political equilibrium in Norwich, and elsewhere. Chartism defied traditions and customary practices and sought to liberate the working class from dependence on largesse and charity. If Chartism had succeeded there would have been no need for drink as a currency of interchange between elite and masses.

John Dover had been confident enough to challenge his supposed social superior in open court and avoided retribution for the time being. However, Chartist leaders like Dover, who had once manipulated the masses and their drinking culture on behalf of the elite, became prime-targets for the city fathers in their determination to regain control over their workers. In 1841, in the course of the parliamentary election, John Dover was attacked by a mob, apparently of his fellow Chartists, in the 'Kings Head' public house in St. George's where he lived with his common-law wife, Charlotte Humphrey, and was only saved from their anger by the arrival of a detachment of Dragoons led by the mayor. These strange events followed the rumour that Dover had sold his fellow-Chartists by accepting £50 to withdraw his nomination of a Chartist called Eagle after private talks with the sponsors of the Tory and Whig candidates. Was Dover perhaps the victim of a sting organised by the elite? The newspaper source is hostile to him as a Chartist and the affair is puzzling. It does

seem significant that for the next three years Dover was able to resume his place and role within the working-class community, his reputation seemingly restored.

However, in 1844, Dover and another weaver called Ross were arrested and put on trial for possession of stolen silk. The elite were determined to eliminate him as a political and social danger and they did so under the guise of ending his economic threat. Handloom weavers in Norwich, faced with the competition from the factory system, had developed a system known as “heigh-ho” in which they sold on, for their own financial benefit, left-over bobbins of silk thread supplied by the merchant. Dover could have expected a fine of £20 from a magistrate for this first offence. In fact, the city Recorder, Isaac Jermy, and a jury sentenced Dover and Ross to fourteen years transportation. Yet a year later, when Thomas Springfield, a silk manufacturer, former mayor, and magistrate, himself tried most of those arrested in a major police-raid that had recovered stolen cloth to the alleged value of one thousand pounds, the publican of the ‘Cellar House’ in St. Martin at Oak received only the standard fine of £20. Clearly, John Dover’s political threat warranted a different degree of severity.²⁰

The importance of the drinking place and drink in the history of Chartism has perhaps been neglected. Dover was a publican-weaver and drinking places served as important locations both for the “heigh-ho” system and within the nexus of Chartist links. When in March 1839, Joseph Thrower, the secretary of one of the Democratic Clubs in the city, was brought before the mayor he stated he was secretary of the club which used the public houses known as ‘The Staff of Life’ and the ‘Tom and Jerry’, kept by Mr. Storey, and met once a fortnight. Evidence was given on the same occasion that John Dover and John Love, the Chartist Methodist preacher, had been seen together at the ‘Angel’, kept by Mr.

Howlett in St. Martin at Oak.²¹ According to another informant, radical clubs at this time had supplies of pikes that were held at the 'Cottage' behind Patteson's Brew Office in Pockthorpe, the 'Angell' in St. Martin at Oak, the 'Roebuck' in Peafield, Lakenham, and the 'Shuttle' in St. Augustine's, all public houses in some of the poorest areas of the city.²² Moreover, Chartists were generally not inclined to the temperance cause. R.A. Clarke, the Norwich schoolmaster Chartist who started out as a Temperance man, was warning in 1848 of the dangers of temperance as a diversion leading to collaboration with the middle classes.²³

In the first half of the nineteenth century, a system of electoral corruption had become embedded in the drinking culture of the working class. Those members of the urban elite who manipulated this system had come under attack from Chartists, as well as being criticised by progressives from within the elite. Chartism no longer remained a political threat after 1848 but it seemed as if the progressive voice was winning the argument as political reform became increasingly more acceptable to members of parliament at Westminster, leading to the passing of the second *Reform Act* (1867) that added 700,000 voters (nearly 140%) to the English borough electorate. J.P.D. Dunbabin has argued:

'As far as the borough franchise is concerned ... the politicians of 1867 secured some 40 years of quiet, 50 years of stability'.²⁴

Terry Gourvish and Alan O'Day concluded that the electoral reforms of the last four decades of the nineteenth century:

'succeeded in satisfying the aspirations of the 'responsible' working classes for political recognition and the desire of the governing classes for stability'.²⁵

Within Norwich, the electorate increased from a figure of 5,912 in 1866 to 13,296 in 1868, and then to around 15,000 in 1885 and 20,000 in 1906.²⁶ Such an extension of the suffrage

seemed to satisfy the needs of both the elite and most of those they governed, with the important exception of the movement for female suffrage.

Such developments, in the long term, did signal the demise of electoral corruption and the passing of the political significance of the working-class drink culture. However, corrupt practices in Norwich and elsewhere took time to eradicate; they were, it can be argued, still serving a social, political and economic function in a period when political developments were initially providing more opportunities for illegal practices. By 1865, fewer members of parliament were being returned unopposed and so there were significantly more contested elections. As J.P.D. Dunbabin has concluded:

‘More contests meant greater opportunity for disturbance; and the management of an expanded electorate entailed more bribery’.²⁷

Progressives did rise to this challenge; the experience of the 1868 election converted many people to the necessity of the Secret Ballot Act (1872) that reduced the rowdiness of election contests but did not necessarily end bribery. Penal disenfranchisement following successful petitions alleging corruption sent clear messages of the consequences of not accepting the new public morality. However, the ‘real watershed’ came when the Corrupt Practices Act (1883) made it an offence for anybody other than the candidate’s agent to incur expenses during a contest and required a full declaration of authorised expenses, and imposed a ceiling on such expenses. Establishing committee rooms on licensed premises during parliamentary elections was banned, and the following year this prohibition was extended to municipal elections. The widespread redistribution of constituencies in 1885 also ‘facilitated the emergence of a more sober political future’.²⁸ Nevertheless, Norwich was one of the last enclaves of resistance to this new order, one of ten constituencies still not fully purged of corruption by 1885.²⁹

For over two decades a pattern of petition, which twice resulted in a parliamentary enquiry, was established in Norwich, providing graphic evidence of the persistence of electoral corruption and its place within the drinking culture of the Norwich citizenry. Petitions to parliament alleging corruption followed the elections in 1868, 1870, 1875, and 1885. Royal Commissioners of Enquiry arrived in Norwich to make a full investigation of corruption in 1870 and 1876. Norwich was disenfranchised between 1876 and 1880, and between 1885 and 1890 the city lost the representation of one Member of Parliament after Harry Bullard was unseated following an 1885 election petition.³⁰ Such political lessons in the new public morality carried a financial penalty too; in February 1878 the Lords' Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury requested payment by the city of £3,943 19s 2d, the cost of the 1876 Commission. It was a sum equivalent to a rate of 5d in the pound.³¹

So endemic was the link between electoral corruption and the drinking culture of the working class that the Liberal party in Norwich was tainted, although led by men of virtuous reputation such as Jacob Henry Tillett and James Colman who had an attachment to the cause of Temperance and a commitment to 'progress'.³² Such was the intensity of party conflict in Norwich, made perhaps more bitter still by the feeling of some Conservatives that the old order had to be preserved at all costs, and certainly reinforced by the patterns of corrupt electoral behaviour established over generations, that even Tillett found himself unwittingly compromised and unseated in 1871 and 1875.³³

The link between the drink culture of the city and its corrupt practices is evident in the documentation of the Royal Commissions. Following the 1868 parliamentary election in Norwich, J.H. Tillett, the unsuccessful Liberal candidate, filed a petition charging the elected Conservative member of parliament, Sir Henry Stracey, a local landowner, and his

agents with being guilty of bribery, treating and undue influence, and also claiming the seat. The Royal Commission of Enquiry reported in March 1870, unseating Stracey but taking care to exonerate him personally.³⁴ The officials acting for him, however, were found to have hired and organised bands of men to parade the streets and attend the meetings at which he spoke, for a payment of 2s a day and some beer. About £81 had been distributed before polling day to men of the 'lower classes', some of who were electors.

