

Working-Class Alcohol Habits in England during the Decade of Decadence: Refuting Past Investigations and Writings

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The 1890s in Europe, coined as the "Decade of Decadence," saw a number of social problems that concerned government and upper-class elites.¹ Drug use, homosexuality, and degeneration in intelligence and strength were among these problems in this decadent society. One issue in particular, the increase of alcohol consumption among the working-class, concerned these elites in Britain. Social investigators of the time, such as Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree, suggested that many working-class citizens drank immoderately and spent the majority of their incomes on alcohol. One social investigator from the 1890s stated that the working-class picked up more than "two-thirds of the nation's yearly drink bill of £162 million."² Concerning secondary poverty, Rowntree wrote, "there can be but little doubt, however, that the predominant factor is drink."³

However, research and analysis into English family budgets suggests that the working-class did not indulge in nor did they spend an enormous proportion of their wages on alcohol. Only as much as twelve percent of the families' *food budget*, not total budget, was spent on alcohol.⁴ This percentage is far less than what social investigators estimated. There was little surplus for the family to spend on alcohol, while sometimes some families were in debt at the end of the workweek. Other factors, such as wages, leisure and pub activities, temperance movements, drunkenness reports, contradictions made and indefinite conclusions assembled by social investigators provide great support for working-class moderation. Economic and social factors of everyday life show that some of the working-class in England totally abstained from alcohol; while those who chose to imbibe did so responsibly by expending trivial amounts of their earnings on drink and then moderately

consuming alcohol during this "Decade of Decadence," rather than careless spending and immoderation suggested by social investigators.

Before examining the evidence supporting working-class moderation, it is important to understand the larger picture of alcohol consumption in England during the last part of the nineteenth century. In the 1870s, the drink rate in England reached its peak. Historians today have reached estimations based on research and analysis conducted by investigators from the late nineteenth century. It is now estimated that thirty-eight to forty gallons of beer⁵ and 1.3 gallons of spirits were consumed per person in the seventies.⁶ After temperance movements slowly lost their appeal in the 1880s, the 1890s saw a steady increase in alcohol intake.⁷ In fact, alcohol intake during the 1890s rivaled that of the 1870s. Other contemporary research suggests that fifty-seven gallons of beer per man, woman, and child, and two gallons of spirits per man, woman, and child, was consumed through the nineties.⁸ As far as expenditure is concerned, social investigators from the nineteenth century estimated that £4: 5s: 1d was spent, per head, on alcohol in a year. This statistic also rivals that of the 1870s.⁹ Although these statistics include every social class in England, social investigators concluded at the turn of the twentieth century that the working class squandered the majority of the money spent on alcohol. Therefore, interpretation suggests the majority of the consumption was also done by the working-class.

When studying the budgets of working-class families through the 1890s, it is hard to ignore the lack of surplus earnings these households had at the end of the workweek. Families spent the majority of their budget on food and rent.

Additionally, other expenditures arose that further deteriorated the families' budget. It is a constant wonder how agricultural laborers and their families survived at all. One social observer stated that, "Laborers did not live in the proper sense of the word, they merely didn't die."¹⁰ Also, a Royal Commission report stated that working-class laborers as a whole barely lived above subsistence. They were better off than they had been before the 1890s, but they hardly lived satisfactorily.¹¹ Working-class family budgets show that it was improbable, and impossible for some, to indulge in alcohol.

First, the incomes of the rural and urban working-class wage earners varied between 10s/wk and about £3/wk. The income the wage earner received depended greatly on what career he worked. The wage one brought in also depended on the town or city in which they lived. It seems that the larger the town, the higher the wage for many artisans and laborers.¹² Sometimes income came from other sources besides the typical workweek job. In one instance a carpenter earned 15s/wk during the summer and only 12s/wk during the winter. However, his family received supplemental funds by lending out rooms during the week.¹³ In most working-class households, the wife stayed at home to tend to the children and also to keep the house in order. Many times, though, she would contribute to the budget by doing odd jobs. One wife went out doing menial household tasks and washing laundry, which made her family's income considerably greater.¹⁴ Wages also vary greatly from the rural setting to the urban setting. One man supported his family of seven on only 13s/wk. His house was in shambles due to the fact he needed to spend the majority of his earnings feeding his family rather than sheltering them. Compared to the city where a man made an average of 23s/wk, and although his house may not have been a palace, at least he has a solid edifice surrounding him and his family.¹⁵

Some career fields came with extra costs to the wage earner. For example, one journeyman carpenter needed to supply his own files and tools at a cost of £1/yr.¹⁶ For some trades, incomes fluctuated from week to week. One fisherman had no regular earnings and sometimes did not make any money for weeks.

In addition, he paid 10s/season for harbor dues and fishing equipment.¹⁷ The earnings of a professional dock laborer were greatly dependent on the fluctuations of trade.¹⁸ With additional expenses such as these, it was imperative that working-class families conserve their earnings in order to achieve subsistence.

