‘Only a Tap-Room Man’: Social Hierarchies and the Public House

Though the public house might appear to be inclusive, a ‘common and open club”, as Thomas Burke put it, ‘with no rules or formalities of entry save those of decent behaviour and mutual respect,’[1] it has, for much of its history, reproduced a complex network of social and economic distinctions. These have been embodied in its physical structure, including the design and arrangement of its rooms, as much as its rituals and conventions. Whilst intricately partitioned, ‘multi-barred’ pubs were, Peter Haydon argues, a ‘short lived fashion’ that reached its peak in the late nineteenth century, the geography of many public houses in the nineteen-thirties remained remarkably complex.[2] In his 1939 study *The Local*, a collaborative project with the illustrator Edward Ardizzone, Maurice Gorham observed that,

> With their instinct for social distinctions, their morbid passion for what Americans call self-stratification, the English have divided their pubs into the greatest possible number of compartments. A London pub can have a Saloon Lounge, Saloon Bar, Private Bar, Public Bar, Jug-and-Bottle, and Ladies’ Bar, to say nothing of such refinements as Wine Bars, Lunch Bars, Buffet Bars, and Dives.[3]

Some of these rooms served clear practical functions, as in the case of the lunch bar, or the jug-and-bottle, which catered to those buying alcohol for consumption off the premises. The primary purpose of most, though, was to express distinctions of status. The differences between the saloon and public bars, to focus on the most basic division and use the names employed in London, enacted ideas about the relative standing of their customers. Drinks in the saloon were served by a waiter, rather than at the bar, and were more expensive, a ‘tax on social superiority,’[4]

[1] T. Burke, *Will Someone Lead Me to a Pub?: Being a Note upon certain of the Taverns, old and new, of London* (London, 1936), p. 4.
[2] P. Haydon, *The English Pub: A History* (1994; repr. London, 1995), p. 249.
[3] M. Gorham and Edward Ardizzone, *The Local* (London, 1939), p. 7.
[4] Ibid., p. 9.

as Gorham described it, which normally stood at 'a penny a pint'[5] in a northern city like Bolton but could 'run to as much as threepence a pint' in London.[6] There were sometimes restrictions on the kinds of drinks available and the measures in which they were served. Some publicans refused to 'serve mild ale,' normally the cheapest alcoholic drink, in the saloon bar, while others were 'so refined that they do not even serve pints,'[7] which, Mass-Observation argued, had become associated with older manual workers.[8] The saloon was more elaborately furnished and drinkers tended to sit, rather than stand as they did in the public bar. These differences reflected and reinforced models of status, from nationally recognized class structures to more localized ideas of social and occupational prestige. The form of public houses, the 'unexpected and fantastic shapes' that were, as Gorham wrote, often 'sketched on the ground plan of a simple rectangular space' enabled the hierarchies of the communities they served to be performed; individuals could assert their identity simply by entering a particular bar or ordering a particular drink.[9] Their organization helped to encode social distinctions in the practices of everyday life, to make them ordinary. It also exposed them to question. Bars were used in different ways by different groups and individuals, even within a particular pub. This undermined the notion that each room had a fixed function determined by one stable set of social categories; they served multiple purposes and their boundaries were always to some degree porous.

The interwar public house was an ambiguous space within which distinct, sometimes contradictory ideas of status were negotiated. It was a place where men, and, less often, women, fashioned themselves, though not under conditions of their choosing. In some instances, the divisions between bars did reflect broad class distinctions; in *Labour, Life, and Poverty*, for

[5] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People: A Worktown Study* (1943; repr. London, 2009), p. 97.
[6] Gorham and Ardizzone, *The Local*, p. 9.
[7] Ibid., p. 9.
[8] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 184.
[9] Gorham and Ardizzone, *The Local*, p. 9.

example, Ferdynand Zweig describes pubs in which 'the workers go only to the public bar, where it is a little cheaper, while saloons are visited by middle-class people'.[10] The design of public houses enabled members of different classes to drink in the same building without interacting, reproducing broader economic and social structures. In Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square*, the porter of George Bone's building drinks in 'the public bars of the same houses as Mr Bone visited in the saloon bar.' The passage concisely encapsulates the differences between them, which are also expressed in Bone's substantial 'weekly tip of two shillings.'[11] In the main, though, public houses were working-class spaces, and embodied the numerous and often subtle distinctions within working-class communities. Mass-Observation's use of anecdote and individual perception alongside quantitative data makes *The Pub and the People* particularly valuable in tracing the experienced complexities of this process and the various, shifting ways in which these intricate ideas of status were mapped on to material spaces.

