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# Drink and society in twentieth-century Ireland

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## Abstract

This chapter examines debates, controversies and trends in relation to the consumption of alcoholic drink in twentieth-century Ireland, and explores the difficulties and ambiguities associated with characterising the consumption of alcohol in Ireland and defining the Irish drinking culture during this period. In doing so, it includes reflections on drunkenness, temperance, alcoholism, licensing legislation, the drinks industry, the impact of the Catholic Church, the extent to which debate about alcohol was gendered and the role of alcohol in stereotyping Irish identity. Numerous examples of the range of social, political and cultural comment on Irish alcohol consumption are cited, and the chapter also looks at the connections between alcohol consumption and the economy, the impact of modernisation on consumption and the range of alcoholic drinks consumed, and the difficulties associated with alcohol consumption statistics and the comparative analysis of moderate and excessive drinking.

## Introduction

In June 1949, on one of the hottest days of the summer, 80,000 members of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association (PTAA) crammed into the Gaelic Athletic Association stadium at Croke Park in Dublin for the golden jubilee celebrations of the PTAA. By that stage the PTAA was the largest Catholic lay association in the Irish Republic with an estimated membership of 500,000. Established in 1898 its members took a pledge to abstain from alcohol (what was termed a 'heroic offering') in devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The Croke Park celebrations in 1949 provoked the ire of the brilliant writer and alcoholic Flann O'Brien, who lambasted members of the PTAA for bringing Dublin City to a standstill by taking over its transport network in order, as he saw it, to parade their piety. In his *Irish Times* column published a day after the event, he remarked:

Dublin's working man with his wife or four children intent on spending a day at the seaside does not have to journey to Croke Park to prove that he is not a slave to whiskey. If he can manage a pint of porter a day it is the best he can do . . . I can call nothing comparable to yesterday's

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procedure and I hope somebody will examine the legality of it. If the abstainers are entitled to disrupt transport in their own peculiar and selfish interest, there is in our democratic mode no reason in the world why the drinking men of Ireland should not demand and be given the same right. Let everybody stay at home because the boozers are in town! I would advise these Pioneer characters that there is more in life than the bottle, that fair play to others is important and that temperance—taking the word in its big and general value—is a thing they might strive to cultivate a bit better.<sup>1</sup>

The PTAA rally and O'Brien's response to it underlined some aspects of Ireland's tortured relationship with alcohol by the middle of the twentieth century, and the difficulty of finding a middle ground with regard to its consumption. In the same year writer John D. Sheridan depicted the dilemma of the moderate drinker in such a country. Moderate consumers of alcohol, he suggested:

resent the sneers of the heavy drinker—that prince of bigots—who looks down on us as cute, penny-watching apron-slaves, and is forever trying to raise us to his mighty stature. Our case against the total abstainer is not so easy to put into words, since we envy his high motives and admire his self-control, but we think it unfair that we who carry the heavier end of the cross should be denied a share of the halo.<sup>2</sup>

## I

The contributions of O'Brien and Sheridan regarding the place of alcohol in Irish society were a continuation of debates that had been aired, spasmodically, for over a century. The Capuchin friar Fr Theobald Mathew (Fig. 1) made a considerable impact with his temperance crusade in the late 1830s—estimates of the number of pledges administered during his dominance vary from 700,000 to over 2 million—reflecting the transition from moderation to teetotal in mid-1830s temperance societies, a departure which was accompanied by increased working-class involvement. The Fr Mathew episode highlighted the relative ease with which a temperance crusade could be transformed into a temporary mass movement, but it also exposed a multitude of difficulties, including indifference on the part of the Catholic hierarchy and hostility from Protestants. Its link with nationalist politics and the failure to establish a national structure to provide durable foundations for the future of the movement were also problematic.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Irish Times*, 27 June 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *A nation of extremes: the pioneers in twentieth century Ireland*, 2nd edn (Dublin, 2008), 207.

<sup>3</sup> Colm Kerrigan, *Father Mathew and the Irish Temperance Movement* (Cork, 1992), 80. See also Paul A. Townsend, *Father Mathew, temperance and Irish identity* (Dublin, 2002), 260–89.



FIG. 1—‘The very revd. Theobald Mathew the great apostle of temperance’, c. 17 April 1849. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-1727 (b&w film copy neg.). Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

The consumption of alcohol in the nineteenth century militated against political support for temperance; consumption of spirits was in decline from the 1850s due to hefty tax increases, while beer-drinking increased, which created substantial tax revenue; the greater prosperity of rural Ireland after the Famine also contributed to an increase in beer consumption but economic decline from the late 1870s reduced overall alcohol consumption. Although many of the statistics regarding alcohol consumption in the nineteenth century are less than comprehensive, partly because of the extent of illicit distillation, general trends are traceable. Consumption of spirits plummeted in the early 1840s, late 1850s and early 1860s and stagnated after the mid-1870s; by that stage, Irish spirit consumption was lower than Scotland and the United States of America. In relation to per capita beer consumption, a measure that is problematic (see below), the figure for Ireland in 1851 was estimated at 3.5 gallons, which rose to 26 gallons by 1901; these figures ‘were always exceeded, often two to

four times, by figures from the United Kingdom as a whole'. Economic forces were clearly a major determining factor in beer and spirit consumption and wine consumption was minimal.<sup>4</sup>

What was unique about Ireland was its identification with Guinness porter; its iconic St James's Gate Brewery had been located in Dublin since 1759. The output of the Irish brewing industry trebled between the 1850s and 1914, by which time 40% of its production was exported, and that success was largely associated with Guinness, at that stage the largest brewery in the world.<sup>5</sup> Between 1850 and 1875 its sales increased by 600% and the Irish rural market was a key factor in this expansion. By the time of the First World War the Guinness Company, with capital of £5 million, employed 2,000 people and had a reputation as an enlightened and socially progressive employer.

The licensing laws governing the availability of alcohol in Ireland caused much comment as they were distributed over 25 acts of parliament, which seemed to reinforce a liberal interpretation of their provisions, if not ignorance of their content. This was one reason for the House of Lords 1898 Commission on Intoxicating Liquor, which in common with other such commissions was good at highlighting and specifying abuse and wrongdoing, but rather weak on proposing solutions. The commission exposed much malpractice in relation to the operating of the licensing laws, the deplorable condition and excessive number of public houses, and the vigorous canvassing of Justices and packing of benches when the granting of licences was being decided.