Seebohm Rowntree, a social investigator from the time, conducted a town study of York in the 1890s concerning living conditions of the laboring classes. He concluded that while twelve percent of the population lived in comfortable, sanitary houses, eighty-eight percent lived in squalid domiciles.¹⁹ Why is the quality of working-class houses important when studying their alcohol habits? For one, it reiterates the point of how destitute some of these families actually were. Social investigators from the time and also social historians widely wrote that the working-class lived in poorly built and ventilated homes. Even furniture sometimes scarcely existed in some poor, working-class homes. If there was furniture, it was usually adjusted from some other purpose, such as children's cots made from packing cases, or dressing tables made from fruit crates.²⁰ Another reason why quality of housing should be addressed is that child mortality has also been blamed on the irresponsible spending on alcohol. However, child mortality rates can be blamed on the poor housing the working-class lived in. Food is essential to a child's existence, but according to some studies, so are light, air, warmth, and freedom from damp environments. Basement dwellings were popular because they were cheaper, but they provided harsh living environments.²¹

Although many working-class homes were not satisfactory for everyday living, families could not improve on them. For one, a large proportion of working-class budgets were spent on rent alone. In Rowntree's study, percentages of earnings spent on rent revealed these statistics:

Earnings	% of Budget
18s/wk or less	29
18s to 20s/wk	18
20s to 25s/wk	17
26s to 30s/wk	16
31s to 40s/wk	16
41s to 50s/wk	13
51s to 60s/wk	12

The table exhibits the average percentage of budget a family would spend on rent in accordance to how much money they earned in a week. The less a family made, the higher the percentage they would spend of their earnings on rent. In addition to the rent expenses, minimum of expenditures on household sundries, such as wood, coal, tools, burial expenses, cooking utensils, etc., came out to 4s: 11d/wk for working-class households.²² The minimum for food expenditure is: 3s/wk per adult and 2s: 3d per child.²³

Just as most working-class families could not afford to improve on their living environments, many could not improve on their dietary habits. Though alcohol is blamed for secondary poverty, Rowntree noted that primary poverty is the cause for malnutrition. He wrote, "... every laborer who has as many as three children must pass through a time, probably lasting for about ten years, when he will be in a state of primary poverty; in other words, when he and his family will be underfed."²⁴ Low earnings, not alcohol, caused many families to be malnourished. In order to keep the wage earner healthy, a higher proportion of the families' calories needed to be consumed by him. Men averaged 3,321 calories while women and children averaged about 1,870 calories per day.²⁵ What happens, then, is a problem that cannot be solved. If a family were to feed their children more, the chance of the wage earner falling sick would greatly increase. If this happened, they would fall deeper into poverty. What happens instead is that the children and women of the house will be fed less so the wage earner can stay healthy. This problem also directly correlates with infant mortality. When the mother nurses a baby, her diet greatly affects the survival rate of the infant. For instance, if she only lives off of bread and tea, the baby will not receive the proper nutrients and may perish.²⁶ And since, on average, fifty-eight percent of working-class citizens' budget was spent on food, not much opportunity existed for dietary improvement. Research into social investigator's studies show that the more a family earned in a week, the more calories and essential nutrients they received.²⁷ In essence, many working-class citizens could not afford the luxury of a good diet. Therefore, how could

they afford the luxury of indulging in alcohol?

Though these statistics may be hard to comprehend when viewed in their isolated states, it is helpful to see them in a likely family scenario in order to understand the budget situations of the working-class. In Henry Higgs' study of family budgets, the families studied averaged 5.1 persons per family.²⁸ This is a reasonable estimate for working-class household since most of the families studied in various budgets reports usually had at least one or two children, while some had as many as eight or ten. According to Charles Booth, the income group that earns 21s-30s/wk is "... more than any other (group), representative of the way we live now."²⁹ So with these estimations in mind, a fictitious family will consist of five people, two adults and three children, and the wage earner brings in 25s/wk. Therefore, this family will spend sixteen percent of its budget on rent, or 4s/wk. It will cost 6s/wk to feed the mother and father, while it will cost 6s: 9d/wk to feed the children. Then for household sundries around 4s: 11d/wk. Out of 25s made in a week, this particular family has 3s: 4d/wk left for other expenses. However, other expenses such as clothing, past debts, and/or medical expenses may also hinder the working-class budget. With the possibility of a minimum of 3s per week left, this family can buy only a minimal amount of alcohol, and certainly not indulge in it irresponsibly.

By analyzing these budgets, poverty or lack of funds is not the effect of alcohol overspending. Poverty is caused by and can be the effect of so many other circumstances. For one, in the humid factory atmosphere, workers were more likely to become sick.³⁰ More often than not, working-class families would not have insurance to cover the cost of doctors or cover the time of lost wages. In the town of York, the reasons for poverty were quite simple; nearly seventy-five percent of the people lived in poverty because of low wages or large family size.³¹ In another town, one particular family earned a little over £2/wk, yet were still in deficit. The reason, however, was because the husband had been obligated to take care of his mother and pay her bills after she fell ill.³² Widows, it seems, tended to have difficulty supporting themselves. In many cases the

children had already moved out and were supporting their own families; therefore, these children did not have the time and possibly not enough money to help out significantly. One widow relied on her eighteen year old son for income. Her three daughters married young and she could not count on them.³³ Also, wastefulness and carelessness concerning budget management and household goods usage caused financial stress. M. Loane remembers several particular instances where the family bought a whole pound of butter and all of it was set on the table for dinner, but then most of it spoiled and was later tossed out. She also saw many families wasting bread.³⁴

