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# THE PUB AND THE PEOPLE

## *A Worktown Study*

by

MASS-OBSERVATION

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

1943

## XII

## THE LAST HOUR!

BEER DRINKING IS one answer to the solution of the personal problem of existence, the personal revolution. It provides a mechanism for dealing with situations which appear to be recurrent and almost universal. There are few races in the world who do not have some similar method of physiological change as well as a "spiritual" one—religion, an intellectual one—magic or science, and a physical one—sport, dance, etc.

The work-life rhythms of pre-industrial civilizations were bound up with those of their cultural life; they both arose from the same sources—the seasons. In the mill, where it is perpetually sub-tropical summer, what you do, how and when you do it, is independent of time and weather, which are the governing factors of men's work in agricultural societies. The sowing-reaping cycle, not only governed men's working lives, but set the rhythm for their religious and cultural activities. In an industrial society, whose religion is still based on the seasonal cycles of primitive communities, as are many of its cultural traits—spring cleaning, for instance, children's games, adult sport (the football fan's life in the summer is not the same as in the winter). The ordinary daily activities by which people get their living are conditioned by dynamo and steam engine instead of sun and moon.

The pub is still essentially very much a pre-industrial institution. Format, ritual, traditions, nomenclature, games, have not changed very much in the past hundred years. It still caters in the simplest way for leisure hours of working people living in the immediate vicinity, but with one portion for better off folk (and irregulars and travellers). Today the pub is a sort of bridge between the older institutions and those new ones catering for people strictly as individuals, but on a mass basis. The recent experiences and contemporary difficulties of the pub are closely similar to those of its opposite number, the Church. Their Cain and Abel history has already been discussed. But the Church, and the pre-Christian trajectory of year, still decides the dis-

tribution of and emphasizes social activity throughout the year and the week. The pub is ruled by that rhythm too, but is more directly subservient to industrial variations.

The cycle of working life determines, if not directly *how* leisure should be spent, *when* it should take place. Evenings, week-ends, Blackpool holiday week represent, to a different degree, periods of freedom from certain constraints. At work a man's actions are being imposed upon him directly by material circumstances over which he has little or no control.

We have already suggested that both holidays and drunkenness represent breakdowns, the lifting of restrictions and tabus. Human societies have only been maintained by limitations of their members' freedom, by restrictions, tabus, laws, barriers between man and man. The internal stability of a society is dependent upon the general observance of these things. They have to become "natural", so that the ordinary individual in the society considers his way of living to be the normal, sensible one, and other ways stupid, crazy or immoral.

But they are also "unnatural" inasmuch as they tend to repress, constrain, and modify powerful instinctive urges in connection with sex, eating, aggression, etc. Therefore the machinery to preserve the stability of the society must include safety valves, that allow a partial release of accumulating tensions.

The most stable societies tend to be the more primitive ones, which have the most definite and organized ritual breakdowns of tabu, unrepression and "intoxications". It is in these societies that magic, ritual, and convention are most highly developed. One of the features that differentiates our "civilized" society most clearly from other and more primitive forms is the weakening of these forms of restriction, so that it is possible for many people not to accept the idea that the way they live is "natural".

But while these restrictions have weakened another type has become very strong—those imposed by the actual economic structure of the society. The economic restrictions, not imposed by religion, magic or convention, are none the less "unnatural", and the need for their breakdown is just as strong, (possibly stronger) as it is in other forms of society. But there are only few and feeble sanctioned breakdowns of contemporary restrictions. The Christmas feast, the Cup Tie, the wedding party, the week-end drunk—these are our forms of release. But they

are feeble—there are, for instance, no real and sanctioned occasions of sexual freedom—and though the economic restrictions can be temporarily forgotten, yet they are actually present because so often the whole thing is dependent upon how much money people have got in their pockets while they are celebrating. No breakdown provides free beer for all. It is in this respect that we see the importance of the pub democracy, exemplified in the ritual of standing rounds.

The decay of the organized occasions of breakdown of social restrictions has not been accompanied by any real relaxation of those restrictions, or of the need for their breakdown. The yearly holiday and the week-end intermission from work have taken their place. And, no money—no holiday.