Despite per capita consumption figures that suggested relative moderation, the contention that Ireland was shaming itself, morally, politically and culturally by its heavy drinking achieved widespread currency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What lay behind such assertions and a seemingly Irish tolerance of and ambivalence to excess? Many reasons have been suggested, including the idea that it was a product of colonisation, or in the words of nineteenth-century nationalist Thomas Davis, there was a destructive desire 'to achieve liberty and luxury for an hour by the magic of intoxication' (an argument later used by Irish nationalists, in the words of A. M. Sullivan, MP, was that 'Ireland sober' would be 'Ireland free').<sup>6</sup> The use of drink for medicinal purposes in a cold and damp climate was also cited, as were dietary gaps being filled with drink and payment for work through alcohol in the absence of an advanced cash society. It has also been maintained that heavy drinking was a form of solace to counteract emigration and exile, a facilitator of group identity and an affirmation of male identity.<sup>7</sup> A new post-Famine single

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Malcolm, *Ireland sober, Ireland free: drink and temperance in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1986), 323–5.

<sup>5</sup> Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: a new economic history 1780–1939* (Oxford, 1994), 304.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Malcolm, 'Temperance and Irish nationalism', in F. S. L. Lyons (ed.), *Ireland under the union: varieties of tension* (Oxford, 1980), 70–5.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Stivers, *A hair of the dog: Irish drinking and American stereotype* (New York, 1976), 13–14. See also Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley, *The Irish in Britain 1815–1939* (London, 1989), 1–10.

inheritance farm economy, lower marriage rates and a cultural remission, or 'a release from sexual Puritanism' have also been cited as reasons for Irish excess<sup>8</sup> as have the power of Irish breweries which needed to operate on a large scale in order to compete with English brewers' expansion of their trade as a result of the English industrial revolution and cheaper imports. There was also the peculiarly Irish system of buying 'rounds' of drinks, seen by its critics as the bane of Irish social life.<sup>9</sup>

In the early twentieth century it was widely agreed that the country was drinking excessively; over £15 million a year was being spent on drink in Ireland at the time of the First World War and there were over 15,000 licensed premises.<sup>10</sup> In tandem, public health reformers and moral crusaders were vocal in linking alcohol abuse to a variety of tragedies, including lost childhoods. Reports from the Dublin branch of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, for example, identified excessive drinking as the chief cause of child neglect and there were numerous references in its reports to women addicted to alcohol, or 'confirmed drunkards' as they were labelled.<sup>11</sup> But there were such a variety of vested interests in the alcohol industry that a cynicism existed about the extent to which politicians would be prepared to enact legislation or help foster a climate that would reduce consumption.

A problem that has faced all chroniclers of Irish alcohol consumption is that official figures, in so far as they were available, told only part of the story because they were meta rather than micro snapshots and did not factor in abstainers, which, given the impact of the PTAA, were a very sizeable cohort. In the absence of reliable consumption figures it is difficult to establish the veracity of assertions about the extent of excessive drinking, but it was undoubtedly the case that after the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, critics of Irish alcohol consumption saw this time of transition as an opportunity to tackle excess. In 1925, for example, the writer and poet George Russell (AE) noted acerbically:

It is merely absurd that a country struggling desperately to find its feet should attempt to maintain in proportion to its population twice as many licensed houses as England and three times as many as Scotland. The statistics for individual towns are still more startling. In Charlestown and Ballaghadereen every third house is licensed to sell liquor; Ballyhaunis, with a total population of a thousand, has a drink shop for every twenty of its inhabitants and Strokestown and Mohill run it close with one for every twenty six ... how many of these towns can boast a bookshop, a gymnasium, a public swimming bath or a village hall? Throughout the greater part of a rural Ireland such things are still looked on as ridiculous

<sup>8</sup> Stivers, *A hair of the dog*, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Ferriter, *A nation of extremes*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> Ferriter, *A nation of extremes*, 38–83.

<sup>11</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of sin: sex and society in modern Ireland* (London, 2009), 46–7.

luxuries, and the mark of social progress is demonstrated by the opening of two public houses where one would normally suffice . . .<sup>12</sup>

Cumann na nGaedheal, which governed the new Free State until 1932, was urged to tackle the licensed vintners, to restrict pub opening hours and to decrease the number of pub licences. It responded quite vigorously, through an intoxicating liquor commission and licensing acts in 1924 and 1927. By that stage the government was particularly conscious of figures which revealed that in England and Wales there were 86,722 licensed premises (a ratio of 1 for every 415 of the population), in Scotland 56,841 (1:695) and in Ireland 16,396 (1:263). An important factor in the promotion of new legislation was the determination of Kevin O'Higgins, minister for home affairs (subsequently minister for justice), who stated in 1923 that:

we need a genuine licensing code, not a bewildering maze of statutes and decisions, which, while creating offences also provided ingenious means of escape for unscrupulous people, and for people otherwise honest but who were driven to lie and worse in the struggle for existence.<sup>13</sup>

For the government, such sentiments were indicative of the need not only to negotiate a middle path through the licensing maze, but also a tacit acceptance that any restrictive legislation would arouse the ire of the licensed trade, a powerful lobbying group, which was politically influential. In an internal government memorandum, it was accepted that 'they are now vested and not to be disturbed'.<sup>14</sup> It took a forceful politician like O'Higgins to do just that. As Madeleine Humphreys has noted, while revenue was of paramount importance, there was still a determination to regularise the trade, despite the fact that the 15,339 recorded convictions for drunkenness in 1914 had been reduced to 6,862 by 1925.<sup>15</sup>

The 1924 Licensing Act, particularly the sections dealing with a reduction in trading hours, compulsory endorsement of licences after conviction for an offence and the position of district justices in their application of this law (they had been far too lenient) 'clearly symbolizes O'Higgins' acute anxiety that the judiciary should understand its subservience to the state while the publicans would know their privileged monopoly demanded exceptional responsibility'.<sup>16</sup> The Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1927 reduced the number of licensed premises and prohibited general openings on Sundays.