With this analysis of family budgets, it is hard to discern how social investigators concluded that working-class citizens picked up much of the 1890s drink bill. Although they did not spend their earnings on alcohol irresponsibly, many still did spend some of it to buy a quart or two here or there. The amount spent, however, was usually very minimal and did not greatly affect the families' living conditions. From a report by the Royal Commission on Labor in 1893, the laborer tended to eat, dress, and read better than earlier in the century; and on the whole, was drinking less. Generally, it has been understood, "Increased earnings were not generally spent in trade drinking customs, but were handed over to the wife who became the decision maker in all aspects of household expenditure. In many households the husband was only entrusted with pocket money to be spent on fares, beer, tobacco. . ."³⁵ The husband, usually being the main drink consumer, would then have limited funds to indulge in alcohol. Also, with a rise of real wages, the 1890s was the first time greater spending did not go to alcohol. A wider range of consumer goods was available, mainly clothing, furniture, or metal-ware, which many people purchased. This purchasing power definitely benefited the working-class since their homes were not in satisfactory condition. While many social investigators' presumed higher alcohol consumption with higher wages, many working-class families were determined to live a better life. And finally, M.S. Reeves states that married men who earn between 18s and 26s/wk do not and cannot drink. The maximum of 2s/

wk he could keep would go toward fares, clothes, or alcohol. It did not, however, allow much margin for drunkenness.³⁶

In order to understand the expenditure on alcohol, it is important to become acquainted with the price of the drinks. During the 1890s, beer cost, on average, about 2.5d a pint,³⁷ or about 4d per quart.³⁸ Spirits cost around 3s: 4d per pint and wine averaged about 3d per pint,³⁹ although the research suggests the working-class loyally committed themselves to drinking beer. A working-class citizen could, therefore, buy three quarts of beer for around 1s.

For many families, especially those studied in *Family Budgets: Being the Income and Expenses of Twenty-Eight British Households 1891-1894*, alcohol expenditure was virtually non-existent. In fact, out of the twenty-eight families, only five spent a significant amount on alcoholic beverages. Of those five families, one family spent twelve percent of its food budget, not total budget, on alcohol, while the rest spent between three and ten percent.⁴⁰ In one family, both parents enjoyed a stout with their dinner every night, hardly an example of overindulgence.⁴¹

In family budget studies compiled by Henry Higgs from the 1890s, the statistics resemble those of *Family Budgets*. For one family, their total yearly income was £125. They spent only 10.5d on alcohol, which works out to less than three quarts in a year.⁴² Another family earned 105s over five weeks, roughly £1/wk. For beer and tobacco, they spent 3s: 2d, which comes out to twelve quarts over five weeks time.⁴³ Though this is higher than the first family mentioned, two quarts a week could hardly be considered significant in the depletion of the family's income. Lastly, one family averaged out £1: 15s: .25d over five weeks time. Out of this, this family spent 11d/wk on alcohol, almost three quarts per week.⁴⁴

Finally, in Rowntree's York study, one family, renamed the Smith's for this investigation, barely earned enough to have a surplus. Mr. Smith brought home on average 20s/wk and then handed over 18s to his wife. With the 2s he kept for himself, he spent it in the following manner: 1d/day on beer, 3d/wk on tobacco, 3d/wk in children's savings box, and then what was left he kept for clothing. After Mrs. Smith was done buying the food, sundries,

and other miscellaneous items, she had 2d/wk left.⁴⁵ So, Mr. Smith spent about 7d/wk on beer, which is maybe two quarts. Mrs. Smith only had enough left to buy a pint, possibly. Once again, evidence illustrates working-class families cannot afford to spend much on alcohol due to their lack of funds.

Other than family budget reports, autobiographies and interviews have been published concerning working-class life in England during the 1890s. From these texts come similar practices of working-class alcohol habits—responsible and moderate drinking. In the following examples some fathers and/or husbands seem to have drunk more than those in budget studies; however, what is written by these firsthand accounts reveals only innocent expenditure and consumption.

In one household, one woman stated that she and her husband brought in 35s/wk, or about £1: 15s. With that money, she saved 7s. This left 28s to pay for food, sundries, etc., which was plenty enough, she said, for the two of them. Seeing that the pubs were too attractive for her husband, she had a quart of beer at home every night for her husband and friends to enjoy.⁴⁶ If she brought home a quart of beer seven days a week, this would cost her 28d/wk, or approximately 2s: 4d out of the 35s/wk that she and her husband brought in each week.

Furthermore, there are two examples of autobiographies where the father's would drink, but not immoderately. Faith Dorothy Osgerby said one thing she did not inherit from her father was the love of drink. On cold days he would warm his milk with rum. Sometimes her father would not come for dinner and he had to be sent for at the neighborhood pub.⁴⁷ Although this may seem like a questionable act by her father, her autobiography did not state he indulged irresponsibly. She seemed to love her father and her family lived happily and well for a working-class family. Nowhere in her autobiography did Faith complain about their living standards. A similar situation occurred with Jack Lanigan's father. Every morning Jack's father needed a pint of beer with breakfast. Jack and his brother would take turns running the errand.⁴⁸ Jack, though, never complained about his father abusing beer nor did he complain

about his childhood as a working-class youth. The Lanigans incurred hard times, however, when Jack's father passed away. The cause was not alcohol. Jack, his brother, and his mother struggled for some time trying to make ends meet.

In accordance with *Family Budgets*, those families that made more money, usually over a pound and a half a week, spent the highest percentage on alcohol.⁴⁹ In Rowntree's study, those making over 30s/wk, the skilled laborers for the most part, spent much more on alcohol than those in other categories.⁵⁰ Just to reiterate the point, according to a Select Committee of Parliament, the most well paid workers, the artisans, could drink more because they could afford to do so.⁵¹ Although these well-paid workers might have drunk more, there is no evidence that suggests these people spent the majority of their income on this activity.