Many public houses served comparatively small residential areas inhabited by people who occupied similar economic and social positions. Mass-Observation found that in Bolton most drinkers lived within 'two to three minutes' walk' of the pub they used during the week, though they might travel to the centre of town at the weekend.[12] Individual public houses reflected the priorities, values, and traditions of such tightly-defined areas. The complexity of their social geography and use undermines the notion of the working class as, in Robert Roberts words, 'a great amalgam of artisan and labouring groups united by a common aim and culture,' revealing instead 'a stratified form of society' structured by distinct but intersecting hierarchies.[13] Occupational status, for example, often determined as much by skill as income, informed the

[10] F. Zweig, *Labour, Life, and Poverty* (1948; repr. London, 1949), p. 23.
[11] P. Hamilton, *Hangover Square* (1941; repr. Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 212.
[12] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 130.
[13] R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (1971; repr. Harmondsworth, 1987), p. 13.

distribution of drinkers between different rooms. Zweig described pubs in which 'all the bars are visited by working men, but in the saloons the craftsmen would more often be found, while labourers are more often in the public bars,'[14] and Roberts states that in early twentieth-century Salford '[e]ach part of the tavern had its status rating,' and that 'workers other than craftsmen would be frozen or flatly ordered out of those rooms in which journeyman foregathered'. An individual's place within the pub had broader implications, and Roberts claims that ''he's only a tap-room man' stood as a common slur,' fixing the position of the person described on a 'social ladder.'[15] Occupation was only one determinant of social standing, though, albeit an important one for men; as Ross McKibbin argues, the 'culture of the English working man was profoundly work-centred.'[16] Ellen Ross insists that '[m]ost classifications' of status within working-class communities were made 'in neighborhood or domestic terms rather than in relation to occupation and skills', and that the social standing of women in particular was determined largely by their ability to establish a reputation for respectability amongst their 'neighbors.'[17] Ideas of respectability certainly defined women's access to pubs, and shaped the institutions themselves, informing everything from their decoration to the kinds of conversation they permitted. For both men and women, though in different ways, the public house was a performative space, in which their status could be confirmed or, in the case of the unskilled worker ordered out of the saloon, humiliatingly denied. Pubs provided a relatively flexible set of symbolic resources, though, rather than a series of fixed categories; the 'best room,' for example, could serve a variety of functions and customers, even in a single institution.

The idea that the different bars in public houses served primarily to separate middle and

[14] Zweig, Life, *Labour, and Poverty*, p. 23.
[15] Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, p. 19.
[16] R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (1998; repr. Oxford, 2000), p. 162.
[17] E. Ross, '"Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep": Respectability in Pre-World War I London Neighborhoods,' *International Labour and Working-Class History* 27 (1985), pp. 43, 39.

working-class drinkers is an inadequate basis for an analysis of their social geography, particularly one that looks beyond a handful of diverse urban areas such as central London. Aside from anything else, pubs were too little used by the middle classes for this to be the case. As Geoff Brandwood, Andrew Davison, and Michael Slaughter observe, they were patronised 'very largely … by men – of the working-classes or, at best, [*sic*.] the lower middle-classes.'[18] Some middle-class drinkers did use them, and there was even a middle-class pub culture in 'bohemian' areas of London such as Fitzrovia, but prosperous pub-goers were comparatively rare in most parts of the country, and particularly in northern industrial cities. As Earnest Selley argued, although '[o]ther classes use the public houses' they do not do so 'in the same relation to their numerical strength' as the working class, in part because they have access to 'greater home conveniences and ampler amenities.'[19] The pub was a less important space for those who could drink and socialise in their homes, in restaurants, and in private clubs. Mass-Observation insisted that in Bolton in the nineteen-thirties, for example, 'nine out of ten of all the well-offs,' to use their term, 'never go into pubs;' those who drank did so 'at home or (a large number) in the Golf Clubs,'[20] spaces closed to the working classes. Few, if any, of the public houses they investigated relied on middle-class customers or set aside a room for their use. Whilst middle-class culture had an influence on pubs, not least on the design and conventions of their most prestigious rooms, it did not determine their form or the ways in which they were used. The direct influence of actual middle-class drinkers was often negligible. The public house, particularly in the north, was a working-class institution, integrated in a distinctive culture which, as Peter Bailey argues of the mid-Victorians, had a 'tangential rather than an emulative relationship to that of the middle