<sup>12</sup> Terence Brown, *Ireland: a social and cultural history, 1922–79*, 2nd edn (London, 1986), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Ferriter, *A nation of extremes*, 93.

<sup>14</sup> National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Department of Justice (DJ), H47 A, Licensing law reform, March 1923.

<sup>15</sup> Madeleine Humphreys, 'Jansenists in high places: a study of the relationship between the liquor trade and manufacturing industry and the Cumann na nGaedheal government 1922–32', unpublished MA thesis, University College Dublin, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Humphreys, 'Jansenists in high places', 178.

Nevertheless, O'Higgins was careful in the language that he used, insisting he was not hostile to the licensed trade or indulging prohibitionists masquerading as temperance reformers. He was also deliberately vague in addressing the question of whether Ireland was a nation of drunks. Speaking in the Dáil in 1927 he commented

That of course is a question of angles. What is excessive drinking? I do not take it that excessive drinking means that you fall over a man every five yards on your way home. If we are drinking beyond our resources there is excessive drinking. £17.5 million was spent across the counter on drink in the financial year 1925–6. Is that excessive drinking? Some people would say no. Some people would say very differently. At any rate I object to the criterion that drunkenness and drunkenness alone is to be the test of whether or not there is excessive drinking.<sup>17</sup>

The licensed vintners, who had formed an association as early as 1817—the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA)—to safeguard their interests, in bemoaning in the 1920s what they saw as punitive legislation, were defensive, and frequently identified their own targets. In particular, they singled out chemists who sold spirits, illicit distillers and private clubs which they characterised as ‘gigantic drinking shops with the difference that they had no restrictions or limitations of any sort or kind’. The LVA also criticised excessive duties on spirits, and its chairman in 1925 expressed the view that the government was ‘travelling too fast on a subject which the old regime avoided as long as possible’. At a licensed trade conference the following year, its chairman J. P. O'Neill condemned Irish licensing legislation as ‘harsh, unjust and ill-conceived’. Following the general election of June 1927, after which Fianna Fáil TDs took their seats in the Dáil for the first time, J. P. O'Neill expressed satisfaction that the Dáil was now representative of the whole state with the result that the ‘prohibitionist mindset will not be allowed to prevail’. Few subsequent governments had the appetite to confront the vintners.<sup>18</sup>

## II

The extent to which the Catholic Church assumed control over the moral and religious climate of the new Free State has been well-documented, and it is unsurprising that advocates of sobriety felt they had an unprecedented opportunity to link the question of alcohol abuse to the preoccupation with eradicating other perceived moral abuses. Given the wider debates in Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s concerning the impact of foreign social imports, including motor cars, ‘company keeping’, jazz music and what was termed the ‘dance craze’, it was inconceivable that Catholic activists on the drink question, dedicated as they were to domestic moral purity, would not make their voices heard.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ferriter, *A nation of extremes*, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Ferriter, *A nation of extremes*, 95.

<sup>19</sup> James Smyth, ‘Dancing, depravity and all that jazz: the Public Dance Halls Act of 1935’, *History Ireland* 1:2 (1993), 51–5.



Much of the focus remained gendered, with women being regarded as both more vulnerable to excess and their abuse of alcohol more transgressive than that of their male counterparts. The Irish Bishops' Lenten Pastoral of 1924 referred to the 'existence of many abuses' in the context of morality and decency. Maintaining this trend in 1926, a sermon by Dr Thomas Gilmartin, archbishop of Tuam, referred to the trend in women's immodest dress and suggested 'the future of the country is bound up with the dignity and purity of the women of Ireland'.<sup>20</sup> Part of this future, it seemed, involved more female sobriety. In the early 1930s a prominent Dundalk priest decried the advent of the 'modern girl':

You know the type I mean, a feather-headed immature creature who talks a lot about being independent, emancipated and nap-doodle of that sort. She deems it essential to throw—to use no stronger word—conventionality to the winds, to toss off as many glasses of champagne as her befuddled admirers, and swallow cocktails with the best of the simpering hobbledahoys who are the young bloods of this age. Fortunately, the modern girl with her boasted independence and emancipation from parental and other control is alien to the Catholic and Irish mind. That safeguard, great though it is, in many cases does not suffice, for quite a number of foreign influences have found their way into our midst and made themselves felt. At all events the modern girl is a cross-channel importation, and you will be well advised to place upon her a protective tariff ... the man who enters the matrimonial state with the modern girl and hopes to make a success of it needs to be more than a magician. For one thing, he is an incurable optimist.<sup>21</sup>

Writers of fiction also broached the issue of male abuse of drink, though in less bombastic terms. In his 1932 novel *The saint and Mary Kate*, Frank O'Connor drew attention to the havoc the abuse of alcohol wreaked on Irish family life, and the character Mary Kate's realisation that the truth of an Irish adage—'behind all the love of women for man lies a secret sorrow'—was that of excessive drinking. Alcohol abuse also created a sexual incapacity, suggested O'Connor, to the point that 'where the charms of women are concerned, a son of Erin couldn't care less'.<sup>22</sup>

There also was much hypocrisy evident in relation to the castigation of excessive Irish drinking. Eoin O'Duffy, for example, the leader of the Irish fascist Blueshirt movement in the 1930s, and a successful Garda commissioner in the 1920s, devoted much attention to preaching what has been termed 'the gospel of national virility' by promoting fitness and athleticism and denouncing vices, especially smoking and drinking. Yet, O'Duffy 'never exercised, smoked

<sup>20</sup> Maria Luddy, 'Sex and the single girl in 1920s and 1930s Ireland', *The Irish Review* 35 (2007), 79–92.

<sup>21</sup> *Irish Catholic*, 3 December 1932.