The Commissioners' *Report* concluded:

'This money was mostly spent in the beer-houses and served, no doubt, to increase the popularity of the Conservatives'.

It would have also been to the economic advantage of the brewers and the retail drink trade; electoral corruption linked with drink necessarily worked in the interests of brewers who were generally traditionalist members of the urban elite and would not have been blind to the increased profitability of their retail outlets at election time.

If the arm of the new public morality had spared Sir Henry Stracey, its reach still extended into the ranks of the governing classes. Edward Stracey, the son of Sir Henry, and Arthur Bignold, the son of the late Sir Samuel Bignold, a leading Conservative in Norwich in the early-Victorian period and former mayor and Member of Parliament, were both forced to leave the country to avoid being examined by the Commissioners.³⁵ They had apparently hatched a scheme in the early afternoon of polling day to procure a £200 loan from Mr. Webster, the landlord of a Norwich hotel, for the purpose of bribing some of the hundreds of newly enfranchised voters who were waiting in public houses and declaring they would not vote without payment. The dishonesty of some of the agents employed to do the fixing, and the shortness of time before the closing of the polling booths, meant only around forty-five votes were bought. The Commissioners' *Report* in 1870 indicates a social structure in

Norwich in which members of the elite and members of the working class colluded in illegal practices for reasons that each could find justifiable.

The *Report's* description of the events of polling day on the 17 November 1868 revealed how the citizenry asserted their corporate strength, located in their own drinking places.

They were not prepared to lose wages as a result of being laid off work for the three election days and they expected their interests to be satisfied and their needs met by those in power. Such an expectation is itself testimony to a high measure of social cohesion:

‘...at an early hour it became apparent that numbers of the electors, principally consisting of those who had been newly placed on the register, were indisposed to vote, either from indifference or in the hope of getting money. During the morning these persons wandered about the city, or stood in groups in the Market Place ... but towards the middle of the day they congregated at various public houses. When asked to go to the poll, they then directly or indirectly intimated that they should not do so unless they were paid, or provided with beer for voting; in many instances they required three days’ pay, which they had lost in consequence of the places where they were employed being closed. They were quite ready to vote for either party who paid them, and this a considerable number of them when examined before us avowed ...’

The Commissioners in 1870 established that the customary practice at Norwich elections was for the poorer electors to act independently in selling their votes, to make their own bargains in the market place or the drinking place, and for these transactions to be conducted often through the medium of volunteers who entered into it in the knowledge that they would be recouped for their work. Robert Hardiment, a tanner and fell monger, bought around thirty votes for the Conservatives for £60 at Clarke’s beer-house in St. Martin’s, going on to buy more votes at the ‘Woolpack’ public house and a beerhouse in St. Mary’s.³⁶ Mr. Green, a timber merchant, secured the votes for the Conservatives of twenty of the twenty-four men gathered at the ‘Thorn Tavern’ on a conditional promise of money. Sir Henry Stracey himself arrived at the ‘Trumpet’ public house around noon where around twenty-five men had been waiting to be paid for their votes since early morning. He left when they declared their position, wisely avoiding a direct association

with the corruption, but shortly afterwards two agents acting for the Conservatives started bargaining with them as a result of which sixteen or seventeen agreed to vote for the Conservatives for 7s 6d each.

‘Treating’ was also established as another corrupt practice that took place in 1870. A publican, Samuel Fletcher, of the ‘Anchor’ public house adjacent to and owned by the Pockthorpe brewery of Steward, Patteson and Finch, had spoken to Mr. Lamb, a clerk in the employment of Henry Staniforth Patteson, the brewer and Conservative supporter of Sir Henry Stracey, before buying thirty voters for a single 10s payment that Lamb subsequently repaid. The Commissioners concluded that treating went on ‘at many of the public houses, among which we may mention the ‘Horse Shoes’, the ‘Ship’, the ‘Recruiting Sergeant’, and the ‘Catherine Wheel’, yet ‘the publicans ... with one or two creditable exceptions, swore that they knew nothing of what took place in their house on the day of the election’. It seems plausible to suggest that a chain of collusion stretched from Conservative parliamentary candidate to Conservative supporters within the elite such as the gentleman brewer, Henry Staniforth Patteson, and then through the brewery, enveloping employees and publicans at drinking places owned by the brewery, until finally ending in the purchased vote of a needy but newly-enfranchised member of the Norwich working class.

The Royal Commissioner’s Report in 1876 on the conduct of the parliamentary elections in 1874 and 1875 again provides detailed evidence for the link between the drink culture of the city and its corrupt practices.³⁷ On its publication, the editorial of the *Norwich Mercury* made clear a sense of shame in the city, both echoing and quoting from the grander thunder of the *Times* in London which had termed Norwich as:

‘the old offender ... convicted under various counts, pronounced hopelessly corrupt and depraved, and waiting the sentence that is to close – or at least suspend its guilty career.’

The issue of Norwich corruption was significant for progressives who believed that there was no place for such practices in their Victorian age. However, it had been the intensity of contemporary party politics at both a national and local level that had helped produce this resurgence of corruption in the city and the ‘Drink Question’ was one important factor contributing to the polarisation of political opinion.

Gladstone’s Liberal ministry of 1868-1874, with its impressive record of reforming legislation, had aroused expectations of licensing restriction within the temperance section of the ‘advanced radicals’. This component of the ‘Liberal coalition’ nevertheless remained unsatisfied and its supporters became disillusioned with their own government and the pull of Whiggery.³⁸ The ‘Drink Question’ was deeply divisive. In 1871, H.A. Bruce’s licensing bill had alienated the drink interest and helped initiate the swing of unpopularity against the government.³⁹ The Licensing Act (1872) was more moderate, ‘a cross-party measure rather than a victory for the puritan extremists’, and only regulated the granting of new licences in addition to restricting the opening hours of public houses.⁴⁰ It therefore disappointed the temperance members of the ‘Liberal coalition’, and the United Kingdom Alliance went so far as to put up their own candidates against those of the Liberal Party in by-elections in 1873.⁴¹

The issue of licensing reform had not only widened the gap between the ‘Trade’ and the Temperance movement; it had also exposed the tensions within the Liberal Party and revealed key differences in the understanding of the term ‘liberalism’. For the United Kingdom Alliance and its supporters, ‘liberalism’ required the state to suppress the individual liberties of publicans and brewers in the greater liberal cause of saving the

masses from the human misery and poverty caused by drunkenness. Bernal Osborne, the radical MP, neatly summarised the alternative liberal position in his opinion that he 'would rather see England free than sober'.⁴² Brewing families who had become identified with the Liberal Party were beginning to feel such ideological tensions. The politicisation of the 'Drink Question', following the founding of the United Kingdom Alliance in 1853, had led by 1872 to an increasing identification of the Liberal Party with the temperance cause and the Conservative Party with the drink interest.⁴³ Nevertheless, this process was not completed in the early 1870s; in fact Harrison has concluded:

'Secessions of drink manufacturers from the Liberal Party occurred steadily over a period of forty years ... Only by the 1890s was there any approach to a clear party division on the temperance question...'⁴⁴

Within Norwich, the passing of the Licensing Act, however moderate a measure it might have seemed to others, led one Liberal brewer, Harry Bullard, to cross the floor of the council chamber in November 1872 and join the Conservatives, taking with him his brother Charles and brother-in-law John Boyce who were also councillors. Another Liberal brewer active in local politics, John Youngs, remained within the party but for Harry Bullard it was a matter of conscience; he felt he could no longer serve his family's interests as brewers within the Liberal Party:

'I have seriously taken this step ... I conscientiously believe that what I have done is right. I can just as well serve the ratepayers on this the Conservative side of the Chamber as on the other.'⁴⁵

The intensity of feeling over the 'Drink Question' in Norwich during 1872 is evident in reports in the *Licensed Victuallers Gazette*, established in July 1872 as a national weekly newspaper to campaign against the United Kingdom Alliance and other threats to the 'Trade'. A leader in July had indicated the sense of paranoia that was typical of its editorials, at least until Gladstone's defeat in 1874, with its reference to:

‘the extensive question of licensing, which is now among the foremost social questions of the day, and aggravated into an undue and unhealthy prominence by being made the “Shibboleth” of a persecuting puritanical minority of meddling legislative Tinkers ...’⁴⁶

Although such a source will be biased, its reports of Norwich disturbances do convey the particular intensity of passions raised by the Drink Question at this time. On July 1 and July 2 1872, United Kingdom Alliance representatives spoke in Norwich at the Market Place and at the Corn Exchange. According to the correspondent:

‘...the Alliance demagogues endeavoured to force their doctrines down the throats of the Norwichians who “would not have it”. On the first evening, a merry brass band, with a very vigorous drummer, assisted by a powerful vocal chorus, who joined in the popular melody of ‘Hey, John Barleycorn’ soon outvoiced the intrusive speakers. The following evening ... these fanatics were forced to retire within the Weigh-Bridge House and (I) regret to state windows were smashed by the insulted and outraged crowd’.⁴⁷

Freedom of speech was a liberty to be denied those who threatened the right to drink.

Political opinion had intensified in Norwich, as elsewhere, due in large measure to the significance of the ‘Drink Question’ for urban society. The majority of the city population, the working classes, depended on drink, and, within the urban elite, brewers were key figures as manufacturers and magistrates and as owners of so many of the city’s drinking places. Representation at Westminster seemed to matter more than ever as the traditional drink culture and its associated electoral practices came under Temperance attack. The corruption evident in the 1874 and 1875 elections had some of its roots in the licensing reform crisis of 1871-1872 and the associated intensification of party political feeling.⁴⁸

The sudden increase in the electorate following the second Reform Act (1867) was another key element in the mid-1870s corruption scandal as it had been in 1868.⁴⁹ The poverty of the newly enfranchised contributed to the electoral corruption. The Royal Commissioners’ *Report* in 1876 established that labour was very low-priced in the wholesale shoemaking and clothing trades that had replaced the traditional manufacturing industries of Norwich and in which ‘work, to a great extent, is done as piece-work at men’s own homes.’ The

Commissioners also found that large sections of the poor population, with estimates varying up to 7000 men, constituted a migratory section which ‘wandered from ward to ward ... and tenement to tenement’ in search of employment. The greater proportion of these – ‘at least 3000’ – were now said to be enfranchised, despite the second Reform Act’s stipulation that the franchise for occupiers of dwelling-houses required a residency of at least twelve months. The *Report* itself acknowledged it was ‘agreed by all conversant with the subject that a 10 per cent reduction in the register (was) required’. It was the ‘necessitous condition’ of so many of these new voters that paved the way for the ‘setting on’ or ‘putting on’ system which both parties employed in the 1874 and 1875 elections and this electoral malpractice was once again deeply embedded in the traditional drink culture.

Not only poverty, piecework too helped to create the conditions for this corrupt system. As the *Report* noted, many Norwich workers ‘were freed from the check imposed upon time and wages by the regular hours of workhouses and factories’. It was therefore claimed that they were ‘only too willing to exchange the monotony of their occupations for the processional, musical and other fascinations of a Norwich contested election’.⁵⁰

Many of the recently enfranchised Norwich workers were it seems both poor and available for political activity at a price and so willing participants in the scandal revealed by the Commissioners. Through the ‘setting on’ system over three thousand of the electorate in 1875, nearly one third of those who voted, were illegally paid with the intention of securing their votes. The Conservatives had employed 2148 agents, the Liberals 910 (a figure generally assumed to be a significant understatement), at 3s 6d per diem (or 5s on polling day) as “messengers”, “bill-posters”, “watchers”, or “procession men”. In fact they did little or nothing. For the price of a week’s rent, votes were being bought and this trade was taking place in the committee rooms of the two political parties, forty-seven rooms in

the case of the Conservatives and fifty-nine for the Liberals. These committee rooms were in public houses or beerhouses where some at least of the money would have been spent in the consumption of beer. The drink culture of the working class had once more provided the context for electoral corruption.⁵¹

In 1874 and 1875, as in 1868, the drinking places were at the centre of corrupt practices. Members of the urban elite and members of the working class again colluded in these illegal practices without any apparent sense of wrongdoing at the time. A network of relationships had developed for corrupt purposes during elections in Norwich, embedded within the drink culture and indicating a significant measure of social cohesion. It was, however, a social system dependent on deference and poverty and the common acceptance of drink and cash as media for satisfying the needs and interests of the working class. The extension of the franchise in 1867 gave this system fresh impetus and a variation in form despite its illegality but it could not survive the decline of deference, the increase in prosperity, and the diversification in the economy that together had signalled the end of its social utility by the 1890s. Until then, brewers remained vital figures at the interface between the urban elite and the masses, and must therefore have played key roles, however silently, within this collusive system. The collapse of that system coincided with the retreat of the brewer from the public world of civic duty into more private preoccupations.⁵² The social role of the brewer changed as the primary place of drink in society was itself modified.

Brewers were by implication amongst those castigated in the *Times* leader in March 1876, reprinted in the *Norwich Mercury* special edition, for failing to understand the necessity of reform and the advantages of ‘progress’:

‘But by far the most lamentable part of the matter is the absence, or the indifference, or the weakness, of the better classes ... The fact exhibited by such a report is a scandal for a country which has been doing nothing but reform itself all this century, and a scandal to an age supposed to be fairly on the road to final perfection. We seem, after all, to be just where we were a hundred years ago. Here is a great town, a cathedral city, the capital of a province, so much at the mercy of its lowest classes that it can only be gained to one side or another by the vulgarest form of bribery ...’

The London newspaper, however, failed to appreciate the degree to which this corruption worked to the mutual advantage of members of the Norwich elite and the masses they governed. Even ‘advanced Liberals’ like Tillett who were the first to condemn corruption could not escape its effects in Norwich.⁵³ Nevertheless, the *Times* did have some insight into the importance of the drink culture, naming ‘liquor supply’ as the foundation for the electoral malpractice in Norwich:

‘When one passes enough streets in which one house in every twenty is a public house, and one sees dirt and misery all about, one is not surprised to know that the people there have a better appreciation of drink than of public men or public measures ... the twelve thousand electors who would not be bribed (have been) wholly unable to save their city from reproach, and secure that the choice of a representative should not depend on the liquor supply’.

The ‘setting on’ system that had led to the corruption of over three thousand of the electorate worked though and in public houses and beerhouses. The *Report* noted that in addition to forty-five beerhouses and nineteen grocers’ licences there were 594 fully licensed public houses in Norwich. The Commissioners were ‘astonished’ to find that over one hundred of these had been retained, at various prices, in the March 1875 election and that even more had apparently been retained in the 1874 election. They concluded that:

‘the public houses where the committee rooms are situated conduce to the systematic corruption of the whole town ... The system was designed to secure the influence of the

landlords amongst their customers, as well as their own votes ... It provided at numerous points throughout the city influential lines of communication between the ward-managers and the messenger-class of voters ... and very many of these voters were known to the publicans and are directed to those attractive centres, rendered conspicuous by party colours; where they are either 'set on' by the clerks, and sometimes even by the publicans themselves, or transferred to the central committee room of the ward for any enjoyment which may incline them to favour that party'.