[18] G. Brandwood, A. Davison, and M. Slaughter, *Licensed to Sell: The History and Heritage of the Public House* (London, 2004), p. 65.
[19] E. Selley, *The English public house as it is* (London, 1929), p. 21.
[20] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 259.

class'.[21]

Mass-Observation's *The Pub and the People* explores, amongst many other things, the internal design of Bolton's public houses and use of physical geography to display social distinctions. It considers the extent to which different bars reflected occupational and financial hierarchies, as well as the ways in which this was complicated by other narratives, including discourses of respectability. Though these regulated the behaviour of both men and women, they had a disproportionate impact on the latter, who, as Ellen Ross argues, '*embodied* respectability or the lack of it' in 'their dress, public conduct, language, housekeeping, childrearing methods, spending habits, and, of course, sexual behavior.'[22] Even where these discourses did not exclude women from pubs, they limited their movement within them and participation in the communities they sustained, confining them to the comparatively tightly-regulated 'best' room. The fact that women used the same bars as prestigious male workers, though, demonstrates that public houses were overdetermined spaces that served multiple functions, rather than sites within which a single coherent system of classification was reproduced. The use of particular rooms was consistently determined by ideas of status, whether they served to distinguish craftsmen from unskilled labourers or 'respectable' from 'disreputable' women, but the public house was not simply an institution in which individuals were sorted into a series of fixed categories. It was, rather, an ambiguous space that revealed the complexities of working-class identities and their capacity for reinterpretation. It is central to an understanding of English working-class culture in the first half of the twentieth-century not because it embodies a set of static social forms but because it reveals the contradictions and density of working-class life.

In order to interpret *The Pub and the People*, it is necessary to first consider the

[21] P. Bailey, ''Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?': Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability,' *Journal of Social History* 12/3 (1979), p. 347.
[22] Ross, '"Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep"', p. 39.

organization that produced it and the project of which it formed a part. As Nick Hubble observes, Mass-Observation was founded in January 1937 by Tom Harrisson, a 'schoolboy ornithologist who had turned into an anthropologist,' Charles Madge, 'a reporter for the *Daily Mail*' who was also a 'communist, a poet and a regular contributor to the influential journals *Left Review* and *New Verse*,' and Humphrey Jennings, 'a documentary film-maker, painter, set-designer, and surrealist'.[23] The organization aimed to produce what Harrison and Madge famously described as an 'anthropology of ourselves'.[24] This involved applying techniques developed to study 'primitive' societies to what Harrisson described as the 'so-called civilised peoples of the world,' including the inhabitants of the 'industrial North of England'.[25] Researchers also drew on new sociological work in America, which Harrisson argued was 'much in advance of anything yet seen in Europe.'[26] Mass-Observation combined these systematic methods of social analysis with a more literary concern with anecdote and imagery that shaped the form as well as subject matter of its texts. As Hubble observes, the refusal to operate within a single tradition affected the reception of Mass-Observation's work, as its 'innovative interdisciplinary practices always fell between academic schools,' attracting criticism from those engaged in more established, clearly defined fields of research.[27] It was productive, though, insofar as it insisted upon the need to employ multiple interpretative strategies in order to make sense of even apparently straightforward phenomena and therefore questioned established disciplinary boundaries and objectives. It also enabled researchers to use varieties of evidence conventionally excluded from academic social analysis to examine the subjective experience of particular cultural practices, which quantitative studies ignored or rejected as impervious to