<sup>22</sup> Frank O'Connor, *The saint and Mary Kate* (London, 1932), 47.

eighty Sweet Aftons a day and developed a serious alcohol problem'. His biographer Fearghal McGarry has reasonably suggested that O'Duffy identified his own shortcomings with those of the general population, 'a process of transference which may have been reinforced by the gulf between his idealized and real identities'.<sup>23</sup> But what was more common than condemnation was acceptance, ambivalence or a tolerance of excess wrapped up in a charitable disposition; the idea of drunkenness as 'the weakness of the good man'. Like other shortcomings in the Irish character, according to Joe Lee, drink abuse was afforded a 'reassuringly venial status in the hierarchy of morality'.<sup>24</sup>

But in parallel, it was reported in the early 1930s that since 1921 'there had been a general marked decrease in the consumption of alcoholic liquor of all kinds'<sup>25</sup> and there had been a further decline in spirits consumption after 1900. It is also estimated that there was a 20% drop in deaths from cirrhosis of the liver between 1908 and 1949.<sup>26</sup> There is little doubt that the Guinness Company was affected by a reduction in its domestic market; what was significant was its expansion and internationalisation, partly because during the interwar years the Irish market contracted sharply, though 'the decline in Irish sales in absolute terms was partly compensated by the advance of extra stout at the expense of the less profitable porter'.<sup>27</sup> All brewing was seriously impeded by the First World War, with a consistent decline in sales throughout Ireland and Britain, and Guinness reacted by launching its first advertising campaign in the late 1920s, stressing the alleged medical benefits of Guinness, and using the subsequently famous slogan 'Guinness is good for you'. These advertisements led to a rise in sales and resulted in future campaigns with ever increasing budgets.

The Guinness Company, along with a reputation for philanthropy and social initiatives, proved remarkably adaptable in business terms. It steered 'a wise course' through political unrest and two world wars, deciding to brew Guinness stout for the first time outside of Ireland by opening a huge plant at Park Royal, west London, in 1936, and after 1945 the company's breweries multiplied and diversified into other branches of the beer and drink industries.<sup>28</sup> But the linking of Irishness with Guinness remained central to the company's marketing strategy.

In relation to alcohol addiction, a notable development was the arrival of the first European branch of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to Dublin in 1946, which encouraged discussion in the following decades about the nature of drink addiction. Shane Butler, author of a book on how AA fared in Ireland,

<sup>23</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: a self-made hero* (Oxford, 2005), 162–3.

<sup>24</sup> Joe Lee, *Ireland: politics and society, 1912–1985* (Cambridge, 1989), 645.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, 'Consumption of alcohol', *Irish Times*, 9 May 1933.

<sup>26</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 November 1972, and *Irish Independent*, 7 December 1972.

<sup>27</sup> S. R. Dennison and Oliver Mac Donagh, *Guinness 1886–1939: from incorporation to the Second World War* (Cork, 1998), 264–6.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Corcoran, *The goodness of Guinness* (Dublin, 2005), 143–6.

describes AA as ‘loosely structured and largely leaderless’, its promoters believing that ultimately, for all the debate about defining alcoholism as a disease, the only diagnosis that mattered was self-diagnosis. Particularly during times when the ‘ownership of drinking problems’ was still such a contested affair, AA was shrewd in maintaining an official position of neutrality in relation to the concept of alcoholism as a disease. Distaste for top-down authority and for facilitating the autonomy of individual AA groups was also essential to its longevity in Ireland.<sup>29</sup>

AA arrived in Ireland at a time when some saw its philosophy as a threat to the homogeneity of the medical profession and the Catholic Church, and in overcoming these difficulties, the persistence and the abilities of key AA organisers like Conor Flynn, Richard Perceval and in particular Sackville O’Conor Mallins, who devoted 30 years of his life to organising AA in Ireland, were instrumental. He insisted ‘either the Catholic Church in Ireland was made an ally or AA in Ireland was sunk’ and demonstrated considerable skill and energy in ensuring that it stayed afloat. The Catholic archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, did not give it his blessing or denounce it; Butler refers to this as ‘the curious incident of the dog that didn’t bark’,<sup>30</sup> and AA must stand alone as something that provoked neutrality from the exceptionally opinionated and interfering McQuaid.

This did not mean that individual AA organisers did not have to build contacts and alliances, whilst retaining the association’s independence. Building these networks was no easy task, as seen, for example, in its relationship with the National Council on Alcoholism, established in 1966 by the minister for health, and about which O’Conor Mallins became disillusioned and somewhat cynical, criticising ‘the circle of so-called experts’ globetrotting to various conferences.<sup>31</sup>

Although it is impossible to give a realistic estimate of the number of alcoholics in Ireland during this era, it is clear that ignorance at all levels of society existed concerning the condition. The Intoxicating Liquor Commission, which reported in 1957, formed the basis for the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1959 that sought to further liberalise the Irish licensing laws. Although there was opposition to the 1959 legislation, particularly from Archbishop McQuaid, politicians, including Taoiseach Seán Lemass, rejected the requests of those who sought a free vote in the Dáil on grounds of conscience, and were able to cleverly square the circle of episcopal disapproval by claiming, in the words of Lemass, that ‘drunkenness is a sin for which men are responsible to a higher court than ours’.<sup>32</sup>

The Intoxicating Liquor Bill episode was interesting for other reasons. The report of the commission had stated baldly that drunkenness was no longer a serious problem in Irish society. As someone who was deeply involved in the provision of Catholic social services in Dublin, McQuaid was justified in challenging this fallacious contention. In a letter to the Department of the

<sup>29</sup> Shane Butler, *Benign anarchy: Alcoholics Anonymous in Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), 32–58.

<sup>30</sup> Butler, *Benign anarchy*, 89–92.

<sup>31</sup> Butler, *Benign anarchy*, 124–32.

<sup>32</sup> *Dáil debates*, vol. 178, cols 384–6, 25 November 1959.

