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Abbreviations

CAMRA – Campaign for Real Ale
CC – Commissary Court
CS – Court of Session
DCA – Dundee City Archives, City Square, Dundee
GUA – Glasgow University Archives
ML – Mitchell Library, Glasgow
NLS – National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
NMRS – National Monuments Record of Scotland, Edinburgh
NRS – National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh
NSA – New Statistical Account of Scotland
OSA – (Old) Statistical Account of Scotland
PKA – Perth and Kinross Archives, A. K. Bell Library, Perth
PP – Parliamentary Papers
RCAHMS – Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
SBA – Scottish Brewing Archive, Glasgow University Archives
SC – Sheriff Court
SLTA – Scottish Licensed Trade Association
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Introduction

A History of Drinking: The Scottish Pub since 1700

If fewer instances of intemperance, impurity and prodigality appear in the country than in the town in proportion to the number in each, it is perhaps chiefly, because simplicity of manners is less liable to corruption in the former than the latter, from a multiplicity of low ale houses, these seminaries of impiety and dissipation (Old Statistical Account, Forfar, 1792)

The Scots have long had a problematic relationship with alcohol. The quotation above from the Reverend John Bruce, minister of Forfar, shows that, even before the rise of the temperance movement in the 1820s, ministers of the Church of Scotland were critical of the role played by ale houses, dram shops and tippling huts in the lives of their parishioners. The (Old) Statistical Accounts, published in the 1790s on a parish-by-parish basis, are full of criticisms by Presbyterian ministers of rising levels of crime, drunkenness, alcoholism and consequent impoverishment of families, as a result of the replacement of beer by whisky as the drink of choice for the masses. Their anxieties were strengthened because this was a period of rapid social and economic change, with large-scale population growth and population movement, growing urbanisation and industrialisation, accompanied by widening social divisions. It was also a period in which existing social and political orthodoxies were being challenged, as the examples of American independence and revolutionary France lent encouragement to republicans, secularists and others who questioned the existing social, religious and political order. Pubs and ale houses were closely involved in these changes, as public spaces, often below the radar of the authorities, where artisans, labourers, craftsmen, farmers, shopkeepers and others could meet to discuss matters including economics, work, religion and politics, as well as local gossip. For example, the Reverend John Scott of Perth, a substantial burgh with a population of 19,800 in 1792, condemned ‘the lamentable effects which happen to some persons, from
their being too ready to leave their loom, or their workshop, to meet in companies, or in clubs, or in the ale house.\textsuperscript{1}

The centrality of the pub as a meeting place and as the location of choice, together with the church, for the celebration of major life rituals such as births, christenings, marriages and funerals has been played down or ignored by many Scottish historians. In \textit{The Making of the English Working Class}, E. P. Thompson referred to ‘the enormous condescension of posterity’ when faced with ‘the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the “obsolete” hand weaver, the “utopian” artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott’.\textsuperscript{2} A similar condescension may explain why many historians have tended to ignore the importance of the ale house, the inn, the tavern, the dram shop, the tippling house, the shebeen and the licensed grocer in the lives of the mass of the Scottish population.\textsuperscript{3} An exception must be made for the folklorists, ethnologists and anthropologists, associated with the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, who have consistently adopted a different and more inclusive approach.\textsuperscript{4}

Academic historians, however, have recently begun to focus on studying the everyday in Scottish life, as exemplified by the four-volume series \textit{A History of Everyday Life in Scotland}, published by Edinburgh University Press, which is based on the premise that Scots ‘made sense of their everyday lives . . . through ritual and belief, by their interactions with others and by self-reflection’.\textsuperscript{5} This has been the approach in this book, where I argue that the public house and its numerous variations were, in the words of the Scottish writer Ian Rankin, ‘a place of rules and rituals’.\textsuperscript{6} Everyday life has more commonly been studied in other European countries and in North America than it has in Scotland. The Annaliste historians in France, for example, have concentrated on material culture and on ‘microhistories’ of an individual, village or particular incident to understand the \textit{mentalité} of the particular society they were drawn from.\textsuperscript{7}

\textbf{HISTORIOGRAPHY}

There is no Scottish equivalent of Peter Clark’s \textit{The English Alehouse. A Social History, 1200–1830} (1983), or of Brian Harrison’s detailed examinations of nineteenth-century English pubs and the temperance movement.\textsuperscript{8} Many Scottish historians have exercised a kind of self-censorship and remained largely silent about the functions and impact of public houses, taverns, ale houses, shebeens, dram shops and licensed grocers. For example, a book on Victorian Dundee\textsuperscript{9} where, in the 1840s,
there was one pub for every twenty-four families,\textsuperscript{10} has only two references to drunkenness in the index, one to whisky but none at all to ale, dram shops, shebeens, licensed grocers or public houses. Similarly, Martin Mitchell’s otherwise excellent book on \textit{The Irish in the West of Scotland, 1797–1848}\textsuperscript{11} contains no references at all to public houses, dram shops, shebeens or even whisky in the index, despite the fact that keeping a pub or a shebeen was a well-recognised route out of poverty for first- or second-generation Irish immigrants, or that pubs, together with churches, functioned as places where recently arrived migrants went to look for work and lodgings and to seek the company of their fellow countrymen. Finally, a recent photographic record of Scotland includes many photographs on popular and obscurer sports in its section on ‘Leisure and Recreation’ but not a single one of a pub interior or exterior, despite the centrality of the Scottish pub in the development and support of sports such as horse racing, football, boxing, rugby or curling. It does include, however, some illustrations of breweries and distilleries.\textsuperscript{12}