The connection between publican and voter in this corrupt electoral practice was acknowledged; any corrupt political link between the brewer and the publican, however, remains a matter of surmise. Yet as owners of many of the public houses, and as employers of numbers of the publicans, as well as manufacturers of the beer retailed in these licensed premises, it seems plausible that brewers too colluded in these traditional practices.

At a time when the public house still provided the main source of relaxation and leisure-activity for the poor and the supply of beer constituted a vital source of uncontaminated liquid, the publican served a social role of considerable importance. In the period between the second Reform Act (1867), with its enfranchisement of over six thousand of the urban working class, many of them poor and 'necessitous', and the Corrupt Practices Act (1883) that effectively stopped the use of public house rooms for political purposes, brewers, publicans and public houses became even more significant in the social and political systems of Norwich during both municipal and parliamentary elections. The *Report* named two publicans, William de Caux and J.T. Aldous, who were prepared to admit that the use of committee rooms in public houses was intended for corrupt purposes by both parties.⁵⁴

An analysis of the link between the politics of the breweries that owned the public houses used for these corrupt purposes and the political party hiring rooms in those drinking places indicates a trend one might have expected.⁵⁵ Youngs in 1875 remained the only brewery supporting the Liberal Party and fourteen 'corrupt' public houses - nearly a

quarter of the fifty-nine used by the Liberals - were owned by Youngs. Conversely, only five public houses owned by Youngs appear on the list of forty-seven used by the Conservatives. The Bullard family switch from the Liberal to the Conservative camp less than three years previously complicates the picture since it evidently left thirteen Bullard pubs and publicans still supporting the Liberal party. Four of the six Bullard pubs on the Conservative list were purchased in 1873 from licensees or other individual owners so there are signs of the new party affiliation, but the traditional Bullard allegiance to the Liberals seems to have remained significant for a number of its publicans. Morgans were the smallest of the main Norwich breweries, the brothers Henry and J.B. Morgan buying the Tompson brewery in King Street in 1845, and, although councillors, their support for the Conservatives did not attract the same attention as that of Henry Staniforth Patteson or Harry Bullard.⁵⁶ Pubs owned by Morgans do not seem so well-defined in their political allegiance and appear in both lists with nine Liberal and ten Conservative pubs. The Patteson brewery support for the Conservatives was clearly shown by its eleven 'corrupt' pubs and publicans – nearly a quarter of the forty-seven used by the Conservatives, and by the fact that only five Patteson pubs appeared on the Liberal list.

Nevertheless, these instances of pubs and publicans that do not follow the political allegiance of the brewery suggests a degree of political independence that is noteworthy, as is the high number of 'free houses' on both lists, with twelve each for the Liberals and for the Conservatives. Although the more political of the breweries were clearly influencing the politics of their pubs and publicans, there was at the same time a significant measure of political independence within the drinking culture of the working class in Norwich.

Who, then, was to blame for the scandal of ‘setting on’ in the public houses of Norwich? In 1868, it seemed that thirteen committee rooms had been enough for the Liberals and one may assume that the Conservatives had about the same number; some persons unknown had realised the vote-securing potential of such a scheme before the 1874 election, repeated the scam in 1875, and in effect came out of the public enquiry scot-free. Although there are token scalps to parade – for example, seventy-one named persons guilty of bribery and thirty-one named persons bribed – no one of any social importance was brought to justice. The Commissioners were too close to times of revolutionary fear and too aware of the potential for class antagonism to risk a modern-day concern for exposing all to public accountability. They contented themselves by asserting that blame lay with a small section of the constituency:

‘... those who on both sides control the Parliamentary and Municipal elections and who lack an adequate sense of their duties and obligations.’

The Commissioners were insisting on the adoption of a new public morality; the Norwich urban elite had been told to abandon their traditional practices, however popular and socially cohesive. In these circumstances, prominent Liberals and Conservatives are ready with their public declarations against corrupt practices, including the two brewer-politicians quoted in the *Report* who attempt to shift the focus from the parliamentary to the municipal elections:

‘Mr Youngs, the Sheriff of the city in 1873, a partner in a firm of brewers of Norwich, a member of the Whig section of the Liberal party, and an active politician (except in his year of office) stated his belief that the municipal contests were “the schools for the corrupt practices at the parliamentary elections”. ... Mr Harry Bullard, a partner in another firm of brewers, now a member of the Conservative but formerly of the Liberal party, who has been on the Town Council, concurred in the opinion that the municipal elections were ‘hotbeds of corruption’.

Whatever the part brewers had played in the traditional electoral system, they need to make clear their public commitment to the new order and morality. Provincial ways had to mend

when faced with the indignation of the law and central government. However, the Commissioners had no desire to upset the social equilibrium in Norwich by calling into question the integrity of any member of the urban elite, not least a prominent brewer, as is clear from the account of the Buttifant affair in the *Report*.⁵⁷

Josiah Buttifant was a secretary to a local insurance society – the Norwich Union Fire Society - and had also been an election agent for the Conservatives for many years; at the time of the 1874 election he was working with and under Mr Sparrow who had been engaged as the principal election agent. Henry Staniforth Patteson, the senior managing partner of Steward Patteson and Finch, ‘a brewer, and a gentleman occupying an influential position’, was a prominent member of the Conservative Party and had been appointed expenses agent for both Conservative candidates in the 1874 election at the particular request of one of them, Mr Huddleston (later Baron Huddleston), for whom he had acted as expenses agent in the 1870 election. Patteson had served as a director of the Norwich Union Fire Society since 1848 and had been a vice-president since 1874. It was Patteson, as ‘president’ of the insurance society that employed Buttifant, who instigated the prosecution against him that led to a penal sentence of fifteen years for forgery and embezzlement of funds. Buttifant insisted at his trial that he had acted in good faith and was moving funds under direction.

Buttifant had been found guilty but the Commissioners actually visited him in prison in order to conduct a further investigation after his wife had written a letter to Baron Huddleston threatening to tell all she claimed to know, believing as she wrote: ‘that the charges have emanated from a vindictive feeling on the part of several members of the Conservative Party at Norwich’.⁵⁸ That letter had prompted the attention of the Royal

Commissioners who then encountered a refusal by Buttifant in prison to answer any questions. Such are the bare bones of the Buttifant affair as they appear in the *Report*. Whatever the truth of the affair, there would seem to have been some link with the extraordinary flow of cash during the 1874 election but the Commissioners could not establish its nature. Vital evidence had disappeared. Buttifant had possession of nearly all the papers that had reference to the conduct of the 1874 election on the Conservative side at the time of his arrest, but they had been ‘dispersed’. Mr Stephens, on the Liberal side, had destroyed all his papers in September or October 1874 when he considered resigning his position as registration agent and felt that the papers would be of no further use to him. The Commissioners expressed surprise but made no further judgement. A possible connection between insurance society funds, election expenses and the ‘setting on’ system was apparent but without evidence had to remain inconclusive.

Without doubt, electioneering in Norwich in the mid-1870s required a considerable flow of cash. Any Victorian election candidate could expect to face a hefty expenses bill at the end of a campaign but in Norwich in the 1874 and 1875 elections those expenses were so extraordinary as to indicate malpractice. With the relevant papers missing, the Commissioners estimated that the expenses in 1874 had been excessive but probably less than for the following year. In the 1875 campaign, a minimum of around £535 a day had to be raised to pay 3,058 agents at 3s 6d a day. In a contest lasting nine days the Liberals paid out around £1,800 to ‘employees’ and the Conservatives £1,650. The total bill that the two Conservative candidates eventually shared between them, after much dispute, anger, and eventual compromise – and after Buttifant’s imprisonment - was £4,274. Henry Staniforth Patteson was the expenses agent responsible for this money. It was likely that the urban

elite of Norwich and not least its brewers had had a learning experience they would not easily forget in the election scandals of 1874 and 1875.