Taoiseach in May 1959, McQuaid expressed regret that 'in the report, consideration is given to drunkenness, not to alcoholism' and suggested that, given the continued increase in the consumption of drink, aligned with a falling population and high percentage of abstainers, it was surely obvious that there was heavier drinking by fewer people. As a result of his comments, the Department of Justice queried the Department of Health as to the scale of alcoholism in Ireland. The reply was an indictment of the prevailing ignorance concerning alcohol abuse, and characteristic of an ambivalent official attitude to the Irish drinking culture: 'Off hand the Department of Health have said it is not a problem in this country: that fewer than 400 persons are received into institutions (public or private) for treatment in any year'.<sup>33</sup>

### III

Despite the pace of change in Ireland in the 1960s there was a certain stagnation associated with some Irish drinking practices and the drinking environment. Assertions about the Irish drink 'culture' became more negative. This was the analysis of writer Michael Sheehy:

Intoxicating drink is the Irish anodyne. A fondness for drink, like religion and patriotism, unites and characterises the Catholic Irish. It is evident everywhere, in city, town and country, in all social classes rich and poor, educated and ignorant, and, in recent decades in women as well as in men. Irish drinking is heaviest in the country towns where addicts excuse themselves by saying 'there's nothing else to do'. The clergy themselves are apt to share in this 'good man's weakness' and turn a blind eye on Irish drinking habits.<sup>34</sup>

In his study of the (fictional) western parish of Inishkillane, Hugh Brody wrote of drinking patterns and habits being closely aligned to the seasons, with heavy but happy drinking in the summer and more despondency in the winter among the alcoholic bachelors:

A drunken man in winter leans more heavily on the bar. He often seeks to draw another drinker or two to his side. Such a group creates a tight circle of privacy around itself—a privacy physically expressed by the arms they lay across another's shoulders. Then, with faces almost touching, they appear to join closely in evident despair. This despair is not expressed in discussion among the drinkers. Rather, they exchange silence as if it were words, and words in brief expression of the lonesomeness.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> NAI, Department of the Taoiseach (DT) S16524, Memorandum from the Department of Justice, 5 June 1959.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Sheehy, *Is Ireland dying? Culture and the church in modern Ireland* (London, 1968), 204–06.

<sup>35</sup> Hugh Brody, *Inishkillane: change and decline in the west of Ireland* (London, 1973), 33.

There were however, alternative observations, such as the following from Donal Connery, an American journalist writing in 1969, who concluded that alcoholism was a problem, and that it had a seriously negative effect on relations between the sexes, yet he cautioned:

The pub is a booby-trap however, for anyone trying to take a true measure of Irish life. The fact is that the majority of adults hardly ever set foot in a pub. Most Irish females simply do not drink in public and many never touch a drop in their lives, and among the men there are more total abstainers than heavy drinkers . . . I will admit, as I write this that it is painful to go against form and portray the Irishman as something other than a glorious drinker and an altogether devil of a fellow. None the less, there are far more homes than pubs in Ireland and it is in the homes that one must look for the Irishman as he is most of the time. Away from the conviviality of the pub he's revealed as someone who is extraordinarily ordinary. He leads a far simpler and certainly less sophisticated life than most other Europeans.<sup>36</sup>

These observations are a reminder that there was no adequate or agreed definition of the 'Irish drinking culture'. While it has frequently been asserted that 'Ireland is synonymous with pubs'; that 'the importance of the pub to community life cannot easily be overstated'; that 'there is something quintessentially Irish about the country's relationship with alcohol' and that heavy consumption 'is viewed as the heroic preservation of a famous oral culture', what caused counter comment was an identification of 'extreme ambivalence about drinking' as 'part of the national psyche'.<sup>37</sup>

But there was a high proportion of Irish adults who abstained from drink—one estimate from 1968 was that they accounted for 42% of the adult population—and those intent on promoting more sobriety or seeking to prevent alcohol abuse received increasing publicity and were provided with new forums in the 1960s and international research, which provided verifiable evidence of the harm of excessive consumption. In 1967, the year after the government announced the establishment of the National Council on Alcoholism, it was suggested in the *Sunday Press* that there were up to 60,000 alcoholics in Ireland, and that perhaps the prevalence of alcoholism and the concomitant call for a more ecumenical approach to a problem which had for so long remained underground, represented a challenge to those who saw it as primarily a moral failing. Modern research on the issue generated new perspectives which suggested that traditional attitudes to alcoholism were not only lacking in

<sup>36</sup> Donal Connery, *The Irish* (London, 1969), 97–100.

<sup>37</sup> Shane Kilcommins and Ian O'Donnell (eds), *Alcohol, society and law* (Chichester, West Sussex, 2003), xix; James Fennell and Turtle Bunbury, *The Irish pub* (London, 2008), 6.

scientific and medical accuracy but were also devoid of basic charity.<sup>38</sup> European sociological research, which suggested that inculcating children with an exceptionally negative view of alcohol was not conducive to a healthy and balanced approach to alcohol in later life, was also cited. Particularly influential was the Plaut report, published by the French government in 1967, which condemned therapeutic nihilism (the belief that problem drinkers could not be helped), and criticised the confusion of disapproval of dangerous drinking with opposition to all drinking.<sup>39</sup>

The enduring identification of Irishness with drinking to excess was, however, bolstered by the antics of well-known Irish personalities who were famed for their drunkenness. These included the playwright, Brendan Behan (Pl. I), who used his drinking to establish himself as a 'character'; a hard drinker 'who could enthrall any gathering with a stream of songs, parodies and grotesquely dramatized incidents'. But this 'roaring boy' persona masked a



PL. I —Brendan Behan being asked to sing again at the Jager house Ballroom 85st & lex av [sic]/World Telegram & Sun photo by Phil Stanziola, 1960. Reproduction Number: LC-USZ62-108030 (b&w film copy neg.). Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

<sup>38</sup> Ferriter, *A nation of extremes*, 216ff.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Plaut, *Alcohol problems: a report to the nation by the co-operative commission on the study of alcoholism* (New York, 1967), 8.

tragedy: 'his failure to face up to the solitary discipline of writing filled him with guilt and self-disgust which led in turn to heavier drinking in order to obliterate his demons, although as a diabetic he knew that such drinking was suicidal'.<sup>40</sup> He died in 1964 at the age of just 41.