Certainly, the Scottish temperance movement made no such mistake in underestimating the importance of drink and the public house in Scottish society. In his \textit{Artificial and Compulsory Drinking Usages of the United Kingdom}, published in 1839, the prominent Scottish temperance reformer, John Dunlop, displayed a detailed and well-researched knowledge of the numerous functions of public houses in early nineteenth-century Scotland. They included the use of drink in life rituals such as marriage, baptism and funerals, the payment of wages in public houses, and their function as a location for other workplace rituals, such as those associated with apprenticeship rites of passage, the ‘treating’ of foremen by workers, and ‘pay-off’ celebrations.\textsuperscript{13}

There are, however, honourable exceptions among historians to this relative neglect of the history of the public house. Interestingly, given the male-dominated ethos of many Scottish pubs, some of the earliest work on the topic was written by women. Marie Stuart’s book on \textit{Old Edinburgh Taverns} (1952) may be somewhat antiquarian in tone but is nonetheless generally well informed, particularly on the many literary associations of Edinburgh pubs.\textsuperscript{14} Some thirty years later, two female museum curators published well-researched booklets on drink-related topics – one on the temperance movement in Scotland, the other on Dundee drinking places. Elspeth King’s excellent study of the Scottish temperance movement dates from 1979 while Veronica Hartwich’s \textit{Ale an’ A’Thing}, a pioneering study of the licensed trade in Dundee, was published a year later.\textsuperscript{15}
Among male historians, the pioneer in this, as in many other subjects, was Laurence Saunders in his remarkable *Scottish Democracy, 1815–1840*, published in 1950, which included a section on the temperance movement and drinking practices in Scotland. In 1979, Ian Donnachie produced a major study of the Scottish brewing industry and, in the same year, an article on ‘Drink and Society’. Another pioneer was T. C. Smout whose *Century of the Scottish People, 1830–1950*, published in 1986, contained a masterly chapter on ‘Drink, Temperance and Recreation’. Two years later, Chris Whatley, in a chapter on the ‘Experience of Work’, explored the ways in which ‘alcohol continued to be an integral part of the working lives of Scots well into the nineteenth century’, a theme continued in a later work, *Scottish Society, 1707–1830*. Bill Knox discussed similar themes in his *Workplace Nation, 1800 to the Present*.

The recent *The Scottish Town in the Age of the Enlightenment* claims that, in the eighteenth century, ‘Inns and taverns remained the principal sites of sociability among lower-class males, weavers and other artisans’, where ‘artisan clubs and societies met’ and were ‘very much part of the fabric of normal urban living for working males’.

**APPROACHES**

The ideas for this book emerged partly as a result of research for two previous publications. While researching *From Popular Enlightenment to Lifelong Learning*, I discovered that Scottish pubs had been the meeting place for numerous self-improvement groups for working men until the rise of the temperance movement in the 1820s and 1830s. Similarly, research for *The Rise and Fall of the Scottish Cotton Industry, 1778–1914*, revealed that urban pubs were the meeting places of choice for trades unions, strike committees and radical political groups until the 1850s and, as such, fell under the scrutiny and suspicion of the authorities and their network of informers. In this way, they functioned as a more ‘democratic’ and less exclusive version of what Jurgen Habermas has characterised as ‘the bourgeois public sphere’ where the literate urban bourgeois public took on a political role in the discussion and evaluation of contemporary affairs and state policy. Habermas used as an example the clubs, salons and coffee houses of eighteenth-century London which were supported by a growing and increasingly free press to form a ‘critical forum’, largely independent from the court. In both England and France, coffee houses and salons emerged as ‘centres of criticism – literary at first, then also political’. There were, however,
striking national differences. In England and Scotland coffee houses and taverns were largely male institutions whereas the French salon was ‘essentially shaped by women’, and upper-class women at that. In Scotland, urban and rural pubs and taverns functioned at a humbler social level with a wider and less elitist clientele. Their regular clientele in the eighteenth century ranged from the labouring poor to skilled artisans, as well as lawyers, doctors, merchants, farmers and shopkeepers, and they became centres for many kinds of social and political debate – from anti-Unionists and militant Jacobites to the Friends of the People and United Scotsmen.

Anthropology can also offer insights into drinking spaces, drinking practices and behaviour across different cultures. Mary Douglas, in the late 1980s, argued that ‘in most cultures, alcohol is a normal adjunct to celebration’ and that ‘drinking is essentially a social act, performed in a recognised social context’. She claimed that alcohol has three major constructive functions. Firstly, it has a social role in everyday life, often linked to celebration of life events. It can also be linked with informal social networks of friends, work colleagues, and family and community groups. Secondly, it can be seen as a form of ritual. The American anthropologist, Joseph Gusfield, contrasted the roles of coffee and alcohol. He argued that ‘coffee cues the shift from playtime to work-time and alcohol cues the transition from work to playtime’.

Of course, this is very much a late twentieth-century North American viewpoint, and the divisions between work and leisure were not so clear-cut in eighteenth-century Scotland, though they became more marked in the next century. Finally, Douglas argued that drinking, selling drink and the production of alcohol are significant economic activities and ‘entrenches the alternative economy’. The example used in the book is the alcohol (vodka-based) economy in eighteenth-century Poland but it could apply equally well to Scotland where the ‘black economy’ flourished in the form of unlicensed ale houses and dram shops, illegal whisky stills and, in urban areas, the underground shebeen and the brothel.