The concern that followed the instigation of the Royal Commission and its *Report* in March 1876 had brought into vivid focus the importance of the public house in Norwich social and political life. The drinking place also had an economic importance as the basis of the prosperity of the four main brewery firms in Norwich in the mid-1870s. The intense political rivalry at this time led not only to electoral corruption and the national castigation that followed; it also had the effect of further increasing the sales of alcoholic drink in Norwich and so boosting the profitability of the Norwich brewers. A case can be made that Norwich brewers, who had been important public figures throughout the nineteenth century, were at their most prominent for a period of around a quarter of a century after the passing of the second Reform Act when the potential for electoral corruption for a while increased and the significance of the working-class drink culture for politics was especially pronounced.

In particular, Harry Bullard's later career made him 'probably the best known of all Norwich citizens of his time'.⁵⁹ He held the office of mayor on three occasions: 1878, 1879, and 1886, after switching his political allegiance to the Conservatives in 1872. In 1885, his sense of political duty, and an awareness of the interests of the family brewery at a time when the Temperance threat was substantial, led him to accept the nomination as Conservative candidate in the parliamentary election. His family's dependence on the drink trade may have shaped Bullard's political life but it was the difficulty of separating politics from the drink culture in Norwich that denied him electoral success in 1885. Once more, although this time finally, a member of parliament for Norwich was unseated after a

petition. Bullard lost his seat and Norwich its representation for five years after allegations of 'bribery, treating, undue influence, and personation by agents' during the election. In fact the only case of bribery to be proved was a gift of a two-shilling piece by an alleged agent to a voter and this set-back did not prevent Bullard being knighted in 1886 and being elected the Conservative member of parliament in 1890 and 1895.⁶⁰

In conclusion, the deaths of Henry Staniforth Patteson in 1898 and Sir Harry Bullard in 1903 brought to an end a generation of gentlemen-brewers who, like their fathers before them, became politicians out of a sense of duty and self-interest. The next generation of brewers did not follow this pattern and events in the 1890s help provide key explanations for this difference. The primary role of drink in society was modified due to the increase in prosperity, diversification in the economy, and the development of alternative leisure-activities. The shift in public morality and the effect of national legislation ensured that the link between politics and drink through electoral corruption was generally broken or stretched close to breaking point as in Norwich.⁶¹ The movement towards all the bigger brewery partnerships becoming limited liability companies between 1885 and 1900 seemed to ensure a financial security for family members of brewing firms not dependent on civic and political action.⁶² A politics shaped by deference, social control and drink was being replaced by a system more informed by professionalism, democratic representation and sobriety. Social cohesion was no longer so dependent on drink.

Footnotes to Chapter 9

- ¹ See above, pp.180-181, for the introduction of this argument.
- ² J.P.D. Dunbabin, 'Electoral Reforms and their Outcome in the United Kingdom, 1865-1900', in T.R. Gourvish and Alan O'Day (eds.), *Later Victorian Britain, 1867-1900* (Basingstoke, 1988), p.95
- ³ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (Hounslow, 1984), pp.11-36.
- ⁴ Thompson, *Chartists*, pp.341, 344, 352, 361.
- ⁵ In particular, NHC, N320, Gerry Chaney 'Notes on Norwich Radicalism', two boxes of unpublished research papers which include material from contemporary local newspapers. A valuable mid-Victorian source is A.D.Bayne, *A Comprehensive History of Norwich* (London, 1869). Frank Meeres, *A History of Norwich* (Chichester, 1998) also contains useful material.
- ⁶ *Drink*, p.332.
- ⁷ Bayne, *Norwich*, pp.320-321. 'Treating' refers to drink bribes; Harrison (*Drink*, p.330) made the point that 'treating was a convenient way of controlling large constituencies' and had 'long been more common in municipal elections, with their relatively wide franchise, than in national elections.
- ⁸ Bayne, *Norwich*, p.514.
- ⁹ Gourvish and O'Day (*Later Victorian Britain*, p.1) argued that: 'Britain, by the norms of other nations, enjoyed high degrees of social cohesion and national unity built on consent and co-operation between the governed and the ruling order'.
- ¹⁰ Bayne, *Norwich*, pp.379-404.
- ¹¹ Bayne, *Norwich*, pp.392-393, 395. P.J. Corfield, 'The Social and Economic History of Norwich, 1650-1850' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1976), p.335, concluded that: 'Norwich industry conspicuously did not revive with the national economy in 1828-29. Disputes became even more bitter in 1829 ... unemployed weavers paraded in the streets playing muffled drums and carrying shuttles bound in mourning crapes ... a Norwich manufacturer, William Springfield, was fired at and wounded'. Social cohesion in the city could be stretched to breaking point at times of economic crisis.
- ¹² Bayne, *Norwich*, pp.381, 398-400. Derek Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Oxford, 1979), pp.15-16, made the point that 'it was fear of what the democratic municipal franchise might throw up that underlay all Tory protests ... Political Radicals saw municipal reform as one battle in the war against a ramified aristocratic establishment'.
- ¹³ *NN*, 28 Mar./ 4 Apr. 1863, quoted in Bayne, *Norwich*, pp.320-321.
- ¹⁴ Bayne, *Norwich*, pp.320-321.
- ¹⁵ Bayne, *Norwich*, p.321.
- ¹⁶ John Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857-1868* (London, 1966), pp.96-106.
- ¹⁷ H.J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management Politics in the time of Disraeli and Gladstone* (London, 1959), p.283.
- ¹⁸ Hanham, *Elections*, p.281, note 3. The other corrupt constituencies were Gloucester, Ipswich, Maidstone, Rochester, Shrewsbury, Southampton, Walsall, Worcester, and Yarmouth. Norwich, Ipswich and Yarmouth are East Anglian; others of the ten constituencies also have barley-growing hinterlands. The brewing and agricultural interests perhaps had a role in the survival of such corruption.