[23] N. Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (Houndmills, 2006), p. 4. Jennings left by the end of the first year.
[24] T. Harrisson and C. Madge, *Britain by Mass-Observation* (1939; London, 1986), p. 12.
[25] T. Harrisson, 'Preface,' *The Pub and the People*, p. 7.
[26] Ibid., p. 13.
[27] Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life*, p. 11.

interpretation. In both respects, it anticipated later work in cultural studies which, as Stuart Hall observed, involved the 'intellectual risk' of rejecting established disciplinary models, of 'saying to professional sociologists that what they say sociology is, is not what it is.'[28] This evolving approach encoded a democratic impulse to broaden the scope of social investigation that was also demonstrated in the process of research. Mass-Observation used full-time participant-observers, but also, as their name suggests, volunteers, who sent in accounts of their everyday lives, and its reports were published under the name of the organization, rather than the individuals who collated the material. The 'mass' were, in theory at least, both the subject and object of analysis, and the movement suggests a self-reflexive community concerned to understand and thereby shape its own assumptions and behaviour.[29]

Mass-Observation's concern with communities, ritual, and self-fashioning led it to focus, almost from its inception, on public houses as key social spaces within which both individual and collective identities were reproduced. In *First Year's Work*, they argued that these were particularly important because '[m]ore people spend more time in public-houses than they do in any other building except private houses and workplaces,' and in 1943 they published *The Pub and the People*.[30] The research for this had been carried out in the late nineteen-thirties, and aside from 'trivial modification' the text was 'completed in 1939,' which, as Harrisson observed, meant that by the time it was published after four years of war, 'much that is described here' already seemed 'part of history, the past.'[31] The book concentrated on Bolton, which was called 'Worktown' throughout the text in 'emulation of Robert and Helen Lynd's classic American

[28] S. Hall, 'The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis in the Humanities,' *October*, 53 (1990), p. 16.
[29] In practice, observers often had other motives for participation and, as James Hinton argues in 'The "Class Complex": Mass-Observation and Cultural Distinction in Pre-War Britain,' *Past and Present* 199 (2008), 207-36, many gained a sense of individual distinction and value from their involvement.
[30] Mass-Observation, *First Year's Work; 1937-8* (London, [1938]), p. 24.
[31] Harrisson, 'Preface', pp. 11-12.

study, *Middletown*', which examined Muncie, Indiana.[32] Harrisson insisted that the name was not intended to suggest that Bolton was a 'typical town,' and indeed that the text challenged ideas of 'the typical, the representative, the 'statistical sample',' which had 'exercised a serious limitation on the British approach to human problems'.[33] Nonetheless, despite its insistent focus on the material and particular, the text is concerned with a prevalent myth of the working class as such, contributing to what Gary Cross describes as the 'search for the 'authentic' in the hardy North'[34] in the period, the attempt to find amongst the industrial working-class forms of community the middle classes had lost or abandoned.

The public houses Mass-Observation described were primarily, and in many instances exclusively, used by the working class. They varied considerably in size and design, but the majority were organized around three basic rooms. The most significant division was that between, on the one hand, the taproom and the public bar, normally called the vault in Bolton, and on the other the saloon bar, normally called the lounge, parlour, or best room. The vault and taproom were sparsely furnished, with little seating, and both were 'patronized only by working class drinkers,' which here suggests specifically what Mass-Observation described as the 'middle and lower (unskilled and semi-skilled) working class'.[35] The vault was 'distinguished by the presence of THE BAR COUNTER,' whilst the taproom was 'more of a club and game room,'[36] where customers could play darts, dominoes, and cards. The lounge offered more places to sit, and was often decorated with pictures and plants; beer cost 'a penny a pint more'.[37] Though distinctions were expressed through material objects and spaces, they were interpretative and