In this book, I want to examine what went on in Scottish pubs, their social history and economic importance. I want to explore the differences between Scottish and English pubs, to set the pub in its European context, and discuss the ways in which pubs functioned as public spaces and how this was modified by the temperance movement. I also hope to make a contribution to the history of popular culture in Scotland. Public houses and the drinks they sold were important revenue raisers for local and national government and were licensed, regulated and
documented accordingly. They were frequently viewed with suspicion by the authorities as places where the lower classes could gather to discuss unorthodox opinions, largely removed from the scrutiny of their social betters. In this way, pubs could provide space for a subversive or alternative culture and act as a counter to the somewhat stifling hegemony of Presbyterianism, thrift, self-help, temperance and respectability that came to dominate nineteenth-century Scotland from the 1820s onwards. The French philosopher Michel Foucault defined ‘the Other Victorians’ as those who lived ‘below the radar’ of convention and challenged, rejected or ignored dominant cultural norms such as thrift, sobriety, self-denial, sexual repression and ‘respectable’ behaviour. In Foucault’s scenario, ‘the brothel and the mental institution would be those places of tolerance’. To this duo we can add the pub and its various manifestations, together with the prison.

Because this is a wide-ranging survey over three centuries, the book will not attempt to cover all aspects of the subject but rather those that illustrate continuity and change in the functions of Scottish drinking places, and how they were influenced by changes in society and by practices and habits from other cultures and other countries. Most previous books about Scottish pubs have taken the form of city or regional guides and concentrated on the buildings, their interiors, location, the types of drink served and so on. Because of that, this book will not focus primarily on buildings, interiors and locations, except where they illustrate significant changes taking place in response to social, cultural, economic or political pressures. It will also not concentrate on the Scottish brewing industry or whisky distilling because these have been treated at length elsewhere.

There is a rich literature on Scottish pubs, from the eighteenth-century poets, who spent a good deal of their time drinking and socialising in Edinburgh taverns, to contemporary Scottish novelists, such as Irvine Welsh and Ian Rankin, who write knowledgeably and perceptively about late twentieth-century and present-day pubs. There have been numerous books about pub architecture, buildings and interiors, fixtures and fittings, and the types of drink that were, and are, sold in them. These books, often written from the standpoint of a member of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) can be at worst a rather tedious list of public houses and the types of beer sold in them. At their best, however, they can represent a real labour of love, with a lifetime of detailed knowledge and research going into them. There has also been a thriving literature on local and regional pubs, particularly those in urban centres, such as Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling. In the last
decade, the architectural historian David Walker has written on ‘Inns, hotels and related buildings’ in Scotland, CAMRA has published a book on Scotland’s heritage pubs and their interiors, and Historic Scotland has produced a book on historic pubs.\textsuperscript{30} The recent \textit{Scottish Life and Society, A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology}, Vol. 5, \textit{The Food of the Scots} also contains valuable insights and information into the Scottish drink trade and Scottish drinking practices.\textsuperscript{31} There are numerous books on Scotch whisky making and drinking practices, from Bremner and Barnard’s nineteenth-century classics\textsuperscript{32} to more recent publications.\textsuperscript{33} Brewing has been well served by Barnard’s four-volume nineteenth-century study and a modern history by Ian Donnachie.\textsuperscript{34} Gourvish and Wilson’s book on the \textit{British Brewing Industry} also contains valuable material on Scotland, as does G. B. Wilson’s much earlier book \textit{Alcohol and the Nation, 1800–1935}.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{DEFINITIONS}

There was, and is, a complicated hierarchy of drinking establishments in Scotland with a nomenclature to match – hotels, taverns, inns, public houses, ale houses, brewseats, change houses, dram shops, tippling houses, shebeens and licensed grocers. As early as 1424, the Scots Parliament passed an act for inns to be set up for travellers and their horses, providing food and accommodation for men and animals. Twelve years later, a curfew of 9.00 p.m. was imposed on the consumption of wine, ale or beer in inns by travellers, which suggests that such inns actually existed.\textsuperscript{36} In 1480, William Moyes was authorised or licensed to sell red Gascony wine in his Aberdeen tavern at 6d a pint.\textsuperscript{37} This shows that state and local regulation of drinking places in Scotland predated the Reformation. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a range of alcoholic drinks, including ale, wine and spirits, was available for sale, often in private houses, where brewing was frequently carried out by women.

The brewing of beer was heavily gendered, with women dominating the trade in some periods, men in others. One of the earliest references to ale and brewing in Scottish literature is to a female alewife or brewer – \textit{The Ballad of Kind Kittock} – which Maurice Lindsay attributes to William Dunbar (1460?–1520?).\textsuperscript{38} Kind Kittock is a Fife alewife or ‘Guddame’ who dies and goes to heaven but quits in disgust because the ale there is sour, poor-quality stuff. She returns to earth to drink her own good ale, ‘for to get hir ane fresche drink, the aill of hevin wes sour . . . than to the ailhouse agane she ran the pycharis to pour,
and for to brew and baik’. In the same period, a list of 152 brewsters (brewers), drawn up in 1509 in Aberdeen, revealed that all of them were female, though most were married to free burgesses, who had the right to brew and to bake bread.

Dundee was a stronghold of the reformed faith, being ‘honoured with the appellation of a second Geneva’. In January 1558/9 the Bailies and Council of Dundee imposed a curfew after 10.00 p.m., when ‘no person (was) to be found walking in the streets or gaits of the burgh, or drinking in any ale house or wine tavern after ten hours of the night, under the pain of forty shillings for the first fault and for the second fault to be banished’. A few years later, they also prohibited ‘dancing, drinking, playing or sic vain exercise’ after 9.00 p.m., ‘under the pain of the breking of the minstrel’s instruments’. In October 1564, Dundee Town Council appointed some of their members personally to inspect the quality of ale in the burgh and found that ‘the ale brewen be David Spankie’s wife was sufficient’.

After the Reformation, the kirk session often took it upon itself to monitor ale houses rather than rely on the secular authorities. For example, in Balmerino in Fife, the kirk session decreed in 1637 that any brewer selling ale on the Sabbath ‘after or befoir noon, betwixt the ringing of (the) hindmost bell and the dissolving of the preaching’ should pay a fine of 40 shillings ‘and make their repentance before the pulpit’. Similarly, in Govan in Lanarkshire, the kirk session summoned Elisabeth Craig, wife of John Watson, in 1651, to question whether ‘shoe did detain ane drunken man in her hous and sell aile to him’. She denied this but admitted that ‘ane cam (whom shoe knew not) and desired a pynt of aile and so went his way’. This kind of semi-domestic, proto-industrial arrangement involving alewives lasted a long time in Scotland.