- ¹⁹ *NC*, Mar. 1839, quoted in Chaney, ‘Norwich Radicalism notes’.
- ²⁰ Chaney, ‘Norwich Radicalism notes’, in particular a draft: ‘John Dover – Chartist leader’.
- ²¹ *NC*, Mar. 1839.
- ²² Meeres, *Norwich*, p.138.
- ²³ *NN*, 25 Dec. 1847, quoted in Chaney, ‘Norwich Radicalism notes’.
- ²⁴ Dunbabin, *Electoral Reforms*, pp.97, 103.
- ²⁵ Gourvish and O’Day, *Later Victorian Britain*, p.6.
- ²⁶ *NM*, 2 Mar. 1870; Barry Doyle, ‘Middle Class Realignment and Party Politics in Norwich, 1900-1932’ (unpublished Ph.D thesis, UEA, 1990), vol.2, p.368.
- ²⁷ Dunbabin, *Electoral Reforms*, p.103.
- ²⁸ Dunbabin, *Electoral Reforms*, pp.103-105; Paul Jennings, *The Public House in Bradford, 1770-1970* (Keele, 1995), p.211.
- ²⁹ See above, p.312.
- ³⁰ *NM*, 2 Mar. 1870, 2 Mar. 1876; NHC, C CCOL, *An election address: ‘Colman and Tillett and their Electoral Contests in Norwich’* (1886); Charles Mackie, *Norfolk Annals: a chronological record of remarkable events in the nineteenth century, compiled from the files of the Norfolk Chronicle* (2 vols., Norwich, 1901), II, p. 366, 17 Mar. 1886.
- ³¹ Mackie, *Norfolk Annals*, II, p.264, 15 Mar. 1876.
- ³² See above, Chapter 8, pp.289-295.
- ³³ *Colman and Tillett*, pp.8-10, 16-19.
- ³⁴ *NM*, 2 Mar. 1870. This special edition carried the full report of the Royal Commissioners’ Enquiry into the 1868 election. The quotations and references that follow (pp.318-320) are taken from this source.
- ³⁵ Stracey was arrested on his return and tried at Norwich Assizes in April 1870 when the Attorney General himself conducted the prosecution. The jury found him not guilty. “No sooner was the announcement made than deafening cheers were raised in the court, and it was in vain that the officers tried to suppress them.” (Mackie, *Norfolk Annals*, II, pp.200-201, 31 Mar. 1870.) The force of ‘deference’ seems still to have had considerable power.
- ³⁶ In 1870, Hardiment was serving six months for corruption in the 1869 municipal elections. He had not been examined by the Commissioners to prevent him gaining immunity from prosecution. At the April Assizes in Norwich he was found guilty and sentenced to ten months, the sentences to be concurrent. (Mackie, *Norfolk Annals*, II, pp.200-201, 31 Mar. 1870.) With Stracey being found not guilty, there seemed to be one type of justice for the ‘higher’ orders, and another for the ‘lower’.
- ³⁷ *NM*, Mar. 2 1876. This special edition carried the full report of the Royal Commissioners’ Enquiry into the 1874 and 1875 elections. The quotations and references that follow (pp.323-336) are taken from this source.
- ³⁸ T.A. Jenkins, *The Liberal Ascendancy, 1830-1886* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp.132-141; G.R. Searle, *The Liberal Party* (Basingstoke and New York, 2001), pp.11-18.
- ³⁹ Jenkins, *Liberal Ascendancy*, pp.133-134.
- ⁴⁰ Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London, 1993), p.241.
- ⁴¹ Jenkins, *Liberal Ascendancy*, p.134.
- ⁴² P.H. Bagenal, *Ralph Bernal Osborne MP* (privately printed, 1884), p.325, quoted in Jenkins, *Liberal Ascendancy*, p.135.
- ⁴³ See above, pp.275-276.
- ⁴⁴ *Drink*, pp.278-280. Harrison noted that the number of brewing and distilling interests in the two parties were evenly balanced in 1868. The long-term trend was then towards clear party division on the temperance question but the Liberal party still had as many as 22

brewing and distilling interests in the parliaments from 1874 to 1885, although the Conservatives now had 30.

⁴⁵ *LVG*, 30 Nov. 1872, p.367. Also see above, p.243.

⁴⁶ *LVG*, 13 July 1872, p.33.

⁴⁷ *LVG*, 13 July 1872, p.35.

⁴⁸ The intensity of political feeling and the link with the drink issue were exemplified in a magisterial fracas that took place in August 1872. There was a fight between two councillors, a Liberal, Mr. R.W. Blake and a Conservative, Mr. C.E. Bignold, while application was being made for the exemption of the 'Suffolk Arms' in the Market Place from the provisions of the 1872 Act at the annual Brewster Sessions. Mr. Youvall of the 'Morning Star' at Dukes Palace Bridge alleged that Mr. Blake had assaulted him during the struggle with Mr. Bignold on the magistrate's bench. (*LVG*, 31 Aug. 1872, p.157)

⁴⁹ The Enquiry Report of 1876 gave these figures for voting categories, 1866-1875:

	freemen	occupiers	freeholders	lodgers	total
1866	1981	2607	1324	-	5912
1868	1984	9798	1488	26	13296
1875	1674	11941	1331	24	14953

The Commissioners concurred with the general view that the "humbler classes of voters in Norwich are very poor, as well as very numerous."

⁵⁰ See below, Appendix 4, p.366, for an account of the spectacle of Norwich election processions in 1874 and 1875, taken from the Royal Commissioners' *Report* of 1876. It is noteworthy that 'many witnesses' thought that Norwich was a safer place at election time because the parties employed 'roughs' who were provided by 'certain publicans who were well known in Norwich for their experience in this kind of business'. Social cohesion seemed to depend on traditional practices. The Commissioners, however, disagreed and looked to an effective Norwich police force to keep order.

⁵¹ See below, Tables 9.1A and 9.1B, pp.326-329, for the lists of 'corrupt' Liberal and Conservative drinking places and their ownership in 1875. The lists appeared in the *NM* special edition (2 Mar.1876) that published the full *Report* of the Commissioners. I have established the ownership of those public houses from the First Register of Victuallers Licences. The five Liberal and four Conservative drinking places for which I could not establish ownership are likely to be beerhouses and their registers are not extant. Also see below, pp.331-332, for an examination of the link between brewer ownership of these public houses and political allegiance.

The election outcome in 1875 was a Liberal victory by 798 votes:

Jacob H.Tillett (L) 5877

Col. Josiah Wilkinson (Con) 5079

The total number of voters on the Register was 14,953.

⁵² See above, pp.167-168, 228-229, 245.

⁵³ See above, p.317.

⁵⁴ William de Caux was the publican from 1870-1877 at the 'York Tavern' in Castle Meadow, a public house belonging to the Liberal brewers, Youngs, and one of the fifty-nine Liberal committee rooms. John Aldous was the publican from 1872 to his death late in 1875 at the 'William IV' in Coburg Street, another public house with Liberal committee rooms but belonging to Bullards, the brewing family that had turned from the Liberals to the Conservatives in 1872. John Aldous gave some indication of the splits that must then have followed within the ranks of publicans and 'regulars' at Bullard public houses when he testified before the Commissioners that 'I have upwards of 100 customer voters – 60 on one side, 40 on the other ... The real object (of the hire of committee rooms) was for votes ... as well as the publicans' own votes'.

⁵⁵ See above, Tables 9.1A and 9.1B, pp.326-329.

⁵⁶ Walter Rye, *Norfolk Families* (Norwich, 1913), p.566.

⁵⁷ E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (London, 1973), p.4, noted the importance of recognising ‘the vastly greater reliance on local initiative, which characterised parliamentary legislation for much of the nineteenth century’. Although ‘compulsion became more common towards the end of the century, particularly in the fields of public health and education’ (p.5), in the seventies there was still, within local government, a strong emphasis on ‘independence from supervision by central authorities’. (p.6) The Commissioners from London and the urban elite within Norwich would have been involved in a measure of delicate negotiation; a necessary readjustment of the balance between the centre and the locality was taking place in the interests of social equilibrium.

⁵⁸ It had been Huddlesone’s elevation to the Bench as Solicitor-General, becoming Baron Huddleston, which had required the calling of the March 1875 parliamentary election in Norwich. This was a seat the Conservatives would have been keen not to lose with Disraeli forming his Tory administration only the year before.

⁵⁹ Patrick Palgrave-Moore, *The Mayors and Lord Mayors of Norwich 1836-1974* (Norwich, 1978), p.25.

⁶⁰ Herbert H. Bullard, *Sir Harry Bullard, A Record of a Busy Public Life* (Norwich, 1902); Mackie, *Norfolk Annals*, II, p.366, 17 Mar. 1886.

⁶¹ See above, pp.312, 315-17. Hanham’s judgement that Norwich and nine other constituencies were still ‘more or less corrupt’ after 1885 points to the difficulty of eradicating a culture that supported corrupt practices. Nevertheless, there seems to be an absence of specific evidence of electoral corruption.

⁶² See above, pp.227-229.

CONCLUSION

Victorian social cohesion depended to a significant degree on drink. Those who held power, within Norwich and elsewhere, were able to use working-class dependence on the consumption of beer to maintain social order and control. In Norwich and other urban centres, one consequence of urban growth in the nineteenth century was the expansion in the supply of alcoholic drink to satisfy the needs of this enlarged population. The drinking place was a social necessity that became ever more important. If the Victorian period can be seen as a time of consolidation when a social order was developed appropriate to an urban, industrial, capitalist society, then this process was itself dependent, to some degree, on the addiction of the majority of the population to society's legal drug, alcohol.