[32] Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life*, p. 5.
[33] Harrisson, 'Preface', pp. 8, 10.
[34] G. Cross, 'Introduction: Mass-Observation and Worktowners at Play' in G. Cross (ed.), *Worktowners at Blackpool: Mass-Observation and popular leisure in the 1930s* (London, 1990), 1-15, p. 7.
[35] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 140.
[36] Ibid., p. 93.
[37] Ibid., p. 93.

established through difference rather than features of the rooms themselves. A lounge did not have to be any particular size, contain any particular furniture, or achieve any particular level of comfort, but simply needed up be distinguished from other areas of the same pub. This emphasis on differentials also determined pricing. Drinks were consistently more expensive in the best room than in other areas of the pub, but it was this distinction rather than absolute cost that was important. The differences between bars could be relatively minor, and Mass-Observation even discovered one small public house in which there was '*no* physical separation' between the vault and parlour, which were parts of the same room. There were small decorative distinctions between the two areas, but the boundary was marked primarily by a sign half-way along the bar reading 'PARLOUR PRICES BEYOND HERE.'[38] The landlord explained he had divided the room in an attempt 'to make it more select,' and retained the sign even after he had stopped charging different prices in an attempt to 'keep out undesirables.'[39] The vault and parlour were defined by function rather than form, and in particular by the attempt to draw social distinctions, however minor or arbitrary.

Despite this, many parlours in Bolton shared certain basic characteristics that illuminate working-class ideas about status and the ways in which these could be expressed. Mass-Observation noted that there were normally more seats in the parlour than in the vault but fewer spittoons, and that the floor was 'never stone' but covered with 'lino, rubbercloth, etc.'[40] These qualities established an image of refinement that was informed but not determined by bourgeois conventions. The comparatively elaborate decoration, with its emphasis on comfort, contrasted with the functionality, not only of the vault, but of the workplace in which drinkers spent much of their time. A similar process of distinction was illustrated in dress. *The Pub and the People*

[38] Ibid., p. 99.
[39] Ibid., p. 100.
[40] Ibid., p. 106.

argued that in Bolton the 'simplest indications of class and status that can be observed in the pub are those of clothes,' though appearance was particularly important to an organisation which, as its name suggests, emphasised the importance of visual data to social research, as a method of gathering information without exposing the investigator.[41] There was a 'considerable difference' between the clothes worn by those in the vault and 'drinkers in the best rooms,' which paralleled distinctions in the rooms themselves.[42] Those in the comparatively elaborately furnished lounge were more likely to wear bowler hats or trilbies, ties, and good suits, more expensive clothes which separated them from what Mass-Observation called 'workerness,' rather than caps, scarves, and old suits or workclothes, which dominated in the vault.[43] Conventional modes of behaviour also differed. Those who used the parlour normally entered in groups, sat together 'having no especial intercourse with people at other tables,' and were brought their drinks by waiters.[44] The bar could not be seen from the room, as it could in the vault, suggesting a private rather than public and commercial space, where people drank with a closed circle of friends, not as part of an open, shifting crowd. Mass-Observation argued that the parlour was 'a large comfortable room with decoration such as may be found in any Worktown home, but on a large scale, on a middle-class level of comfort, with servants and service, everyone in smart clothes,' a place where ideas of gentility or respectability could be enacted.[45]

The boundaries of this space were, however, blurred and permeable. Many people moved between bars, perhaps most notably men who joined their wives or mothers in the lounge after an evening spent with male friends in the vault, or who drank there at the weekend. This migration, which was particularly marked on Saturday nights, suggests that the best room was for some men

[41] Ibid., p. 140.
[42] Ibid., p. 141.
[43] Ibid., p. 143, 141.
[44] Ibid., p. 106.
[45] Ibid., p. 106.

a regular indulgence, though one that could only be enjoyed shortly after they were paid, when the higher prices were less prohibitive. They did not use the lounge during the week but they were not 'ordered out' by their social superiors when they did enter, as the labourers of Roberts' childhood had been, and their ability to temporarily make a place for themselves undermined the notion of rigid distinctions between the bars. Even differences in dress proved unstable, as many men who normally drank in the vault wore their newest suit and '"respectable" headgear' (typically a bowler hat or trilby) at the weekend, making them indistinguishable in this respect from those who habitually used the parlour.[46] This fluidity helps to explain Mass-Observation's insistence that 'the structure of the pub is not a class-structure in the ordinary sense of the phrase.'[47] Dominant conceptions of class provided tools for reading its hierarchies, but these could also be deceptive. Assertions of status were conspicuously contingent, and were complicated, rather than simply reinforced, by other narratives, including those which structured dominant working-class ideas of gender and respectability.