But these more prosperous working-class citizens, as well as the others, in Edwardian England who chose to drink did so for reasons that have been the same for years: to socialize and to escape.⁵² In order to socialize and escape, the working-class found no better venue than local pubs and inns. The working-class citizens were attracted because beer "... was associated with manliness and virility, and in its principal locus, the public house, with conviviality, good fellowship, class, and occupational identity."⁵³ Although alcohol was one attraction of the pubs, other enticements provided the working-class a place to relax and socialize.

First, pubs were the focal points of local news and gossip. Instead of meeting at each other's houses, home would extend into the pubs.⁵⁴ Secondly, bars all over England were being remodeled during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The bars that remodeled or were rebuilt became more eye-catching to pub attendants.⁵⁵ Saloons with billiards, fine furnishings, carpets, and wallpaper provided, to say the least, a delightful environment for socializing. Furthermore, the ways the bars were designed with their warm and welcoming color of "pitch-pine boarding offered a remarkably sympathetic atmosphere to drink."⁵⁶ Many of the pubs also offered banquet rooms that served as meeting rooms for Trade Unions,

Football Clubs, etc. According to Rowntree, the demand for these rooms during the 1890s was still immense.⁵⁷

Since these pubs provided a nice, roomy, and clean atmosphere to socialize, there is little wonder why many working-class citizens spent their time there. Working-class houses still remained very small and very squalid in appearance. For example, one family of five people lived in a two-room abode. The large living room served as the parents' bedroom while the two boys sleep in the backroom. The little girl sleeps in the living room with her parents. Furniture is very scanty in this particular house.⁵⁸ In Higgs' study, the average rooms per family were only 2.8.⁵⁹ In these cramped conditions, working-class adults needed to leave the house once in a while in order to free themselves from the tight living quarters.

Another attraction was the lunch specials some pubs offered. One example of a lunch special would be potato pie, cheese, pickles, thick twist tobacco, and a pint of beer.⁶⁰ To make life easier on the tired working-class, some pubs would cook meat that customers would bring in from their local butchers.⁶¹ This made the pub evermore attractive since after a long workday, both by the mother at home and the father at his employer, many working-class citizens might not have felt like cooking.

Although it seems that many working-class citizens attended pubs for drinking and other social activities, research suggests that little, if any, drunkenness occurred. First, in one workingmen's club, members spent £5: 8s: 10d a year on beer.⁶² Over the course of a year, this works out to about eight pints each week, or a little over 1s/wk in expenses—hardly immoderate. This amount certainly does not suggest drunkenness. And even though Charles Booth suggested that a quarter of working-class budgets were spent on alcohol,⁶³ he remarked that drunkenness had decreased. He continued to say that the pub has remained the focal point of working-class life.⁶⁴ Speaking about the 1890s, Allen Clarke stated, "I am glad to say there is not quite as much drunkenness . . . as there was twenty years ago."⁶⁵ This reveals that the 1890s in England experienced much more temperance than the immoderate state during the 1870s.

Besides the pubs and clubs, society offered little for working-class recreational activities and social diversions. During the mid to late nineteenth century, most of the leisure activities were created by and for the upper classes.⁶⁶ Although other activities did emerge, such as parks, museums, exhibitions, public libraries, and local churches, these attempts by the upper classes at reforming working-class social activities failed.⁶⁷ One working-class husband and father refused to take his family to a museum. He had never been to one even though he grew up in London. He feared his family would be looked down on because of their inferior dress. Instead, this gentleman found pleasure just by staying at home helping out around the house or entertaining their children. He played the flute for the children—he finds great pleasure in doing this. Then, when he left the house for leisure, he ventured over to his brother's house where they engaged themselves in dominos.⁶⁸ Sunday seemed to be the dullest day for the workingman. Instead of involving themselves in social activities, some men would stay in bed all day and all night until the Monday workday dawned.⁶⁹

Since pub attendance rose due to the lack of other leisure activities for the working-class, many middle class citizens began to form prohibition movements. Although the research shows the working class drank moderately and spent only a slight portion of their budget on this leisure activity, many upper class citizens saw this "drink problem" as a serious threat to England. Many working-class citizens did not buy into this propaganda, however. Because the working-class as a whole refused to take part in this movement, many upper class citizens, and, consequently, social investigators, concluded they indulged in alcohol. This conclusion, however, is unconvincing.

Anti-drink enthusiasm was so strong throughout some areas, especially in northern England, that there were very few towns that were not without a temperance council pushing for a reduction in licenses.⁷⁰ One group at the head of the temperance movement, the teetotalers, believed in complete abstinence from any alcoholic drink. Though it has been stated that some working-class families did not spend one pence on alcohol, there were many that drank occasionally, such as at lunch or at dinner.

Complete abstinence for many working-class workers was unlikely, especially since the pub remained one place where they could enjoy some socialization.