While the ordinary, week night, quiet evening at the local pub represents social relaxation, "week-end drinking" (in its extended sense) is playing the same sort of social role as the Cup Tie, the Coronation, religious and political revivalism. As contemporary industrial society becomes more and more unstable, manifesting this in fears of wars, unemployment, revolutions, lack of confidence in the future and of certainty that we live in the best of all possible worlds, the need for breakdowns becomes greater amongst those who have no adequate set of values to deal with the situation. But drunkenness is not on the increase. There is, however, as will be shown in other books of this series, an increased belief in magic, luck, craving for "mystery", gambling, a whole series of alternative values, passive, personal and non-participative, though of course with the necessary social sanction that large numbers of other individuals—some of them famous or royal—do the same thing.

One big function of the pub is thus being undermined, from other angles, by other groups whose principal motive must be the making of profits. But there is still no other group interested in providing a place to which ordinary people with ordinary incomes can come without formality, swear with impunity, meet strangers and talk about anything, and maybe spit on the floor.

#### OTHER INTERPRETATIONS

Finally, we should look at some other points of view on the pub. The list of books at the end of this section is not intended to be a full bibliography. It is only of those books actually referred to during the writing of this one. Most of them are of

little use to anyone who wants to get to know anything about the pub as a living social organism.

They can be divided as follows:

1. (a) Historical. The majority of these are sources of quotation. No kind of comprehensive history of the pub as a social institution exists. In order to find anything about it, it is necessary to consult broadsides, pamphlets, plays, poems, in which chance remarks can be found that throw a light on how the people of the period regarded the pub, and what they did in it. Our selection of sources is naturally limited; we have not attempted to write a history of the pub.

1. (b) Contemporary works which are specifically about the history of the pub or which include passages relevant to it. Of these, antiquarian, like R. V. French's *Nineteen Centuries of Drink*, or the useful work of Firebaugh, Marshall and Gregory; and sociological, like Sidney Webb's work on the Licensing Laws; a few others have been relevant to this study.

2. Scientific works. (a) Physiological. Of these there are plenty. And as far as they go they are adequate. But, cf. Koren's remarks on how experiments on the effects of alcohol are carried out. There is nothing in any of these books to show, for instance, what the effect of drinking beer *in a pub* is. They contain material about "subjects", not pub-goers.

2. (b) Sociological. There are plenty of these too, some specifically about drink, and others which treat of drink. While most of them contain a lot of statistics, they are concerned with the "drink problem", not the pub. The titles of those we have listed show this quite clearly. The sociologists and the sociologically minded temperance writers have not considered the pub as a social institution. To them it comes under "Crime and Delinquency" (cf. *The London Survey*).

That the physical, moral, and statistical results of excessive drinking are interesting and important is not to be denied. But they are the results of an *abuse* of the special functioning of a social institution. And writers have studied these results as a "problem" divorced from its real background. It is just as if the problem of unemployment was to be studied without any reference to, knowledge, or understanding of the social and economic system in which it took place.

The trouble is that sociologists and temperance men are seldom pub-goers. To them, as to Worktown's Rural Dean, the pub door

opens on to mystery. Who goes in and what happens there they don't know. But from this doorway there reels a succession of figures that can be recorded under the headings of drunks per ten thousand of the population, and later as victims of cirrhosis. We have seen how few of the people who come out of these doors actually are had up for being drunk or do die of cirrhosis.

The ordinary pub-goer has no official existence. It is typical that the *New English Dictionary* gives no pub use of the word "vault" and that for the *Encyclopædia Britannica* the pub only exists in relation to the liquor laws (to which one-eighth of a paragraph is devoted) and the legal aspect of public house Trusts.

The *Fact* survey quoted earlier speaks of people seeking "more civilized" amusements than pub-going. The idea implicit in this is that it is more civilized to go to the pictures than get drunk. Well, most pub-goers don't get drunk anyway, but is it more civilized to go to the pictures than get drunk? It just depends upon what your ideas of civilization are. The film is nearly 100 per cent celluloid, beer  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent alcoholic. In terms of stupefaction content the film wins every time. Yearning after Garbo instead of flirting with the barmaid is a lot less trouble. This is an idea of civilization that is based on self-culture.