Women's access to public houses in the early twentieth-century varied considerably from region to region. As Ross McKibbin argues,

> In the North, the vault and the taproom or public bar were barred to women by a convention which had the force of law. They were confined to the best room or the parlour. The public bar was as masculine in spirit as a club […] In London, however, women were admitted to and were to be found in all bars and this was probably so in much of the South and the Midlands.[48]

Mass-Observation confirms this, describing both the vault and taproom in Bolton as 'tabu to women', but noting that 'women were found in every bar' by investigators studying pubs for a

[46] Ibid., p. 143.
[47] Ibid., p. 107.
[48] R. McKibbin, *Classes and Culture: England 1918-51* (1998; repr. Oxford, 2000), p. 183-4.

report on 'the social factors in politics in the borough of Fulham, South West London.'[49] This conspicuous distinction between north and south should not distract attention from significant local variations, even in the capital; Ellen Ross argues that whilst in 'some parts of London, women could visit pubs regularly without losing caste' there were 'some Hackney districts… where women were seldom seen in pubs.'[50] There were regional differences in the ways public houses were used, but these were always more complicated than any binary description allows, as both McKibbin and Mass-Observation recognize. There were also continuities, even between comparatively open London pubs and socially conservative working-class institutions in industrial northern cities. In almost all areas, ideas of respectability defined the terms of women's access to public houses, even if the terms themselves varied. These restrictions were the result of broader Victorian ideas of respectability which identified women with the home and sought to exclude them from public space or limit their freedom of action within them. As Deborah Mutch observes, although women 'were a common sight in the early dram shops and gin palaces,' during the nineteenth century they were 'gradually re-situated in the domestic sphere, leaving the men in the pubs'.[51] In the early twentieth century, women rarely enjoyed the same freedom as men in their use of pubs, and their behaviour within them could have a significant impact on their reputation and, consequently, social standing.

One of the most prominent ways in which respectability was articulated for women in working-class communities was through notions of sexual propriety. This extended beyond the regulation of explicitly sexual behaviour to the policing of apparently trivial details of appearance and demeanour. Ross argues that '[e]very poor woman had to demonstrate almost

[49] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People*, pp. 93, 110.
[50] Ross, '"Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep"', p. 46.
[51] D. Mutch, 'Intemperate Narratives: Tory Tipplers, Liberal Abstainers, and Victorian British Socialist Fiction', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36 (2008), p. 473.

continuously in her dress, gestures, and movements that she was not a 'low' woman, a prostitute; her respectability was under perpetual suspicion.'[52] This problem was particularly marked in public houses. As Claire Langhamer observes, there was a well-established 'association between women, pubs, and sexual morality where female drinkers were represented as either the instigators of sexual union or, if underage, the victims of seduction.'[53] Even entering a public house could consequently undermine a woman's claim to respectability. Selley observes that in 'certain mining districts, on the North-East Coast particularly, a woman loses caste if she enters a public house'.[54] In *Industrial Town*, Charles Forman's account of Salford in the nineteen-twenties, an unnamed licensee's daughter states that it,

> wasn't the practice for a young woman to be seen in a pub. They daren't come in – their parents wouldn't let them. It wasn't done, just as women didn't smoke in the street – they'd have been called hussies if they had.[55]

Those who transgressed such prohibitions risked being regarded as promiscuous or 'loose,' and could be the subject of unwanted attention, a problem that persists in many contemporary pubs where, as Stephen Earnshaw observes, women enter 'expecting visual harassment at the very least.'[56] In the early twentieth century, even older, respectable women who followed the conventions of the public house developed strategies to defend against this. Richard Hoggart notes that in Hunslet in the twenties and thirties '[u]nmarried seamstresses of 'a certain age' tended to drink in small clusters – on their own they might have been taken for prostitutes,' and stuck to 'the pubs at which they felt safe, and the safe, preferred drinks,' which included port