Behan also achieved international recognition due to his television appearances in Britain and the United States, but broadcasts relying on the theme of the drunken Irish were a source of concern for those seeking to project a more sophisticated image of Irishness internationally. In June 1960 an article in *Time* magazine which made reference to the unlikeliness of an Irishman attending a temperance meeting, provoked the ire of the Department of External Affairs. In response, the Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, addressed a community group in County Tipperary and suggested that the stereotypes of the drunken Irish fuelled racial prejudice:

One of the most persistent and irritating falsehoods about the Irish is that they are excessive consumers of alcoholic drink. The lie has gone very far afield. Even the BBC Television service rarely, if ever presents a play about Ireland without the characters moving around in clouds of alcoholic vapour. The simple truth is ignored and the truth is that the per capita consumption of alcoholic drink in Ireland is one of the lowest for all countries for which reliable statistics are available ... the consumption of beer per head in Britain is about the same as in Ireland, and of wines considerably higher. Of all the spirit drinking countries, Irish per capita consumption is nearly the lowest.<sup>41</sup>

The contentions of Lemass were a result of details furnished by the Central Statistics Office, which had been established in 1949; the figures he received, based on the year 1958, showed that in bulk litres of alcohol, Ireland's per capita consumption was 64.3 litres of beer and 1.2 litres of spirits, while the figures in Britain were 79.1 and 1.1, respectively.<sup>42</sup>

Whatever about sensitivity regarding racial stereotypes, successive Irish governments virtually ignored many of the social problems associated with underage drinking and alcohol-induced poverty and crime. Alcohol consumption rose dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1963 and 1972 consumption of spirits, for example, rose by 66%. Brewers, notably Guinness, continued to innovate and adapt to cater for new markets; one of the successful episodes in brewing during this period was the creation by Guinness of Harp Lager in 1961; sales of this new product rose to 1 million barrels by 1970

<sup>40</sup> Colbert Kearney, 'Brendan Francis Behan', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography: from the earliest times to the year 2002* (9 vols, Cambridge and Dublin, 2009), vol. 1, 415–17.

<sup>41</sup> NAI, DT S16920A, 'Statistics re: consumption of drink in Ireland', 8 July 1960 and text of a speech by Seán Lemass at the Muinitir na Tíre rural week at Rockwell College, Co. Tipperary, 1960.

<sup>42</sup> See note 41 above.

and 2 million in 1976, while by 1979 pre-tax profits at Guinness were £52 million.<sup>43</sup> In 1971 £147 million was spent on alcohol in Ireland, accounting for 11.5% of total consumer expenditure, and by then there were an estimated 66,000 alcoholics in Ireland. Ten years later, 1.5 million drinkers consumed £700 million worth of drink, with a conservative estimate of 75,000 suffering from alcoholism. In the mid-1970s a report by the National Council on Alcoholism maintained:

The most important step in the prevention of alcoholism and excessive drinking is to change attitudes. This change can only be achieved gradually by a broad based programme of propaganda, information and education in which certain departments of state, regional health boards, voluntary organisations, schools, management, trade unions and the medical profession co-operate. Above all, the state must be seen to be concerned and must give the lead in preventative measures.<sup>44</sup>

These desired collaborations did not materialise to any significant extent. The chairman of the National Off Licence Traders Association, Patrick McDonnell, who owned an off licence on Dorset Street, Dublin, wrote to the government in 1970 to complain that the minister for justice, Des O'Malley:

is not taking any notice of the serious problem of teenagers consuming alcoholic drinks. The situation is ready to erupt into a national scandal and will, if not erased now, have disastrous effects on the physical, mental and moral conditions of the children of Ireland

He maintained that the licensing laws were out of date (the last intoxicating liquor act had been in 1962) and that 'it has become the in-thing with over 14 year olds to get half stoned before they attend the "baby dances" on Friday and Saturday nights' and that cider was being sold by those with 'sweet licences' that allowed shopkeepers to sell wine of Irish manufacture. What was needed, he argued, was 'maturity regarding their drinking as the European children have'.<sup>45</sup> Taoiseach Jack Lynch expressed his regret that McDonnell's letter 'should be couched in rather intemperate terms'. At that time there were only 256 off licence holders (spirit grocers) in the republic but there were 11,000 publicans.

W. Herlihy, a Garda inspector, was asked to investigate McDonnell's claims that well-known Dublin pubs were serving teenagers alcohol, and while he accepted that McDonnell was genuinely concerned about teenage drinking, he also saw him as championing his own trade 'and that of the other spirit grocers who he feels are being squeezed out of business by the larger combines'.

<sup>43</sup> Michelle Guinness, *The Guinness spirit* (London, 1999), 495.

<sup>44</sup> Ferriter, *A nation of extremes*, 251.

<sup>45</sup> NAI, DT 2009/135/117, Intoxicating Liquor Acts, Patrick McDonnell to Jack Lynch, 3 February 1970.



O'Malley refused to meet with McDonnell and told Lynch he was not representative; O'Malley found the tone of some of McDonnell's statements 'grossly offensive'. He was also 'far from satisfied that the problem of drinking by young persons, in so far as it exists, can be materially reduced by any practicable change in the law or by increased Garda action'.<sup>46</sup>

When asked in the Dáil that month by Dublin Fine Gael TD Hugh Byrne, a district medical officer, if he would consider raising the legal drinking age from 18 to 21 on the grounds that 'nowadays a 14 year old can pass for a person of 18 years', O'Malley was dismissive: 'Surely a 20 year old can pass even more easily for a 22 year old. I consider Deputy Byrne's suggestion ridiculous'. Byrne also suggested that 'in a certain area of Dublin, firelighters, which contain a high content of methylated spirits, are being mixed with cider and cheap wine'.<sup>47</sup> Concerns about young people 'physically maturing at an earlier age' continued to be raised in the late 1970s to which the response from the Department of Justice was that it was the job of parents and not the state to police underage drinking.

There was also much comment during that decade on the lack of social alternatives to the pub; Ivor Browne, chief psychiatrist to the Eastern Health Board, was vocal in this regard, as was Dr Michael Browne, the Catholic bishop of Galway ('there is nothing else for young people to do on Friday nights than to start drinking'). The National Council on Alcoholism also reported to the minister for health about the lack of alternative facilities for youth.<sup>48</sup> Joseph Adams, the director of the Council, pointed to the irony of the linkages made between the economic well-being of Ireland and alcohol consumption; while historically, poverty had been blamed for excessive drinking, now increased affluence was deemed to be the reason.<sup>49</sup>

By 1975 Irish annual per capita consumption of alcohol was 0.42 gallons of spirits and 19.1 gallons of beer (the beer consumption levels were similar to those of the 1880s), figures that were not excessive internationally. In a list ranking consumption figures for 29 western countries, Ireland came twentieth in spirits consumption and tenth in beer consumption.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, it was asserted in the current affairs magazine *Magill* in December 1977 that 'the country has been on a massive drinking rampage'. Sales of alcohol 'rocketed by 15%' in the three months of June to September 1977 compared to the same period in 1976. In 1968 58% of the adult population were estimated to have drunk alcohol; by 1975 this figure had increased to 65% and it was maintained by the end of 1977 that this had risen further to 70%, with women and younger people accounting for the majority of the increase. But the point

<sup>46</sup> NAI, DT 2009/135/117, Intoxicating Liquor Acts, letter of W. Herlihy, 24 July 1971, and Des O'Malley to Jack Lynch, 13 August 1971.