English travellers famously gave horrified descriptions of the failings of Scottish lodgings and drinking places, and Scots sometimes agreed with them. In 1598, Fynes Morrison claimed that, in Edinburgh, English-type hostelries were unknown but ‘in all places some houses are known, where passengers may have meat and lodging: but they have no bushes or signs hung out, and for the horses, they are commonly set up in stables or in some out-lane, not in the same house where the passenger lyes’. The continuing absence of English-style pub signs in Scotland is confirmed a hundred and fifty years later by a traveller to Aberdeen in 1748 who complained ‘when we entered New Aberdeen, it was with difficulty we found a Public House, which they call Change Houses, there being but one Sign in the whole Place to notify such a House, thot’ there

are many of them in it’.\textsuperscript{46} As late as 1774, the English Captain Topham wrote of Edinburgh ‘there is no inn that is better than an alehouse, nor any accommodation that is decent, cleanly or fit to receive a gentleman’. In the Pleasance, they were shown to ‘the best inn in the metropolis’ which was full of ‘about twenty Scotch drovers . . . regaling themselves with whisky and potatoes’.\textsuperscript{47}

**TAVERNS**

The dividing line between inns and taverns in Scotland could sometimes be rather blurred. Taverns sold wine, ale, beer, brandy and other spirits and were run by burgesses or guild brethren, or by their wives or widows. The personal name, Taverner, dates back to at least 1361 and, by the mid-sixteenth century, women taverners were not uncommon.\textsuperscript{48} By the late eighteenth century, a prosperous burgh like Dumfries, a port and an expanding market town of 7,000 in 1792, contained ‘2 principal inns, a coffee house and several taverns’,\textsuperscript{49} including the Globe Tavern (now Inn), patronised by Robert Burns. In Perth, another growing market town, textile centre and port of 19,871 in 1796, the Reverend James

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**Figure 1.1** Interior, The Globe Inn, Dumfries. One of Robert Burns’s favourite howffs. © Anthony and Judith Cooke.
Scott described how ‘there are great taverns and a coffee room’. As living standards rose in the early nineteenth century, Scottish inns and taverns responded by adding extensions in the latest style, influenced by developments in London, the market leader of fashion. The George IV Tavern in Perth announced in 1830 that it had expanded to include ‘a large and commodious TAP ROOM’ on the London system, selling Barclay and Perkins’s London porter and ‘the best Scotch Ales’. Its clientele consisted of ‘farmers and others doing business at the weekly markets’ and it carried ‘newspapers with the latest London prices for corn’. In this way, Scottish inns and taverns were inextricably linked with the development of the market and cash economy across Britain.

INNS

Generally, inns provided some type of accommodation, as well as food and alcoholic drink – beer, wine and spirits – together with stabling for the travellers’ horses, though in earlier periods this was often in a separate place. Taverns, particularly those in Edinburgh, often provided basic food as well as drink but were less likely to provide accommodation. Robert Chambers, a Scot, claimed that in the mid eighteenth century the traveller had a poor choice of accommodation in Edinburgh. The only two inns were ‘the White Horse, in a close in the Canongate, or the White Hart, a house which now appears like a carrier’s inn, in the Grassmarket’. The English traveller, Sir William Burrell, described Edinburgh inns in 1758 as ‘indifferent, generally adapted only for the service of beasts, men being obliged to lodge at private houses, the New Inn excepted, which accommodates both extremely well’. Twenty years later, Edinburgh inns were still being described (by a Scot) as ‘mean buildings; their apartments dirty and dismal; and if the waiters happen to be out of the way, a stranger will perhaps be shocked by the novelty of being shown into a room by a dirty sun-burnt wench, without shoes or stockings’. Generally, lodgings and stables were kept separate in Edinburgh.

Before the 1750s, ‘Glasgow possessed no inns for the accommodation of travellers, except small public houses to which stabling was attached, and the signboard of these petty hostelries generally bore the well-known intimation to wayfarers of “Entertainment for men and horses here”’. The first purpose-built inn in Glasgow was the Saracen Head, built in 1755, with stones recycled from the nearby medieval archbishop’s palace, on land donated by the Glasgow magistrates to Robert Tennant, a founder member of the famous brewing dynasty. The
inn boasted ‘36 fine rooms, now fit to receive lodgers’, with separate bed chambers, and beds ‘all very good, clean and free from bugs’. There was a good stable and ‘a shade within the said yard for coaches, chaises or other wheeled carriages’. The inn had a large meeting room which could accommodate a hundred people.56

The mid eighteenth century saw the construction of a number of new purpose-built inns across Scotland in response to rising living standards and a consequent increase in commercial travel. In 1754, a year before the opening of the Saracen Head in Glasgow, Aberdeen saw the building of the New Inn, a fashionable place with a sizeable meeting room, where the Aberdeen Lodge of Freemasons held their meetings.57 In Paisley, some thirty years later, the New Inn was erected by the Earl of Abercorn in 1781.58 The Great Inn at Inveraray, Argyllshire in the West Highlands, was designed for the Duke of Argyll by the architect John Adam in 1750 and built between 1751 and 1756. Similarly, the Earl of Breadalbane built the inn at Kenmore in Perthshire in 1760, and the Menzies family built the Weem Inn, on the other side of the Wade Bridge from Aberfeldy, Perthshire, a few years later.59