[52] Ross, 'Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep', p. 49.
[53] C. Langhamer, ''A public house is for all classes, men and women alike': women, leisure and drink in second world war England,' *Women's History Review* 12/3 (2003), p. 435.
[54] Selley, *The English public house as it is*, p. 123.
[55] C. Forman, *Industrial Town: Self-Portrait of St. Helens in the 1920s* (1978; repr. London, 1979), p. 200.
[56] Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature*, p. 1.

and, in the case of Hoggart's Aunt Lil 'stout – especially Mackeson's'.[57] As Langhamer argued, even when social conventions relaxed during the Second World War there 'remained some measure of taboo on women entering the pub alone, and women tended to go with friends or with boyfriends.'[58] These forms of regulation were perhaps enforced more strictly in the north, but they were not peculiar to it. In *Hangover Square*, Netta 'had to have a man to take her over' to the pub 'because she didn't want to be taken for a prostitute'.[59] Women did participate in most public house communities, though not always in large numbers; Selley wrote that 'women customers were found in public houses in every area visited'.[60] Mass-Observation stated that a survey in Bolton revealed that '16 per cent of a large count over a long period in all types of pub were females,' and Langhamer argues that there is a 'general picture of women constituting a quarter of public house patrons,' at least in 'urban areas.'[61] However, ideas of respectability often confined them to certain pubs and limited their movement once inside. Some pubs even had a separate 'ladies bar,' though Gorham suggests that even by 1939 this was 'a relic of older manners, fast dying out'.[62]

This process of containment was rarely secure, and often broke down, along with a host of other conventions, during periods such as holidays when people were temporarily liberated from their normal working routines. Mass-Observation noted that women from Bolton could be seen 'drinking in vaults, and standing at the bar' on visits to Blackpool, despite the fact that neither of these things would have been accepted in Bolton itself.[63] It would be easy to overstate

[57] R. Hoggart, 'Bill and Lil,' *Between Two Worlds: Politics, Anti-Politics, and the Unpolitical* (New Brunswick, 2002), 256-69, p. 257.
[58] Langhamer, 'Women, Leisure and Drink in Second World War England,' p. 432.
[59] Hamilton, *Hangover Square*, p. 29.
[60] Selley, *The English public house as it is*, p. 123.
[61] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 134; Langhamer, 'Women, Leisure and Drink in Second World War England,' p. 427.
[62] Gorham, *The Local*, p. 40.
[63] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 144.

the subversive implications of these excursions, which were to a considerable extent moments of licensed excess; such behaviour was rarely repeated when holiday-makers returned home. One report on 'holiday drunkenness,' for example, described two young women singing 'very loudly a very dirty song, using words seldom heard in Worktown pubs, and never from women,' but noted that when the observer met the '[t]he girls ... in Worktown, in a pub, they behaved perfectly normally, just like anyone else.'[64] Blackpool was a site of release, but one that was explicitly temporary and which therefore served partly to stabilise the dominant values of Bolton itself. The comparatively free movement of women in public houses in Blackpool, their increased consumption of alcohol and, in some instances, greater sexual confidence, was widely seen as exceptional, even by women themselves, a recognised deviation from generally accepted codes of behaviour. Nonetheless, even this licensed, or at least tolerated process of transgression brought into focus the conventions that shaped Bolton's public houses, conventions that normally appeared 'natural,' or 'went without saying.' In addition, it offered concrete examples of pubs being used and organized differently, and provided many women with the experience of behaving in ways that were traditionally reserved for men.