The working classes needed their public houses and beerhouses. They made their meaning in life in response to poverty, lack of education, and unhealthy living and working conditions. Inadequate sanitation and water supply problems meant that beer answered a dietary need for a liquid that was safe to drink in a society where an alternative such as tea only became affordable and acceptable to increasing numbers later in the century.

Depressant comfort came directly from their consumption of alcoholic drink. The ambience of their drinking places brought further social comforts. In Norwich, as in Bradford, Portsmouth, London and other urban centres, most social and political functions were connected with the public house. It served as a recreation centre, a meeting place, and sometimes as a transport centre. Its social role remained significant throughout the late-Victorian period even as changes in transport and diversification of leisure-interests began

to broaden working-class horizons. The 'local' was a key social institution. Most public houses in Norwich experienced sufficiently long periods of publican stability to have played an important role in the development of working-class communities.

The drinking place remained the main leisure-time location for the working classes in part because the rate of urban growth in industrial Britain produced a complex nineteenth century housing problem that remained intractable. The public houses and beerhouses provided both public spaces when these were unavailable elsewhere, and relief from the squalor of rented accommodation. In these circumstances, Victorian social cohesion depended perhaps as much on the supply and consumption of beer as the legislative measures passed at Westminster or agreed within city councils.

Social cohesion was also helped by the key political role that drink and the drinking place played for much of the period. In Norwich, as elsewhere, sections of the urban elite used the working-class dependence on drink to their own political advantage at election time through bribery, treating, and the control of organised gangs of 'roughs'. These traditional practices appeared corrupt to those seeking reform but they were difficult to eradicate as is indicated by the two Royal Commissioners' Reports on electoral malpractice in Norwich in the 1870s.

Social cohesion depended on effective interfaces between the urban elite and the working-class majority, and the drinking place and its regulation served a vital role in this respect. Such an overview of drink, drinking, and drinkers by the elite citizens of Norwich was an exercise in social control. In fact, there was little overt interference with the infrastructure of drinking. Although Norwich had the highest density of drinking places to population in

England, the urban elite in the 1870s was proud that the city could boast the lowest rate of drunkenness. Those who held power could congratulate themselves on their increasing control over the drinking habits of both the working-class majority and the working-class members of the police that the elite had set up as an agency of social control.

The infrastructure of drinking in Norwich was effective not least because brewers were key members of the urban elite and had influential roles within the Watch Committee, the employer of the Police Force, and other local government committees. Members of particular brewing families felt called by a sense of duty and business acumen to involve themselves in the polity of Norwich. Their insistence on the values of deference and conservatism reinforced the social control exercised by the elite and so further deepened the social cohesion that had been in part developed by the consumption of the beer they brewed and the attractions of the drinking houses they supplied and owned.

Yet there were splits within the elite over the issue of drink. Commanded to show love and compassion for their neighbour by the teachings of the Christian faith and yet concerned to increase their own and the nation's wealth, those who had wealth and power argued and divided. The Temperance Movement developed as a consequence of the challenge to traditional Christian ethics presented by the excessive consumption of drink in this new industrial and urban context. For many supporters of Temperance, the sin of excessive drinking provided the explanation for the poverty and lack of virtue they identified within the working class. By 1901, Norwich - like other urban areas - was becoming a more sober, compassionate and just society. But this was not due to the victory of Temperance but rather to a shift in the 'structure of feeling' that saw a wider sense of social responsibility, shaped by the traditional Christian ethic of care for those in need, becoming

more acceptable within the ranks of the elite. Solutions to poverty and disease were now seen in terms of municipal and state schemes for improvements in living conditions and health. A measure of redistribution of wealth was regarded as appropriate.

These are the conclusions of this historical study that has been concerned to incorporate an important lesson of the 'new cultural history': the need to keep the focus on how people actually put together and made sense of what they were experiencing. I have avoided explanations that depend on conceptual structures that are too rigid and therefore lacking in subtlety and depth. The use of sources such as the local press, the surviving minutes books of local government committees, licensed victuallers' registers and decennial census returns, has helped develop insights into understanding the role of drink in Victorian Norwich in particular and the process of social transformation in the Victorian world in general.

Asa Briggs, in the 1950s, argued that English Victorian cities 'responded differently to the urban problems which they shared in common'. Further research centred on the role of drink in urban centres will help establish whether, and in what circumstances and to what degree, Norwich was different from - or similar to - other urban centres in its response to the issue of drink. The argument of this thesis is that drink was a means of developing and maintaining social cohesion not only in Norwich but also in other cities and towns.

Whatever the differences between municipalities in their responses to urban growth and the development of working-class communities, the drinking habits of the working class provided an opportunity for social control and policing that was common to all urban elites. More research can establish the extent to which advantage was taken of this opening. It can also help answer such questions as how typical was either the involvement

of Norwich brewers in urban politics or the mutual Christian respect of some Norwich Temperance leaders and brewers for each other. In Liverpool, the antagonism between temperance and drink interests was more marked but it seems unlikely to have affected the role of drink as an agency for social cohesion and therefore as a vital element in the process of social transformation in the Victorian world.

APPENDIX 1.1 – 1.4

**Four representative sheets
from the Ordnance Survey (1883),
reprinted at a reduced scale of
1:1250**

Source: NHC, NOR: QA, L911.42615
(Southampton, Ordnance Survey, 1971)

APPENDIX 1.1

There are 30 drinking places and 23 courts and yards in this first mapped area. (See the shaded rectangle below for its location within Norwich.)

APPENDIX 1.2

There are 47 drinking places and 4 courts and yards in this second mapped area. (See the shaded rectangle below for its location within Norwich.)

APPENDIX 1.3

There are 18 drinking places and 11 courts and yards in this third mapped area. (See the shaded rectangle below for its location within Norwich.)

APPENDIX 1.4

There are 23 drinking places and 25 courts and yards in this fourth mapped area. (See the shaded rectangle below for its location within Norwich.)

APPENDIX 2.1

DRINK MAP of NORWICH (1878),

**United Kingdom Alliance,
Norwich Auxiliary**

Source: NHC, Box XII, 1878, Ch.p 233

APPENDIX 2.2

***DRINK MAP* of NORWICH (1892),**

**Norfolk and Norwich Gospel
Temperance Union**

Source: NHC, Box XII, 1892, Ch.p 239

APPENDIX 3.1

'Bess of Bedlam' public house, Oak Street, St. Martin at Oak, Norwich [c. 1895]

The 'Bess of Bedlam' was known until 1867 as 'Mad Moll'. This Youngs public house on a main thoroughfare provides an example of publican long-term stability. It had only two licensees from 1867 until it was closed under the national compensation scheme in 1907. James Baker served from 1867-1884; Robert Arthurton from 1885 to 1906.

Source: NHC, NP00013168 (Photographer: George Swain)

APPENDIX 3.2

'Black Horse Inn', St. Giles Street, St. Gregory, Norwich [1901]

This Steward & Patteson public house had three short-term licensees between 1867-1871. John Amies then held the licence from 1872 until his conviction in 1880 for selling intoxicating liquors at illegal hours. One medium-term licence holder followed and then in 1885 the licence was issued to Henry Rowland who remained in place until 1905. The house was rebuilt in 1903. It sold 69 barrels of beer and 67 gallons of spirits in 1901, a balance typical of many central Norwich drinking places.

Source: NHC, NP00003224 (Photographer: John W. Gavin)

APPENDIX 3.3

‘Cellar House’ public house, 249 King Street, St. Peter Southgate, Norwich [c. 1895]

The King Street thoroughfare had one of the highest densities of drinking places in Norwich. Youngs purchased the ‘Cellar House’ pub in 1893. Its previous owners had been Frederic Brown and his son who were resident in King Street. John Clarke remained the long-term licence holder from 1868 to his death in 1909, keeping the licence despite two fines for selling drink outside permitted hours in 1898 and 1901.