The Highlands was notorious for the poor quality of its inns. Samuel Johnson and James Boswell stayed in one at Glenelg, Inverness-shire on their tour of the Highlands in 1773. It sounds like the stuff of travellers’ nightmares. Boswell complained ‘there was no provender for our horses... a maid shewed us upstairs into a room damp and dirty, with bare walls, a variety of bad smells, a coarse black greasy fir table... and out of a wretched bed started a fellow from his sleep, like Edgar in King Lear’.60 By the early nineteenth century, these primitive inns were beginning to disappear, as the number of travellers increased and their expectations rose. Elisabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, writing in 1812, remembered ‘we never see such inns now, no carpets on the floors, no cushions on chairs, no curtains on windows’.61

**ALE HOUSES**

The most widespread type of drinking establishment found in eighteenth-century Scotland was the ale house which was present in most, but not all, Scottish parishes, from Orkney in the north where, in Birsay and Harray in 1793, there were ‘no settled inns in this parish, but plenty of ale houses, as there are no gaugers’ (that is, excise men),62 to Wigtonshire in the south where, in the rural parish of Kirkmalden, there had been a marked reduction in the number of ale houses because of ‘the new regulation of licensing the houses of persons of a fair character’.63 There
were numerous ale houses in ports and industrial settlements where there were large numbers of young people of both sexes with relatively high disposable incomes, often living away from their families. By the late eighteenth century, the term ‘ale house’ was becoming a misnomer, as the drink of choice in ale houses increasingly became whisky. The port and market town of Dunbar in East Lothian, for example, with a modest population of 3,700 in 1792, had ‘no fewer than 46 licensed ale houses (one per 80 of population) where low priced spirits are retailed, and where the execrable custom of dram drinking is practiced [sic] . . . the reproach of man and the disgrace of woman’.64

Another East Lothian burgh, the coal mining centre of Tranent, with a population of 2,732 in 1792, had thirty licensed ale houses. It also boasted the largest distillery in Scotland at St Clements Wells, and some 3,000 to 4,000 gallons of whisky were ‘annually retailed in the parish’.65 In the west of Scotland, another expanding industrial parish with a large number of ‘ale, or rather whisky houses’ was Govan in Lanarkshire with a population of 8,318 in 1792. In this thriving textile manufacturing centre, there were no fewer than twenty-two ale houses and, according to the local excise office, when the cotton industry was in a flourishing state, an astonishing ‘1,500 gallons of whisky were consumed in the village of Govan, in a single quarter of the year’,66 that is, 6,000 gallons a year. The Reverend Thomas Marton, minister of the thriving textile town of Langholm, in Dumfriesshire, characterised beer as ‘the natural and wholesome beverage of the country’ and condemned ‘unlicensed tipling houses and dram shops’ as ‘haunts of vice where the young of both sexes are tempted from the straight and narrow’.67 In both Dunbar and Langholm in the 1790s, women were seen by well-informed observers as regular users of ale houses.

**DRAM SHOPS AND TIPLING HOUSES**

Dram shops and tipling houses were found all over the country, as far north as Shetland where, in Aithsting and Sansting parish in 1792, there were no inns but ‘perhaps 30 or 40 gin and tea shops, to the great ruin of the morals, health and circumstances of the inhabitants’.68 They were generally unlicensed and sold cheap, often poor-quality whisky and spirits to the poor. Their numbers expanded in the second half of the eighteenth century as the increased duties on malt pushed up the price of beer, and spirits became cheaper with a reduction of the duties on whisky retailers in 1794 to 20 shillings in the Highlands and 40 shillings in the Lowlands.69 This increase was not uniform throughout the
country, however, as, in some areas, the magistrates and Justices of the Peace were active in closing down dram shops.

In the whisky distilling areas of Scotland, the correspondents to the *Statistical Accounts* were often more relaxed and less censorious about whisky drinking, as distilling provided a profitable outlet for barley grown by local farmers and the whisky was generally of better quality. In Duffus parish, in Morayshire, ‘A Friend to Statistical Inquiries’ reported in 1793 that the suppression of smuggling ‘has banished foreign liquors and introduced very generally the use of whisky of our own distillery, which is both wholesome and cheaper’.70 Similarly, Alexander Simpson, the schoolmaster in the Aberdeenshire parish of King Edward, welcomed the local distilleries as ‘in every point (of) view . . . a reciprocal advantage to the farmers, and the country at large’.71 In Killearnan parish on the Black Isle, the Reverend David Dunoon explained the large number of distilleries (seven) in the parish as being owing to the fact that they were the only way for the farmer to convert ‘victual’ into ‘cash for the payment of rent and servants’.72 Again, the expansion of distilling here was closely linked to an increasing population, rising living standards, and the growth of a cash economy. Fifty years later, the Reverend Archibald McTavish was very positive about the impact of the six distilleries in Kildalton parish, Islay in 1844, ‘the introduction of legal distilleries has been of great advantage in this respect (the reduction of drunkenness) and also is giving employment to many of the population’.73

**SHEBEENS**

The shebeen was a largely urban phenomenon, an unlicensed drinking establishment found mainly in places with large migrant Irish populations, such as Dundee or Glasgow, specialising in whisky, often distilled illegally on or near the premises, with a clientele composed mainly of recent Irish immigrants or their descendants. Their functions sometimes overlapped with those of brothels. In December 1870, the *North British Daily Mail* published a sensationalist exposé of ‘The Dark Side of Glasgow’ which calculated that, in the old city centre, there were some two hundred brothels and 150 shebeens. The article divided Glasgow shebeens into ‘respectable’, where only the licensing laws were being broken, disreputable shebeens, which provided a base for criminal activity, such as prostitution, robbery or receiving stolen goods, and the ‘wee shebeens’ on the stairhead of a tenement, where ‘a drunken old hag in a greasy mutch’ dispensed a toxic mixture of whisky and methylated spirits to be drunk on the spot.74
Many shebeens were run and managed by women, though not necessarily owned by them. In May 1861, four Dundee women were jailed for six weeks for having a shebeen in their Peter Street home, while fines were imposed on three couples and a single woman for keeping shebeens in various parts of central Dundee. Two years later, Isabella Forbes or Smith was given six months gaol or a £30 fine for keeping a brothel and a shebeen in Couttie’s Wynd, Dundee. The use of the term ‘shebeen’ was not confined to a few urban strongholds, however, but was understood in other parts of Scotland as a kind of shorthand for an illegal and unlicensed drinking place. When the Perthshire Justices met to discuss the Public Houses Hours of Closing Act (Scotland), 1887, a Colonel Stirling remarked that closing pubs at 10.00 p.m. ‘might lead to more or less shebeening throughout the county’.