The restriction of women to the 'best' room complicated the models of status that operated in the public house. The saloon bar could, as Roberts argued, be used to consolidate the prestige of a male working-class elite, but it could also be constructed as a feminine space, and Mass-Observation noted that there were best rooms 'in which quite half the drinkers are women'.[65] Ideas of gentility served to police women's behaviour, offering a notional status as compensation for an actual constraint, a process that persists in an array of conservative narratives that insist upon the need to protect women from the problems and vicissitudes of

[64] Ibid., pp. 249-250.
[65] Ibid., p. 135.

public life, a category that can be extended to almost any social activity. There were significant differences between the prestige enjoyed by craftsmen and respectable wives, something demonstrated by distinct and unequal forms of authority each group exercised within working-class communities. Nonetheless, the fact that both used the lounge exposes a tension in its meaning and function. There was, as Tony Nicholson argues, 'a powerful masculine presence at the very centre of working-class culture,' albeit one whose precise contours and implications were continually revised, and it seems unlikely that the 'tradesman and artisans' Roberts remembered from his childhood would have welcomed being identified with women.[66] Whilst it is important to avoid reproducing simple stereotypes of proletarian misogyny, ideas of status and masculinity were densely interwoven for male workers, many of whom regarded themselves as, in Jack Hilton's words, 'natural men,' whose physically demanding, conspicuously productive labour distinguished them, and made them more valuable, than those engaged in 'clerical work, machine watching, and the like,' whom J. H. Watson saw as 'sacrificing [their] masculinity.'[67] Mass-Observation draws on these narratives, describing the vault as 'the place where men are men,' and those who drank in the lounge as 'women's men, with collar studs,' but the best room was not always gendered in this way, any more than it was always the exclusive domain of skilled male workers.[68] What was consistent about the lounge was its prestige relative to other areas of the same pub. The form and implications of this prestige were not fixed, however, nor was the group it is attached to. The lounge was therefore a space within which working-class ideas of status were negotiated rather than simply exhibited, and in which distinct narratives, and sometimes people, were juxtaposed with one another.

[66] T. Nicholson, 'Masculine Status and Working-Class Culture in the Cleveland Ironstone Mining Communities, 1850-1881,' in K. Laybourn (ed.), *Social Conditions, Status and Community, 1860-c. 1920* (Stroud, 1997), 139-59, p. 145; Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, p. 19.
[67] J. Hilton, 'The Plasterer's Life,' in J. Common (ed.), *Seven Shifts* (1938; repr. Wakefield, 1978), 3-49, p. 22; J. H. Watson, 'The Big Chimney,' *Seven Shifts*, 207-45, p. 226.
[68] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People*, p. 107.

The complex internal geography of public houses emphasises that they were not the straightforward, open institutions they might appear, but regulated spaces. As Mass-Observation insisted, 'pub rooms are graded in the order of respectability,' and drinkers were distributed between them according to an intricate network of social and economic narratives.[69] In particular, they reflected distinctions within the working-class, whether between craftsmen and labourers or respectable and disreputable women. The complexity of the public house demonstrates the intricacy of the working class emphasised by writers such as Roberts and Hoggart, the fact that it was not an undifferentiated mass, but had a well-developed culture with its own priorities and values. The pub enabled elements of this culture to be enacted, and thereby reproduced, with all its richness and inequalities. However, the very overdetermination of the various rooms within public houses, their multiple uses and implications, also made them spaces within which values could be negotiated, in which questions of status and identity could potentially be reinterpreted, in which individuals could sometimes challenge their roles and standing simply by moving bars. It also revealed tensions within some of the key narratives that structured working-class communities, including ideas of masculinity, even as it enabled their reinscription. The pub was not simply a place in which a monolithic and unchallenged notion of masculine identity was exhibited, but one in which distinct forms of 'manliness' intersected and competed, a process complicated by the presence of women drinkers, who were persistently but never securely regulated. These interlocking questions of status, gender, and class were not always formally articulated, but were explored partly through the shifting use and interpretation of particular material places and objects. The acts of entering a bar, of ordering and consuming a drink, had a complex social significance, a symbolic density. They were part of process by which individuals aligned themselves within an intricate and evolving culture, in which they sought to enact and

[69] Ibid., p. 149.

sometimes transform their identity. The public house was, in this sense, a performative space, in which the design and organization of the rooms encouraged but could not finally contain certain forms of behaviour, a site of self-fashioning as well as constraint.

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