Source: NHC, NP00001836

APPENDIX 3.4

‘City Arms’ public house, St. Andrew’s Hill, St. Andrew’s, Norwich [c. 1897]

Grimmer & Co. of St. John Maddermarket owned this central Norwich pub from 1873 until the Yarmouth brewery, E. Lacon & Co. purchased it around 1895. Charles Widdows was the long-term licence holder from before 1867 to 1898. His successor, William Burrage, was refused a renewal to his licence in 1899 and the house ceased trading.

Source: NHC, NP00013486 (Photographer: George Swain)

APPENDIX 3.5

'Light Horseman', Botolph Street, St. Saviour, Norwich [c. 1895]

This Youngs pub had two short-term and two medium-term licence holders between 1868 and 1880. Benjamin Houchin held the licence from 1881 to 1896. The pub was closed under the national compensation scheme in 1911.

Source: NHC, NP00003218

APPENDIX 3.6

‘Two Necked Swan’ and ‘Half Moon’, St. Peter Mancroft, corner of Norwich Market Place [c. 1895]

These two Steward & Patteson public houses served a central market area and one experienced publican instability. The ‘Two Necked Swan’ had eleven licensees between 1867 and 1898 when it ceased trading and its licence was transferred to the ‘Cygnet’, a new Steward & Patteson public house in Pockthorpe. It sold 76 barrels of beer and 39 gallons of spirits in 1897, a moderate but still profitable turnover. The ‘Half Moon’ had five licensees between 1867 and 1903, the last, Henry Knight, holding the licence from 1884 to 1903. His successor, Charles Stubbs, held the licence until 1922, the year before the pub was closed under the national compensation scheme. It had sold 181 barrels and 71 gallons in 1894 but trade had declined by 1901 when the figures were 80 barrels and 32 gallons.

Source: NHC, NP00003174 (Photographer: W. Boston)

APPENDIX 3.7

‘Princess of Wales’, Rose Lane, St. Peter Mountergate, Norwich [c. 1895]

This public house was first licensed in 1869 and owned by Mrs. Anna Ruddick of Rose Lane, Norwich. Matthew Ruddick, perhaps a relative, married Anna Kilburn, the widow of the first licensee, William Kilburn, in 1871 and became the licence-holder until 1877. Bullards bought the property in the early 1890s.

Source: NHC, NP00013411 (Photographer: George Swain)

APPENDIX 3.8

‘Steam Packet’ (rear view), King Street, St. Julian, Norwich [c. 1895]

In 1867, there was a sign change from ‘Steam Barge’ to ‘Steam Packet’. This Youngs pub had another sign change around 1900 and became the ‘Ferry Inn’. Long-term licence holding is evident. William Thompson held the licence from 1867 to 1883 when it was transferred within the family to William John Shingles Thompson who held the licence for a couple of years. William John Aldous was the licensee from 1887 to 1894, followed by Albert John Aldous from 1895 to 1907.

Source: NHC, NP00002062

APPENDIX 3.9

‘Three Pigeons’ public house, St. Benedict’s Street, Charing Cross, Norwich [c. 1890]

This Morgans pub had one long-term licence holder, James Lane, from 1867 until his conviction and £5 fine with costs of 17s 6d for allowing intoxicating liquors to be consumed at illegal hours in 1881. Three licensees followed before 1891 when the licence was not taken up and the house was pulled down for a ‘Public Improvement’. A new licence was then granted to Henry Morgan for a house to be built on the south side of St. Benedict’s Street, Charing Cross, in place of the old demolished pub.

Source: NHC, NP00013400 (Photographer: George Swain)

APPENDIX 3.10

‘Waggon & Horses’, St. George Tombland, Norwich [c. 1897]

This Steward & Patteson public house provides another example of publican long-term stability. It had one licensee, Joseph Wilde, from before 1867 to 1895. Benjamin Rufus Blomfield then held the licence from 1896 to 1899, Mary Ann Blomfield from 1900 to 1901, and James Rufus Blomfield from 1903 to 1906. It sold 60 barrels of beer and 77 gallons of spirits in 1894, a balance typical of many central Norwich pubs. However, the Blomfield family period of licence holding increased turnover and profitability. In 1901, the figures were 297 barrels and 92 gallons.

Source: NHC, NP00013493 (Photographer: George Swain)

APPENDIX 3.11

‘White Rose’, St. Margaret’s Lane, St. Mary Coslany, Norwich [c. 1895]

This public house remained in private ownership until 1887 when Bullards bought the property. It had two long-term, three medium-term, and four short-term licence holders between 1867 and 1901. In 1908, the pub was closed under the national compensation scheme.

Source: NHC, NP00009372

APPENDIX 3.12

‘King’s Arms’ public house, Bishop Bridge, Thorpe, Norwich [dates unknown]

This image shows two photographs of this Youngs pub at different periods. Robert Tidman was the licensee from 1868 to 1892, Charles Franklin from 1893 to 1896, Sarah Franklin from 1897 to 1898, and Alfred William Bell from 1899 to 1925. It seems plausible that Robert Tidman might have been the landlord of the pub shown in the upper picture; Alfred William Bell the landlord of the pub shown in the lower picture.

Source: NHC, NP00012539

APPENDIX 4

The Norwich elections (1874 and 1875) – an account taken from the Royal Commissioners' Report as published in the *Norwich Mercury*, 2 March 1876

“A practice had for a long time prevailed in Norwich of organising at the different elections very costly and largely attended processions, accompanied by bands of music and banners, for which at night were added hundreds of torches, blue lights, etc.

These processions were generally arranged to escort the candidates to and from large public meetings, but on the polling day the rival bands, with their banners, paraded the city from morning till night.

Besides the organised processions, it seems to have been customary for the candidates themselves to drive about the city in carriages with four horses and liveried outriders, attended by runners on foot. Sometimes they were accompanied by their friends on horseback, and on one occasion, viz. the election of 1874, the attendance in costume of the performers at a circus then open in the city, was offered to the Conservatives, and accepted by them.

Excessive for many eyes, this sort of display was especially lavish in 1874 ... At least £1000 was spent on the Liberal side and the Conservatives were not undone ... (It) provided an opportunity for further extending the system of colourable employment. Men were employed at 1s - 2s 6d each and sent by ward [there were eight wards] and divisional [there were eighteen polling divisions] managers as necessary. Even 3s 6d was paid when a torch or banner was carried.

Several bands were permanently engaged for election week with sometimes up to 24 performers in the band. 10s 6d with refreshments was paid a day, and 20s on polling day.

The processions already referred to, and the meetings at which the candidates address the electorate, furnish a further pretext for the employment of large numbers of men for so-called purposes of protection. These men are taken for the most part from the class of men known as “roughs” and many of them are cattle drovers. They are engaged by certain publicans who were well known in Norwich for their experience in this kind of business, and who were able to send 25-50 men to any part of the city at the shortest notice.

These men were mostly employed only on a day to day basis but some were permanently engaged by each side for the whole election at 2s 6d – 3s 6d a day.

Generally they were well under the control of their leaders and under strict instructions not to create disturbance. But on polling day in 1874 and 1875 those employed by the Liberals unquestionably created a considerable disturbance.

Many witnesses agreed that though their recent employment had been excessive they were necessary to the safe conduct of the election. 22 people had been taken to hospital in 1870 when the Conservatives abstained from employing roughs.”

“Prudence”, in the words of one witness, “required what propriety shunned”. The Royal Commissioners, however, felt that the city police, reinforced if necessary, were sufficient to safeguard public order.

Source: *NM*, 2 March 1876