Overall, the teetotalers' movement did not attract or please the working-class because of their "pro-employer" stance. Throughout the nineteenth century, workers struggled with employers for shorter hours and higher wages. Since these teetotalers, in the workers' minds, were fighting on the employers' sides, wages did not significantly increase because the teetotalers were lobbying against it.⁷¹ In addition, the teetotalers refused to admit that there was actually something wrong with the laissez-faire economic system and blamed trade depressions on drink. For these teetotalers, blaming drink was an easy way out to explain social and economic problems.⁷²

The Church of England also took part in this temperance movement during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Named the Church of England Temperance Society (CETS), they mostly drove for alcohol moderation instead of total abstinence. It is not surprising that the CETS ran into trouble with total abstinence groups. The CETS also supported the opening of off-licensed shops on Sundays for a couple hours. This way, the CETS said, if people wanted to have a drink with their Sunday dinners and suppers, they should have the facilities to purchase the alcohol.⁷³

Toward the end of the century, groups were separated into either the chapel or pub category. The chapel turned into a hostile place even for the moderate drinker. Therefore, for many working-class citizens, the chapel offered a place of resentment toward their lifestyle. Thus, many citizens who did not take the side of the chapel were considered defenders of evil. In the final years of the century there was little mixing between the two groups.⁷⁴

The temperance movement brought about much hostility over alcohol consumption. The views of the teetotalers and chapel groups and the propaganda spread throughout the years made it seem that if someone drank, they were on the side of the devil. It also made the working-class seem immoral and irresponsible. So not only were social investigators making inaccurate estimates on working-class

consumption of and expenditure on alcohol, temperance movements gave alcohol an infamous reputation, even in moderation.

Because of the temperance movement's characteristics, it probably did little to sway those in the working-class who drank. Of course, as the research suggests, little propaganda was needed because of the families' lack of income and also various other expenses they needed to pick up.

Another factor that would keep the working-class away from alcohol is the amount of hours they worked each week. Although working hours decreased in the late nineteenth century, the decrease was not very significant. In some workplaces, the fifty-four hour workweek began to emerge, but for many professions, only a minimal cut in hours occurred. For instance, shop assistants often worked eighty to ninety hours per week. Agricultural laborers also toiled varying hours.⁷⁵ In different industrial areas, hours ranged from fifty hours per week to over sixty. Data suggest that most people worked between fifty-two and fifty-eight hours.⁷⁶ From 1850 to 1890, the decrease in hours was gradual and a significant decline did not happen in England until the 1920s. A point of interest, however, is that the biggest decrease in hours occurred between 1870 and 1880, the height of alcohol consumption.⁷⁷ During the 1890s, however, hours did not decrease substantially. The working-class still toiled many hours per week in this decade. The 1890s left the working-class very little time or energy to spend in drinking customs or any other social activity.

The estimations of data drawn in these secondary sources reflect that of family budget studies. In one example, "The husband is engaged from 9am till 6pm daily; Saturdays 9am till 3pm at the dispensary; and occasionally does a little work after dispensary hours for the doctors at 1s per hour."⁷⁸ As a woodsman, one particular man worked six days a week from 8am to 6pm. From time to time he also repairs clocks and watches during the late evening hours.⁷⁹ In another family, the husband works as a slipper maker and labors for eighty to eighty-four hours a week.⁸⁰ Lastly, one husband and father works as a plumber for about fifty-three to fifty-six and half hours per

week. Sometimes he cannot find enough work so he does various other odd jobs, such as paper hanging in homes or working as a porter in auction rooms.⁸¹

As seen here, depending on the trade, the working-class worked varying hours. In addition, it should be noted that along with the chief wage earner's job, income is brought in some other way, either by the wage earner himself or by his wife. This reiterates the point that many working-class citizens worked extra hours. In addition, it also supports the fact that many of these working-class families needed the extra money in order to live comfortably.

In a study titled, *Local Wage Variations*, varying trades were examined to see the amount of money each made and also the amount of hours per week these laborers worked. In this particular study, work hours for various trades seem to be lower than that of the previous ones mentioned. However, their workweek is still rather long. The following professions were charted over various towns across England. The average hours per week have been adjusted to fit the different hours worked during the summer and winter months.

- Plasterers, information collected from eight towns, 50hrs/wk⁸²
- Painters, information collected from six towns, 54hrs/wk⁸³
- Carpenters, information collected from nine towns, 50.6hrs/wk⁸⁴
- Plumbers, information collected from eight towns, 51hrs/wk⁸⁵
- Stonemasons, information collected from seven towns, 48.75hrs/wk⁸⁶
- Bricklayers, information collected from seven towns, 51.4hrs/wk⁸⁷

These hours serve as the normal workweek for these respected professions. In many cases these particular trades also work overtime, therefore further extending their workweek. This study reinforces the fact that many working-class citizens do not have the time, or energy, to participate in drinking customs.

In another example, the principal wage earner worked in a pottery factor from 7am to 6pm. From his earnings, according to his child's autobiography, the father considered them of the high working-class strata. But in addition to

his regular job, he took on a part-time job figuring the assurance book with the Royal Oak Society. He also took the title as the Collector of Dispensary for a local doctor. His father performed these duties because he insisted he needed something to do with his spare time.⁸⁸ In this case, the wage earner took on other jobs as his "leisure activity," and did not spend it drinking or at the pubs.