Shebeens had a remarkably long life, prolonged by the local veto campaign of the early twentieth century which attempted to ban alcohol sales from designated geographical areas of Scotland, based on local veto polls. In February 1928, for example, the Glasgow and District Licensed Trade Defence Association reported that levels of drunkenness were increasing in the Southern Police Division of Glasgow, in the Hutchesontown, Gorbals and Kingston wards of the city. They believed this was mostly caused by ‘drinking of methylated spirits and also from Clubs and Shebeens’. Five years later, the President of the Scottish Licensed Trade Defence Association claimed that Wick in Caithness, which had voted itself ‘dry’ by local veto, now consumed more liquor than when the town was ‘wet’ and that Wick ‘was practically a huge shebeen in 1933’. Shebeen is an Irish Gaelic word meaning an illicit liquor shop, and the name and the institution itself have been transposed to the black townships of present-day South Africa where young, often single, male workers come to find drink, food, lodgings, women and work.

LICENSED GROCERS

A distinctive feature of the Scottish (and Irish) drinking scene was the licensed grocer’s shop which sold beer, wine and spirits, often on credit. Licensed grocers were found in most parts of Scotland, though largely confined to the towns. In 1886, there was a total of 4,515 licensed grocers in Scotland, of which 451 (10 per cent) were in Edinburgh, 261 in Glasgow, 249 in Aberdeen and 221 in Dundee. Middle-class observers became particularly agitated when working-class women were buying and drinking alcohol, especially spirits, in grocers’ shops. The
minister of Stevenston in Ayrshire complained in 1837 that the sale of
spirits in grocers’ shops had had ‘a most pernicious influence, especially
on the female part of the community, who, when there is no danger of
detection, are tempted to add a dram to the other commodities they pur-
chase’.80 Some fifty years later, licensed grocers in Dundee were accused
of entering liquor in their pass books under the headings of ‘goods’,
‘soap’, ‘snuff’, ‘tobacco’, ‘sugar’, ‘tea’ and other articles required in a
family, when they were selling liquor to women, so that the male in
the household was often unaware that his wife or ‘bidey in’ (partner)
was buying alcohol on a regular basis. The writer added ‘That there
is a good deal of forenoon and afternoon drinking amongst women is
notorious.’ In 1889, there were 453 houses in Dundee licensed for the
sale of liquor, including eight hotels, 228 public houses and beer houses,
and 217 licensed grocers.81

HOTELS

A late arrival at the top of the hierarchy was the hotel, a concept imported
from France. William Creech claimed that in 1763 in Edinburgh, ‘there
was no such thing as a Hotel: the word indeed was not known or was
only intelligible to persons acquainted with the French’. Twenty years
later, there were ‘many public Hotels’ in Edinburgh where visitors could
stay ‘not only comfortably, but elegantly’.82 The arrival of the hotel
on the Scottish scene was another sign of the growth of the market
economy, linked to increasing wealth and rising living standards. In a
thriving commercial nation, travel was becoming more necessary and
was required to be speedy, frequent and reliable.

In 1763, there were two stage coaches from Edinburgh to Leith which
ran once an hour and took a full hour to get there. Thirty years later,
there were five or six stagecoaches on the same route which ran every
half hour and took fifteen minutes. Similarly, in 1763 a stagecoach
from Edinburgh to London ran once a month and took twelve to fifteen
days. Thirty years later, there were fifteen coaches a week to London,
arriving there in about four days. Hotel proprietors instigated, as well
as benefited from, these innovations. A hotel owner called Dunn ‘who
opened the magnificent hotels in the New Town’ was the first to offer a
couch service to Dalkeith, 6 miles outside Edinburgh.83 This hotel was
praised by Arnot in 1779, though he criticised its cost: ‘the charge very
extravagant, viz. for a dining room, parlour (or rather closet) and three
bed chambers, five guineas a week’.84 The young French aristocrat,
Alexandre de la Rochefoucald, stayed at Dunn’s Hotel in St Andrews
Square in 1786 and was much impressed by it, explaining ‘At Dunns we had a superb salon, with gilded mirrors and every magnificence.’ He added ‘It is the custom here, as in London, to stay in these houses, as the inns are very bad and dear.’85

Two years earlier, another French visitor was less impressed by Dunn’s Hotel which he described as ‘a magnificent inn, decorated with columns; but the inside of which, though very clean, did not correspond with the external grandeur of the edifice’. They were overcharged at the hotel, ‘at more than double the rate which we had paid at the best and dearest inns on the road’. The hotel bill ‘was more than an ell long’ and they left ‘without saying a word, but we return no more to Dun’s hotel, to lodge under columns less heavy than the rapacious hand of the landlord’.86