3. Books that contain accurate descriptive material about pubs. There are very few of these. *The London Survey* (drink section by B. D. Nicholson) and Selley's *English Public House as it is* we have frequently quoted. Also Rowntree's pioneer study. The first, though limited in its scope, contains more fact about pubs in its few pages than can be found in all the other books listed here. Selley's book is written from a temperance point of view, assuming that the pub must be bad. And Rowntree shows a good deal of prejudice at times. These writers have *observed* pubs, and their conclusions are based on something else than the study of official statistics and the bumps on dead men's livers.

There is also a whole pile of "Ye Olde Inne" books, of which a few are listed here. (p. 345). These are of little use for the understanding of the pub today or at any other time.

Thomas Burke's *Book of the Inn* is a good anthology of passages from various writers about inns, and contains a lot of material about the use of the inn as a place of accommodation and eating. It is a pity that he gives no details of the works—beyond the writer's name—from which these references have been taken.

Most of English literature contains descriptions of inns and inn scenes—Chaucer, Skelton, Dekker, Shakespeare, Fielding, Smollett, Dickens, are examples. But they contain little that is enlightening on the function of the inn as a normal place, or a social hangout for the locals. The descriptions are of people eating or sleeping there, and of adventure and encounters for which the inn is simply a background.

Amongst contemporary novels there are plenty of pub scenes also, the most outstanding being Joyce's pub stuff in *Ulysses*, and a short story in *New Writing* (1938) by H. T. Hopkinson. But no one—say an educated Indian—ignorant of the pub, reading modern novels would be able to get from them any understanding of what the pub really is and who uses it. We have thus had to leave out most literary sources and we have learned, above all, to distrust (i) data from "official" sources, from interviews with leaders and persons who have vested interests (psychological or economic) in the subjects involved, (ii) from written sources of all sorts, whether historic, contemporary, or questionnaire—wherever and whenever these sources claimed to speak for anyone other than the person speaking. The difference, for example, between what an Anglican clergyman says happens in his church, and what he knows happens, between what he knows happens and what the verger knows, and what the choirboy does, is often sensational, and in each case differs in external circumstances from what *happened*. . . . For any incident consists as much of invisible as visible components, is as much an expression of opinion as of fact. Each interpretation can also be called a misinterpretation, each and all must be included in a sociological decision of "truth". The difference between what is supposed to happen and what does happen, between the written law and the law as enforced, between the press report and the observer's report, is a constantly recurring, and at first bewildering factor in the study of this civilization. Indeed it appears to be a diagnostic character of the key institutions in our civilization, and one which is constantly raising grave and (on present methods) insurmountable problems. This type of discrepancy between fact, fancy, fallacy, decides many of our judgements and personal attitudes—including, no doubt, those of all mass-observers. And the channels that claim to represent public opinion or accurate fact are silted up solid. Clearly we get involved in the same position in Worktown. But

we try not to forget that every expression of opinion, act or word, is valid and potentially significant as part of field-work material.

A typical case of such expression (and relevant at this point) is provided by two articles in *Worktown's* weekly *Journal and Guardian* in early 1938, showing the process of reportage and remoulding, which makes the externals of English culture at first a fog and a wilderness to the groping researcher.

(a) The *Journal and Guardian* carried a four-column centre page item called "Weighing-up Your Neighbours", with a heavy caps para to start off:

Most of us like to speculate upon our neighbour's habits. As a rule, it is an idle form of harmless curiosity but recently, it has been elevated into a pseudo-science "Mass Observation". *Worktown* has been one of the experimental stations of the mass-observation movement and some months ago its citizens were assailed with the question "Why do you drink beer?"

The journalist goes on to say how silly this pub-research is, and to analyse the Chief Constable's annual report to the Licensing Justices for 1937:

The most curious information is that Monday and Tuesday, along with Friday, are the days when *Worktown* goes on the "binge". I wonder if the mass observation people can tell us why? In the meantime whilst waiting for their reply I myself . . .

And he proceeds to explain everything, using neither data nor humour. We must suspect his line of approach from the start, because the word "binge" is not a *Worktown* pub-goer's word; "on the piss" would have been right, or if his paper can't face that fact, getting kettled, canned, or boozed up. His first explanation covers Monday as binge night. "That shilling left over from Saturday and Sunday nights determines where he shall go." It is not clear why a shilling should determine the place, for beer prices are uniform.