<sup>47</sup> NAI, DT 2009/135/117, Intoxicating Liquor Acts, *Dáil debates*, vol. 255, cols 3520–23, 5 August 1971.

<sup>48</sup> *Irish Times*, 5 October 1976 and 16 April 1973.

<sup>49</sup> *Irish Independent*, 7 December 1972.

<sup>50</sup> Malcolm, *Ireland sober, Ireland free*, 324–5.

was also made in *Magill* that Irish consumption figures were still not high by international standards as expressed by per capita consumption; in the late 1970s the per capita consumption expressed in litres of 100% alcohol for France was 16.5, West Germany 12.5, Denmark 9.2, United Kingdom 8.4 and Ireland 8.7.

What did mark Ireland out as different was that 75% of all drinking was done in pubs or clubs. In addition, Ireland spent more of its consumed expenditure on alcohol than other European Economic Community countries (12%); this ‘anomaly is explained by the very high duties on drink in Ireland and the relatively low income per capita’. There had also been a doubling of the consumption of spirits in a decade due in large part to its appeal to young women: ‘Every Saturday night in the 26 counties . . . 195,000 Vodka drinks are consumed by women under 30 years of age and these same women drink 4,500 cases of vodka a week. The social consequences of these consumption patterns bear investigation’.<sup>51</sup>

Those involved in the licensed trade remained more concerned about the burden of taxation that their products had to bear, informing Minister for Finance Richie Ryan in 1973 that it was ‘excessive and out of scale’. Wages had gone up 82% in four years in the Dublin area, they maintained, and profit margins were 30–50% higher in Britain and other European countries: ‘we have the highest taxed pint of beer in Europe’. Revealingly, the number of special exemption orders granted by the courts—to allow drink to be served outside normal licensing hours—increased from 6,342 in 1967 to 14,814 in 1972, to 34,300 in 1978.<sup>52</sup>

In the last two decades of the twentieth century there was mounting evidence of excessive alcohol consumption amongst particular cohorts and of the problems to which it gave rise; while Irish alcohol consumption stabilised or reduced in the late 1970s and early 1980s, this was after consumption had doubled between 1960 and 1979. Alcohol problems among the under 25 age group in the republic increased by 360% between 1970 and 1985, and between 1989 and 1999 there was a 41% increase in overall alcohol consumption in Ireland, whereas in ten other European countries its consumption decreased during that ten-year period.<sup>53</sup> In 1970 the Irish drank 7 litres of pure alcohol per adult; that increased to 10.1 by 1986, and to 14.1 litres by 2001. Overall alcohol consumption per head of population showed an increase of 48% from 1986 to 2006 and alcohol consumption peaked in 2001. Mortality rates for liver cirrhosis among Irishmen of all ages doubled from 5.4 per 100,000 per year in 1957–61 to 11.1 per 100,000 in 1997–2001.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Magill*, 7 December 1977.

<sup>52</sup> NAI, DT 2009/135/117, Memorandum submitted to Richie Ryan in May 1973 and a Department of Justice memorandum, 30 September 1977, and a memorandum on special exemptions, March 1979.

<sup>53</sup> Ferriter, *A nation of extremes*, 248ff.

<sup>54</sup> *Irish Times*, 29 April 2006.

The distribution of average weekly expenditure at different stages of the second half of the twentieth century also indicated the continuity of increased expenditure on alcohol. Accounting for 1.1% of the average urban household in 1951–2, it rose to 3.7% in 1965–6 and 5.5% in 1994–5.<sup>55</sup> Increased consumption in the very late twentieth century made it clear that modernisation and prosperity were factors in facilitating alcohol abuse, just as recession had been a factor in temporarily reducing or stabilising it. The earlier stages of the Celtic Tiger economy in the mid-1990s saw a particular hike in consumption, although per capita consumption had been increasing for far longer.<sup>56</sup>

But the international ‘league tables’ of drinking continued to give solace to those who maintained that the Irish drinking problem was exaggerated. In the mid-1990s, while it was accepted that Ireland’s alcohol consumption was rising, this was to a level that was approximately the same as the European average, according to a World Drink Trends report in 1995 (see the table below).

In 1996 the Department of Health’s *National alcohol policy* statement insisted that ‘there is evidence that the description of the Irish as a particularly alcohol-prone race is a myth. Indeed it is doubtful whether Ireland ever occupied a prominent role with regard to alcohol use or misuse’.<sup>57</sup> Such an assertion was erroneous, overlooked specific drinking patterns, practices and attitudes (see below) and perhaps proves the veracity of the assertion that at the heart of the Irish relationship with alcohol is a deep ambivalence, where there is an eagerness to admit alcohol as:

both a positive and negative feature of political, social and economic life. Alcohol is tolerated and censured, often by the same people, in a way that reveals, paradoxically, the stability and resilience of a particular social system. The ability of the Irish people ... to admit and accommodate contradictory attitudes towards this most socially defining of activities is evidence of Ireland’s wider success as an ambivalent nation of abstainers and swallowers<sup>58</sup>

There was also a noticeable nostalgia for the decline of the traditional pub, which, it was maintained, had epitomised ‘the essential charm of old Ireland’, provided a focus for community life or a place to imbibe involving ‘an emigration of the soul from sometimes unhappy realities’, a very deceptive euphemism.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Adrian Redmond (ed.), *That was then this is now, change in Ireland, 1949–1999* (Dublin, 2000), 73–85.

<sup>56</sup> Tony Fahey, Helen Russell and Christopher T. Whelan, *Best of times? The social impact of the Celtic Tiger* (Dublin, 2007), 106.

<sup>57</sup> Department of Health, *National alcohol policy* (Dublin, 1996), iv.