Similar developments were taking place in Glasgow, where the word ‘hotel’ was never used for an inn or a tavern until the Tontine Hotel was opened in 1782.87 The Tontine Society in Glasgow raised £5,350 in 1781 by issuing 107 shares of £50 each. The money was used to buy Allan Dreghorn’s handsome town hall and convert it into the Tontine coffee room and hotel. The socially undesirable were kept out, as subscribers paid £1.12s a year for the use of the reading room, and accommodation was available upstairs.88 In Greenock, Renfrewshire, an expanding port, cotton-manufacturing and sugar-refining centre, the Tontine Inn was built in 1801 at a cost of £10,000. The subscription for it, at £25 a share, was oversubscribed in two days.89

SOURCES

The sources for a study of public houses in Scotland are often compromised by belonging to one opposing camp or the other – the drink trade or the teetotal movement. Much of the material for the study of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century public house has to be viewed through the distorting lens of the teetotal movement, and the opposing, drink-trade-related sources are often similarly biased. Many working-class memoirs by popular journalists, radicals, trade unionists, and Liberal and Labour political activists were written from a teetotal standpoint, as more obviously, were those by church leaders or missionaries. Out of 127 teetotal leaders in nineteenth-century Britain whose political allegiance is known, no less than 119 were Liberals.90 Disproportionate numbers of early twentieth-century Independent Labour Party (ILP), Labour and socialist activists had a temperance background, often based on their own hard life experience of the devastating effects of alcohol.
abuse on tight household budgets and family life. Out of a sample of seventy-six Scottish Labour leaders active between 1918 and 1939, forty-eight (63 per cent) were known abstainers, only three (4 per cent) were known non-abstainers and the remaining twenty-five (33 per cent) were classified as ‘not known’.  

With the spread of the temperance movement from the 1820s, an increasing amount of literature in Scotland was written from a temperance standpoint. Female working-class poets, such as Janet Hamilton and Ellen Johnston, both wrote poems on temperance themes: for example, Janet Hamilton’s ‘The Drunkard’s Wife, the Victim of Drink or Burnin’ Drink’. William McGonagall, the Edinburgh-born, Dundee-based, weaver poet, advised his readers, ‘to abstain from all kinds of intoxicating liquor, because seldom any good emanates from it’ and wrote poems such as ‘The Demon Drink’ and ‘The Destroying Angel’, an apocalyptic poem which described the street-by-street destruction of Dundee pubs. There was nothing remotely equivalent in Scotland to the novels of Charles Dickens, with their knowledgeable and sympathetic portrayals of English pubs, in works such as the *Pickwick Papers*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* or *Barnaby Rudge*. The prolific nineteenth-century Scottish novelist and newspaper editor, David Pae, for example, whose work was published in serial form in popular newspapers, such as the *People’s Journal*, wrote from a moralistic, temperance standpoint, and condemned alcohol abuse, in novels such as *Mary Paterson; or the Fatal Error*, which ascribed the downfall of one of Burke and Hare’s female victims largely to her immoral lifestyle and use of strong drink.

Similarly, the publications of the licensed trade in Scotland, such as *The Victualling Trades Review*, which was produced monthly in Glasgow from 1889 to 1908, or *The National Guardian*, published weekly from 1889 to 1975, often defined themselves in opposition to the temperance movement and its attempts to restrict or even ban their trade altogether. For example, under the headline ‘Teetotal Delusions’, the *Review* complained in 1891 about the licensed trade’s lack of organisation at the recent municipal elections in Glasgow, compared to the much better organised teetotal lobby, which meant the trade had lost supporters in the council and the licensing courts. Similarly, Dundee, Lochee and Broughty Ferry Licensed Grocers’ Association noted with dismay in 1911 that Parliament was likely to support the Scottish Temperance Bill and that Lloyd George had recently increased the duty on spirits by 3/9d per gallon and had also increased licence duties.

The non-conformist Lloyd George was a favourite target of the licensed trade and, in the middle of World War I, the *National Guardian*
criticised the ‘great Welsh Crusader’ who had described alcoholic drink ‘as a worse enemy than Germany and Austria’. This fear of the power and influence of the temperance movement persisted into the second half of the twentieth century. The Sederunt Books of the Trustees of Mrs Lilias Smith, wine and spirit merchant of Greenock, who had kept the James Watt Bar in East Hamilton Street, Greenock, record payments in September 1952 of two guineas each to the Greenock and District Licensed Trade Defence Association and to the Greenock Anti-Prohibition Party.

To analyse the wealth created by the licensed trade and its associated trades of brewing and distilling, I have used wills and probate inventories, particularly from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These have to be treated with some degree of caution but they can give invaluable details of public houses owned, their stock and fittings and the types of drink they sold. They can also give details of share holdings in breweries, distilleries, railway shares, overseas stocks, and so on, and, sometimes, of substantial holdings of whisky in bond in distilleries in Islay, in Campbeltown or on Speyside. Wills can also provide clues as to religious affiliation and the types of local and national charities supported by the deceased, as well as property owned, such as houses, urban tenement property let, and farms or country estates.

Another source used in the book is oral evidence based on interviews with licensees across Scotland in places such as Angus, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling. Here, the Scottish Licensed Trade Association was very helpful in identifying suitable interview candidates, and Jonathan Stewart of Dundee, who has shown interest in the project from the start, was particularly supportive. I interviewed a number of licensees, concentrating on how they got into the trade, what training they had received, what changes they had seen in the trade during their working lives and how they saw the future.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE BOOK

The book is divided chronologically. Chapter 1 examines the period from 1700 to 1790 which saw a shift in alcohol consumption from beer to whisky as the drink of choice for the masses. Though the economic benefits of Union were slow to appear at first, the century saw population growth, movement of population, particularly to the west of Scotland, growing urbanisation and industrialisation. All these changes, and the increase in travel across Scotland, including the Highlands, were
reflected in an increase in the number and variety of public houses, inns, taverns and hotels. The Malt Tax Riots of 1725 confirm that beer was the favoured choice of drink for the masses in the Scottish Lowlands in the early part of the century. The period saw a challenge to the monopoly privileges of the burghs in areas such as brewing and the production of malt, as population expanded. Pubs fulfilled an important role in the social, economic and cultural life of the country by providing space for commercial and business transactions, as well as life, community and work rituals, and the numerous clubs, associations and societies that flourished in eighteenth-century Scotland, and played a crucial role in the development of civil society.