While working-class husbands and fathers worked long hours in their respected trades, many would not venture to the pubs for drinking or socialization, but would come home to finish up some work around the house. Often, men of the working-class have been characterized as bad husbands and fathers. This generalization, M. Loane points out, is only true for a minority of the population.⁸⁹ Though the reasons why working-class men might be characterized like this are not given, Allen Clarke gives one related to the pub atmosphere. He states many times the attraction to the pubs will provide for a lonely and stressful home life for the wife. The wife would stay at home for most of the day, cleaning the house, taking care of the kids, and in some cases, holding down a part-time job. Needless to say, she would be as tired or more tired than the father. But sometimes he would come home from work, see that everything was in order, and then head out to the pub.⁹⁰ In Loane's observations, however, a working-class father would spend his half-day off at the washtub or finish up his day's work cleaning around the house. Some husbands, she says, pick up some thread and a needle to help out.⁹¹

It has been displayed clearly that the working-class in England did not indulge in alcohol like many of the social investigators had stated. Budget studies, working hours, and temperance analysis revealed that many lacked the money, time, and/or will to drink themselves into inebriation. Furthermore, convictions for drunkenness, as reported by the British House of Commons, actually declined as the 1890s progressed. In comparison with some report samples from the 1870s, clearly less drunkenness occurred during the 1890s. When analyzing these reports on drunkenness convictions, four different geographic areas were examined. The following statistics and analyses

come from rural towns, port towns, mining communities, and large cities. The characterized communities are separated as follows:

Rural: Rutland, Sussex

Mining: Gloucester, Somerset

Large City: London (Metropolitan Police District-MPD and City Ordinance), Liverpool

Port Towns: South Shields, Sunderland, Great Grimsby

Percent of Population Charged with Drunkenness

Year	Rutland	Sussex	S. Shields	Sunderland	G. Grimsby
1889	0.15%	0.35%	2%	1.10%	2.60%
1890	0.09%	0.24%	2%	0.90%	2%
1891	0.13%	0.25%	1.70%	0.80%	1.70%
1892	0.15%	0.30%	2.70%	0.60%	1.40%
1893	0.14%	0.25%	1%	0.65%	1.10%
1894	0.06%	0.27%	1%	0.70%	1.20%
1895	0.09%	0.27%	1.10%	0.68%	1.10%
July 1871-72	0.90%	0.90%	5.40%	2.50%	6.10%

Table 1

Year	Liverpool	London-City	London-MPD	Somerset	Gloucester
1889	3%	1.10%	0.40%	0.20%	0.80%
1890	2.40%	1.50%	0.40%	0.25%	0.80%
1891	1.80%	1.20%	0.40%	0.25%	0.90%
1892	1.60%	1.40%	0.40%	0.20%	0.20%
1893	1.40%	1.20%	0.45%	0.20%	0.27%
1894	0.80%	1.30%	0.50%	0.20%	0.20%
1895	0.80%	1.60%	0.50%	0.18%	0.16%
July 1871-72	7%	N/A	12%	1.10%	0.90%

Table 2

The calculations in tables one and two were taken from House of Commons reports presented during the years of 1873 and then 1890-1895. See the bibliography for further documentation on these reports.

When examining individual municipalities, the percentage of the population convicted for drunkenness is the important statistic, not the number of convictions. Obviously, London will have a higher number of convictions than some rural town because its population will be substantially larger. Another important fact is that the population recorded in 1890 will be the same reported population in 1894 because England's census is taken every ten years. The importance of this fact is that from 1801 to 1901, England's population grew 365%, from 6,893,000 to 32,528,00.⁹² As will be seen, the

number of drunkenness convictions will slightly fall as the years proceed. England's population is still growing at this point; therefore, the percentage will actually be slightly higher than if the actual population from the current year was used. According to the reports, and also displayed in "Table 1" and "Table 2," drunkenness declined in some towns while it stayed relatively constant in the others.

The examination of these drunkenness reports show the whole nation of England did not have as many drunkenness convictions as the 1890s progressed. However, what does this mean for the working-class? If they actually purchased and drank the majority of the alcohol during the 1890s, this means they drank moderately, not immoderately, due to the fact less drunkenness occurred. But as the budget reports show, it is highly unlikely they spent very much on alcohol anyways. So when one social investigator stated that, "In our town there are hundreds of families, the head or heads, of which indulge, not moderately, but immoderately in drink,"⁹³ one should deeply question the meaning of indulgence. Also, the type of town chosen, rural, urban, etc., really showed no significant evidence whether the amount of drunkenness depended on how much the working-class consumed. In addition, how did the law enforcement officials charge someone with being drunk? What was the evidence?

For over one hundred years now the social investigators' statements and conclusions about the working-class and their alcohol consumption habits have plagued modern British history. The copious amount of evidence put forth suggests that the working-class drank moderately, and, in some cases, did not drink at all, while the social investigators concluded immoderate drinking habits and high proportion budget spending on alcohol. As M.S. Reeves states, "Drink is an accusation fatally easy to throw about," which is done often by the upper classes.⁹⁴ Despite the fact that these social historians, such as Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree, are respected for their research and are continuously cited for studies conducted about late nineteenth-century English society, the solidity of their evidence remains in question.

It seems from the wording in their scholarly works that they might have been unsure about the facts of working-class alcohol habits. For instance, "Charles Booth *suggested* it was common for one-quarter of the working-class earnings to be spent on drink as did George Sims, while Seebhom Rowntree *accepted* one-sixth as a *reasonable estimate* for York."⁹⁵ Then, "In regard to the allocation of the total drink bill, Levi *considered* that the working-class purchased seventy-five percent of all beer and spirits and ten percent of all wine sold."⁹⁶ When family budgets are examined, there are definite contradictions concerning alcohol expenditure with the working-class. In addition, these investigators' research does not include any actual family budget information documenting these estimates. In *Family Budgets*, there are no admittances of indulgence of alcohol or extraordinary spending by these particular families. The suggestion of immoderation came from families in the study describing people that live around them spending money carelessly on alcohol.