The writer implies that a *Worktown*er gets arrestably drunk on one shilling (the price of two pints). He then steps on to safer ground of Monday Bank Holidays, etc., before going on to ask, with a usual vagueness:

But what of Tuesday? Baking as a rule, does not usually drive the man of the house from his home. So the solution

must be found elsewhere. I have an idea that market day on Tuesday provides the answer. It provides the one necessary excuse I can think of for coming to town. Carrying a shopping bag has led many a man to the altar. What better reason then, than going to town to give the missus a lift with the marketing does a man need for meeting his cronies of the pub? And this, my mass-observation friends, is, I think, as near a solution as any you will arrive at.

The above statements contain the following erroneous conclusions:

1. That people need an excuse to go to a pub.
2. That they actively help their wives with marketing.
3. That to drink on Tuesdays they come into the centre of the town.
4. That being "driven from his home" is the most probable impulse to pub-going.
5. That most *Worktown*ers still bake their own bread.
6. That people go to the town centre pubs to meet friends; just the reverse, the local pub is for that.
7. That men carry their wives' shopping bags.<sup>1</sup>
8. That carrying a shopping bag has led many a man to the altar.
9. That his mass observation friends can't arrive at something nearer to what he calls "a solution".

The writer carries on his laborious pilgrimage of rationalization throughout every day of the week, and ends up with considerable éclat, "Any sharp rise in the returns of drunkenness should be strictly investigated, especially in view of the tendency over post-war and pre-war years to a decrease".

The futility—from an administrative point of view—of such generalizations is immediately demonstrated by a glance at the drunkenness figures for the previous year, 1936, when there were less people drunk on Monday and Tuesday than on any other night. While Thursday, of which this journalist says an "empty purse automatically rules out having a binge" (he doesn't know about the pub credit system) has only three less drunks than Tuesday in 1937, twice as many as Tuesday in 1936.

(b) On another page of the same issue of the same paper a special article by a staff reporter describes a series of University

<sup>1</sup> A Tuesday night's observation at the market showed only one in one thousand men carrying his wife's shopping basket; the majority of women were not accompanied by men.

Extension lectures being given in Worktown. It mainly deals with a series of questions set as a sort of examination after the latest lecture. It says:

They were interesting questions too. The first one was "What is democracy?" That's a stiff question. Even when one is attending three lectures on "The Theory and Practice of British Democracy". But when the lecturer goes on to say that he wants the answer in the fewest possible words, and allows about three minutes for the answer to be written then it becomes a really tall order. Did it worry members of the audience? Not a bit. They wrote swiftly and silently—some kneeling on the floor while using the form as a desk—and then waited calmly for the next. And although I have no idea what sort of answers were written I am quite sure no one wrote anything like "Government of the people, for the people, by the people."

The writer of this is an expert on local opinion, contributing extensively to both the leading Worktown papers, which enter 96 per cent of its homes.

Actually these questions were designed and set by us in connection with our political research, and in collaboration with the lecturer. Of the 52 Worktowners who were at this lecture 13 *actually and exactly used the cliché* whose non-use the reporter was sure of. Thirty-eight (73 per cent) used forms of it which included the phrases "by the people" and "of the people".

The article ends by quoting with approval a statement, which is clearly correct, from the lecture syllabus:

Over and above this, it has become especially evident in recent years that no democracy can hope to survive unless, in regard to subjects with a close bearing on public affairs, its people are given full opportunity, with fair guidance, under conditions of free inquiry, to learn and to think for themselves.

Quite so.

But along such routes of purely pious and decent *hope* there seems no likely lasting achievement. It is imperative to face the *facts* of contemporary culture. Until we do that our good intentions are mostly futile. The correlation of fact-finding sociologist with act-making humanist, reformer, reporter, reactionary or revolutionary, is essential?

## LIST OF RELEVANT REFERENCES

IN THIS BOOK we have had to make the best use possible of the scanty material about the pub itself. America, richest sociological source, has no pubs in our sense, unfortunately for this bibliography. In this list of publications (excluding fiction) which we have referred to, those marked X have been most useful, and those followed by H have provided significant historical material.

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