<sup>58</sup> Tanya Cassidy, ‘Society and alcohol’, in Kilcommins and O’Donnell (eds), *Alcohol, society and law*, 33–59.

<sup>59</sup> Fennell and Bunbury, *The Irish pub*, 6.

Advertising also increased exposure to drink, notably the highly successful advertisements for Guinness; in 1997 the company became part of the huge multinational Diageo Company, though stout was still produced at the St James Gate Brewery in Dublin at the level of about 18 million pints a week.<sup>60</sup> But what was also striking was the increase in the consumption of wine; while between 1986 and 2006, the sale of alcohol in all beverage categories increased, with beer sales increasing by 32% and spirits by 46%, 'the most dramatic increase in volume was in wine sales with an increase of 8,121,225 litres of pure alcohol representing a 523% increase, although this was from a relatively low base'.<sup>61</sup> Beer continued to be the most popular drink but its market share declined to 51% in 2006 from 69% in 1986, while for wine, the market share increased from 6% in 1986 to 21% in 2006 and there were an estimated 1.45 million wine drinkers in Ireland by 2004. While Irish wine consumption remained 30% below that of Italy or France, much more effort and resources were put into marketing wine which had previously been regarded as a more inaccessible drink due to high prices, limited selections and complex labelling.<sup>62</sup>

The promotion of alcohol however, was also countered in the late twentieth century by commentary on the social, economic, physical and mental health consequences of excessive drinking. One of the most striking features of Irish alcohol consumption was the high rate of psychiatric hospital admission for alcohol-related disorders. The average age of first drinking also fell steadily and this change was 'significantly greater' in females.<sup>63</sup> Alcohol abuse was also implicated in rapid increases in sexually transmitted infections from 1989 onwards.<sup>64</sup> Increases in street disorder and violence were other consequences of excessive drinking and in 1994 legislation was passed to deal with public drunkenness under the title the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act, sections of which dealt with intoxication in a public place.<sup>65</sup>

But it was still maintained that there were too many 'myths and misconceptions' about the Irish being excessive drinkers; in the mid-1990s, Ireland still had the highest percentage of teetotallers in Europe at 20% of the population, compared to between 5 and 7% in southern Europe.<sup>66</sup> This was one of the reasons for considerable debate about 'objective definitions of excessive alcohol consumption' in specialist literature, but 'of equal importance is the

<sup>60</sup> Corcoran, *The goodness of Guinness*, 143–6.

<sup>61</sup> Ann Hope, *Alcohol consumption in Ireland, 1986–2006, report for the Health Executive Alcohol Implementation Group* (Dublin, 2007), 1.

<sup>62</sup> Hope, *Alcohol consumption in Ireland*, 4 and Drinks Industry Group of Ireland, *The drinks market performance in 2009*, Report prepared by Anthony Foley (Dublin, 2010), 1–18.

<sup>63</sup> Gemma Cox, Alan Kelly and Bobby Smyth, 'Decline in age of drinking onset in Ireland', in *Alcohol and alcoholism* 46:4 (2011), 478.

<sup>64</sup> Fahey, Russell and Whelan, *Best of times?*, 346.

<sup>65</sup> Kilcommins and O'Donnell, *Alcohol, society and law*, 189.

<sup>66</sup> *Irish Times*, 27 March 2010.

subjective definition of excessive drinking used by individuals in their normal environments'.<sup>67</sup> This was yet another reminder of the shortcomings of international comparisons that did nothing to shed light on the context, experience and historical backdrop of drink consumption or drinking patterns within particular groups. In the early twenty-first century, a joint committee of the houses of the Oireachtas heard that the incidence of intoxication of teenagers had increased by 370% since 1996.<sup>68</sup> It was also clear that binge drinking (75 grams of pure alcohol in one sitting) at least once a week was common amongst Irish college students in the early twenty-first century; one male student's definition of excessive drinking was 'when you're stumbling all over the place and you can't get your words out'.

What was notable in the surveys of student drinking patterns was the high threshold that for them qualified as excess, and 'a clear disregard for the concept of alcohol guidelines', and, because they associated excessive intake with intoxication, they felt that recommended levels of safe drinking were unrealistic. But crucially, there was also the culture they had inherited and what they had observed of their parent's generation ('whom the students do not perceive to be particularly heavy drinkers'), which also undermined the validity of alcohol guidelines and warnings.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, while Ireland's overall alcohol consumption, as crudely measured by the league tables, may have been slightly below the European average, Ireland's consumption of beer was much higher than other European countries; beer, white wine and vodka remained the drinks of choice for most Irish consumers.<sup>70</sup> By 2006 while alcohol consumption decreased from a peak of 14.3 litres of pure alcohol per adult in 2001 to 13.3 litres:

Ireland continues to be among the highest consumers of alcohol in Europe. The average consumption per adult in the enlarged European Union is 10.2 litres of pure alcohol. Ireland ranks third in per adult alcohol consumption when compared with other international countries. Taking the EU 15 countries, Ireland ranks second after Luxembourg.<sup>71</sup>

Waves of publicity over the problems of alcohol abuse continued, as did promises of taskforces and measures to tackle the problems such as stricter regulation of marketing, but ultimately it was decided to allow the industry to

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<sup>67</sup> Liam Delaney, Colm Harmon, Claire Milner, Lorna Sweeney and Patrick Wall, 'Perception of excessive drinking among Irish college students', *UCD Geary Institute Discussion Paper Series*, May 2007, 1–36.

<sup>68</sup> Terence Brown, *Ireland: a social and cultural history, 1922–2002* (London, 2004), 385.

<sup>69</sup> Delaney *et al.*, 'Perception of excessive drinking', 22.

<sup>70</sup> Kilcommins and O'Donnell, *Alcohol, society and law*, 183.

<sup>71</sup> Hope, *Alcohol consumption in Ireland*, 5.

regulate itself. The influence of the drinks industry was regarded as 'one of the biggest barriers to change',<sup>72</sup> a charge it rejected, but experts on alcohol abuse agreed that a change in the drinking culture and targeting alcohol as a major public health problem rather than the use of legislative measures was the key to transforming attitudes, a message that had also been propounded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to little avail.

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<sup>72</sup> *Irish Times*, 15 March 2008.