In Rowntree's study of York, he recognized secondary poverty and its causes. He states that, "There can be but little doubt, however, that the predominant factor is drink. I have been unable to form any close estimate of the average sum spent weekly upon drink by working-class families in York, but a careful estimate has been made by others of the average sum expended weekly by working-class families throughout the United Kingdom."⁹⁷ Rowntree admits he has not obtained enough evidence, but others have, to make this *estimate* of working-class alcohol expenditure. Who are these other people? He never says. The estimation of 6s/wk spent on alcohol by the working-class came out of a portion of the national drink bill that "competent authorities" assigned.⁹⁸ Who are these competent authorities? Once again, Rowntree does not say.

When looking at the House of Commons drunkenness convictions, York resembles that of the other municipalities sampled. In 1890, the percentage of drunkenness convictions was .95%. Then as the years went on, the numbers gradually decreased. By 1894, the percentage of people convicted for drunkenness was down to

.66%.⁹⁹ And although Rowntree states the cause of secondary poverty is drink, the drunkenness convictions in York are low and as he observed many times, most people in the pubs are drinking, but not heavily.¹⁰⁰

Along with lackluster evidence to support their arguments, there are some contradictions in these studies and scholarly works. Although Rowntree states that competent authorities have made these estimates of alcohol expenditure carefully, he states that the classification of those in secondary poverty is made largely by opinion.¹⁰¹ Then in the book *Liquid Pleasures*, John Burnett writes that only the poorest women in the slum districts would be caught in a pub.¹⁰² However, he writes later that public houses became more comfortable where even women could go and stay. Even "respectable" women now attended pubs. Finally, in one of Booth's studies, he observed many vagrants in the streets. He saw them as drunks, thieves, or loafers. According to Salvation Army statistics, though, a high proportion of these men and women were looking for work and were indeed morally decent people.¹⁰³ Not only does past evidence lack solidity of evidence, but in some cases contradict itself.

Even though the evidence supports working-class moderation, some questions cannot be answered, while others need to be raised to address the complexity of this issue of working-class alcohol expenditure. First, the reports of drunkenness made in these studies and in secondary sources come from people who saw their fellow neighbors or peers spending their money carelessly on alcohol and even saw them heavily intoxicated. The validity of these reports is questionable. On a less academic side of the argument, of those working-class citizens that drank moderately, was inebriation acceptable once in awhile?

Secondly, the highest drink rate reported in England during the nineteenth century occurred during the 1870s. The only decade that rivaled it with consumption per head, expenditure, and brewing output was the 1890s. So who was drinking the beer, wine, and spirits? Could it have been the upper classes? Or since these social investigators stated that the working-class took the brunt of the bill, was it the working-class? The evidence put forth states the

working-class could not support this drink bill; however, they could have carried a decent amount. Is it possible that the working-class drank, but did not drink themselves into poverty or drunkenness? Since there was little opportunity for other social and leisure activities, they participated in responsible drinking customs.

Finally, an obvious point, some working-class citizens indulged in alcohol and spent the majority of their budget on it. Nowhere in the world has there ever been a utopia where some class of people is one hundred percent morally perfect. However, those working-class people that did spend a high proportion of their budget on alcohol might not have been married or might not have had a family. In Rowntree's study, he observed that the company in pubs is almost entirely composed of young persons, youths and girls, sitting around the room chatting, drinking, and smoking.¹⁰⁴ Did this division of the working-class take the brunt of the bill? After all, these young persons had no direct familial obligations. And as stated before, those who drank in the working-class were better off economically in the first place.

The evidence displayed on working-class alcohol habits during this "Decade of Decadence" definitely portrays the working-class as a struggling class economically, but not because of drink. Examination of family budgets clearly shows the difficulty many working-class families experienced and that the purchasing occurred hardly at all. Further

examination of those budgets shows the working-class citizens who did spend money on alcohol did not purchase a significant amount. In addition, with the amount of hours many of these people worked, any leisure activity seemed only like a far-fetched dream. And even though some working-class citizens drank, they did so moderately according not only to the family budget examinations, but also according to declining drunkenness convictions' percentages. Although the evidence exhibited thus far is critical of past research and historiography, it is not newly discovered data. History is being written and rewritten everyday. New analyses, hypotheses, and research projects are surfacing everywhere. This subject on working-class alcohol habits during the 1890s has not been rediscovered. Those social investigators of the 1890s reported what they saw and diligently studied their reports. However, what was socially unacceptable during the 1890s now might be seen as an innocent social activity. The drinking activities carried out by the working-class might not have been seen as legitimate socialization, even in moderation. In the twenty-first century, these moderate drinking habits of the working-class seem harmless. The job of a historian is to look at a subject objectively and then find the truth. With these ample amounts of facts supporting the working-class responsible drinking habits, the truth is there, but needs to be examined differently than it has been over the last one hundred years.

End Notes

¹ At the end of the nineteenth century, Western European nations, mainly France and England, began to decline as world powers in industry, trade, and colonization. With their decline saw the emergence of new powers such as the United States, Germany, Japan, and even China. The upper-class elites and government officials in Britain blamed their decline on breaking of social paradigms. These new attitudes such as homosexuality, new styles of art, drug use, and drinking were the brunt of the criticisms handed out by the upper classes.