Chapter 2 looks at the period from 1790 to 1830 which saw rapid social, economic and political change across Scotland. By the 1790s, Presbyterian ministers in parishes all over Scotland were united in condemning the replacement of beer, which they usually saw as a wholesome drink for the labourer, with cheap whisky, which was considered to be a threat to health, sobriety, industry, and family living standards, not to mention morality. In this chapter, I argue that changes in the consumption of alcohol in this period were largely a symptom of rising living standards and changing tastes. Not only did the consumption of whisky and stronger ale by the lower classes increase but more wine and rum were drunk in middle-class households, hotels, inns and taverns. At the same time, there was an increasing degree of social segregation as landowners, wealthy farmers and urban merchants withdrew from the ale house and entertained more in their homes, increasingly moderated by female codes of politeness and sociability.100

Chapter 3 examines the period from 1830 to 1914 which saw increasing urbanisation and concentration of population in the Western Lowlands of Scotland. There was considerable population movement from rural areas of the Lowlands, from Ireland and the Scottish Highlands to the cities and industrial towns. By the end of the century, Scotland was one of the most urbanised countries in Europe. The temperance movement, which was solidly rooted in Scotland, had increasing influence from the 1820s onwards. One of its leading campaigners across Britain was John Dunlop (1789–1868), a Greenock-born lawyer and philanthropist, supported by the Glasgow printer and publisher, William Collins. After the 1832 Reform Act, the Liberal Party, generally favourable to temperance, emerged as the dominant force in Scottish politics, including municipal politics, for most of the century. This meant that licensing courts in cities such as Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow supported restrictions in matters such as opening times, Sunday opening, limiting
the number of licences issued in certain areas and so on. Despite this, public houses thrived, particularly in the growing cities which attracted large numbers of young single people, often removed from much adult supervision, except in the workplace. By the end of the century, rising living standards among the working and lower middle classes led to the growth of the ‘People’s Palaces’, opulent urban pubs, which vied with one another with lavish fittings and a wide choice of drinks, including wine, beer and own-blend spirits.

Chapter 4 looks at the two world wars and the interwar period from 1914 to 1945. The Temperance (Scotland) Act of 1913 was the culmination of nearly a century of campaigning but its implementation was delayed by the outbreak of World War I. World War I saw a rise in the political influence of the temperance lobby, with prominent supporters, such as Lloyd George and Phillip Snowden, holding government office. There were also successful attempts to nationalise the licensed trade in certain parts of the country, both north and south of the border, to safeguard the munitions industry. From the 1920s, the Local Veto campaign made it possible to prohibit the public consumption of alcohol altogether in parts of the country that voted for it. Relatively few parts of Scotland chose this option, however, and the campaign declined in importance. During World War II, the licensed trade, like many other parts of the economy, came under increasing state regulation and control, though its importance and consequent lobbying power were strengthened by its major contribution to the war effort through the large amount of tax revenue it contributed to the Exchequer.

Chapter 5 looks at the period from the end of World War II to the present. The second half of the twentieth century saw major social and economic changes, including rising living standards, better health care through the new National Health Service, better levels of state education, high levels of employment and an increasing number of women entering the workforce. This was reflected in changes in the licensed trade, with a greater emphasis on comfort in pub layout and increased spending on pub interiors in an attempt to appeal to newly affluent families and to female customers. The Clayson Report of the early 1970s proposed a liberalisation in Scottish opening hours, and many of its proposals were implemented by the Licensing (Scotland) Act of 1976. Greater challenges came towards the end of the century when a combination of rising taxes on alcohol and supermarket price-cutting led to a situation where the total alcohol spend was split 70 per cent supermarkets and 30 per cent in licensed premises whereas, earlier in the century, the position had been the reverse. Pubs had become expensive
places to buy a drink, and other factors were at work, such as the increasing emphasis on the effects of alcohol consumption and smoking on people’s health and safety. As early as 1967 there had been Britain-wide legislation to limit alcohol levels for drivers and, in the summer of 2007, a ban on smoking in pubs was implemented in Scotland, the first place in the United Kingdom to do so. This was followed by a major downturn in the domestic and international economies in 2008. As a result of all these changes, considerable numbers of Scottish pubs began to close in the last decade of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first, and there was growing concern for the future of the traditional Scottish pub.

NOTES


40. Fenton, *The Food of the Scots*, p. 82.

41. C. McKean, ‘What Kind of Renaissance Town was Dundee?’, in C. McKeen, B. Harris and C. A. Whatley (eds), *Dundee. Renaissance to Enlightenment* (Dundee, 2009), p. 11.

42. A. Maxwell, *The History of Old Dundee* (Dundee, 1884), pp. 78, 80, and 99.
76. Perthshire Courier, 27 December 1887.
77. Glasgow University Archives, Scottish Brewing Archive, GDL, 1/6/1, Glasgow and District Licensed Trade Defence Association, Directors’ Minutes, 15 February 1928.
79. Donnachie, Brewing Industry in Scotland, p. 211 (Table 74, A and B).
95. D. Pae, Mary Paterson; or the Fatal Error (Dundee, 1865). See also W. Donaldson, Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland (Aberdeen, 1986), pp. 77–100; and C. McCracken-Flesher, The Doctor Dissected:

96. *Victualling Trades Review*, 12 December 1891.

97. Dundee Public Library, Lamb Collection, 217 (93), Dundee, Lochee and Broughty Ferry Licensed Grocers’ Association, 33rd Annual Report (1911).