² Standish Meacham, *A Life Apart: The English Working Class* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 124. ** English money system during the 1890s: *d*= Penny, pence; *s*= shilling; £= Pound. Conversions: 12*d*= 1*s*; 20*s*= £1.

³ B. Seebhom Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 4th ed (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1902), 142.

** Secondary Poverty occurs when a family's earnings would be sufficient for physical efficiency but wages are wasted by carelessness in spending, i.e. gambling, drinking, poor budget management, etc

⁴ *Family Budgets: Being the Income and Expenses of Twenty-Eight British Households 1891-1894* (London: P.S. King and Son, 1896), 76.

⁵ John Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures: a social history of drinks in modern Britain* (London: Rutledge, 1999), 126.

⁶ Derek Oddy and Derek Miller, eds., *The Making of the Modern British Diet* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 98.

⁷ Mark Girouard, *Victorian Pubs* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), 63.

⁸ Seeborn Rowntree and Arthur Sherwell, *The Temperance Problem and Social Reform*, 9th ed. (London: Judder and Stoughton, 1901), 139.

⁹ Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 128.

¹⁰ John Burnett, *Plenty and Want: a social history of diet in England from 1815 to present* (London: Scolar Press, 1979), 151.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹² F.W. Lawrence, *Local Variations in Wage* (New York: Longman's, Green, and Co., 1899), 18.

¹³ *Family Budgets*, 31.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁵ M. Loane, *From Their Point of View* (London: E. Arnold, 1908), Reprint (New York: Garland Publications, 1980), 248-255.

¹⁶ *Family Budgets*, 51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹⁸ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), 28.

¹⁹ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 179.

²⁰ John Burnett, ed., *Destiny Obscure* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 223.

²¹ M.S. Reeves, *Round about a Pound a Week* (London: G. Bell, 1913), Reprint, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 29.

²² Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 165.

²³ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁴ Derek Oddy, "Working-Class Diets in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain" *Economic History Review* 23, no.2 (August 1970), 321.

** Primary Poverty is simply not bringing in enough income to survive adequately.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

²⁶ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 44.

²⁷ Oddy, "Working-Class Diets in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain," 319, 322.

²⁸ Henry Higgs, "Workmen's Budgets" *Journey of Royal Statistical Society*, 56, no.2 (June 1893), 259.

²⁹ Oddy, "Working-Class Diets in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain," 321.

³⁰ Allen Clarke, *The Effects of the Factory System* (London: Grant Richards, 1899), 53-4.

³¹ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 120.

³² *Family Budgets*, 25.

³³ *Ibid.*, 38,39.

³⁴ M. Loane, 76.

³⁵ Bernard Waites, *Popular Culture: Past and Present* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 106.

³⁶ Reeves, 9-10.

³⁷ Oddy, *Making of the Modern British Diet*, 120.

³⁸ Girouard, 4.

³⁹ Oddy, 120.

⁴⁰ *Family Budgets*, 75.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27-8.

⁴² Higgs, 279.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁴⁵ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 55.

⁴⁶ Loane, 91.

⁴⁷ Faith Dorothy Osgerby, *My Memoirs*, unpublished autobiography, in *Destiny Obscure*, ed. John Burnett (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 91-2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁹ *Family Budgets*, 70.

⁵⁰ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 73.

⁵¹ Oddy and Miller, 126.

⁵² Meacham, 124.

⁵³ Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 125.

⁵⁴ Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 226.

⁵⁵ Girouard, 87.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 74, 77.

⁵⁷ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 310.

⁵⁸ *Family Budgets*, 21.

⁵⁹ Higgs, 256.

⁶⁰ Robert Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (London: Penguin, 1971), 112.

⁶¹ Oddy and Miller, 162.

⁶² Meacham, 123.

⁶³ Oddy and Miller, 120.

⁶⁴ M.A. Bienfeld, *Working Hours in British Industry: An Economic History* (London: Redwood Press, 1972), 101.

- ⁶⁵ Clarke, 151.
- ⁶⁶ John Benson, ed., *The Working Class in England 1875-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 179.
- ⁶⁷ Waites, 99-100.
- ⁶⁸ *Family Budgets*, 21
- ⁶⁹ Benson, 148.
- ⁷⁰ Lilian Shiman Lewis, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 194.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 207.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 209.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 108-109.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 153, 156.
- ⁷⁵ Benson, 135.
- ⁷⁶ Bienfeld, 153.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ⁷⁸ *Family Budgets*, 27.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-30, 32.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ⁸² Lawrence, 66.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 54
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ⁸⁸ Albert Goodwin, *Autobiography*, unpublished autobiography, in *Destiny Obscure*, ed. John Burnett (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 283.
- ⁸⁹ Loane, 25-6.
- ⁹⁰ Clarke, 139.
- ⁹¹ Loane, 147-8.
- ⁹² H.A. Monckton, *History of the English Public House* (London: Bodley Head, 1969), 77.
- ⁹³ Oddy and Miller, 227.
- ⁹⁴ Reeves, 76.
- ⁹⁵ Oddy and Miller, 120. ** Author of paper added italics in quote.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 120. ** Author of paper added italics in quote.
- ⁹⁷ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 142.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.
- ⁹⁹ House of Commons, 1890-1895.
- ¹⁰⁰ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 311.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ¹⁰² Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 130.
- ¹⁰³ Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 206.
- ¹⁰⁴ Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, 311.

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