

**DISCUSSION PAPER**  
**PROVIDENTIALISM, THE PLEDGE AND VICTORIAN HANGOVERS:**  
**INVESTIGATING MODERATE ALCOHOL POLICY**  
**IN BRITAIN, 1914-1918**  
*Henry Yeomans<sup>1</sup>*

**Introduction**

This discussion piece is based on research undertaken as part of the author's ongoing PhD project. Drawing on history, sociology, criminology and law, the broader empirical enquiry investigates attitudes to alcohol and their relationship with the development of laws relating to alcohol (primarily in England and Wales) from the nineteenth century onwards. It builds on the insights of moral regulation theory, as espoused by Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer<sup>2</sup> as well as Alan Hunt<sup>3</sup>, in order to position the law within a wider project through which individual behaviour is governed. Consequently, a diverse range of sources, including newspaper reportage, cartoons, health promotion literature and advertising, are drawn upon to help understand the various ways, legally and morally, through which people were, and are, compelled to behave in particular ways. This piece focuses on the period 1914-1918 and, in accordance with these theoretical formulations, raises issues relating to both legal and extra-legal efforts to govern alcohol consumption in Britain during World War One. In particular, it draws attention to the widespread promotion of the teetotal pledge during this period as a means to help Britain's war effort.

The issue of drink during World War One is a neglected area of research. James Nicholls gives a useful description of the governmental response to alcohol during the war, but public attitudes are not his primary focus.<sup>4</sup> John Greenaway examines the period in a little more depth, concentrating largely on the rise to dominance of the secular issue of national

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<sup>1</sup> University of Plymouth [Henry.Yeomans@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:Henry.Yeomans@plymouth.ac.uk) currently writing up PhD 'Intoxicating Measures and Temperance Agendas: Attitudes to Alcohol in Britain'. This article is based on a conference paper given in July 2010 at the European Society for Comparative Legal History Conference, University of Valencia.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: a Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England* (Manchester University Press, 2009).

efficiency which encompasses industrial productivity and military discipline.<sup>5</sup> But is Greenaway's work, emphasising the 'rational' explanation of national efficiency, enough to explain the borderline hysteria over alcohol consumption at the time, encapsulated by Lloyd George's famous claim that 'we are fighting three foes, Germany, Austria and Drink: and as far as I can see the greatest of these deadly foes is Drink'?<sup>6</sup> Or can the investigation of contemporaneous public discourse and an appreciation Victorian temperance ideology improve our understanding? This discussion incorporates a longer-term historical focus and an enquiry into public attitudes into the investigation of British alcohol policy, 1914-1918.

## **1 The Enigma of British Alcohol Policy, 1914-1918**

From 1914-1918, alcohol policies internationally were fundamentally re-evaluated. The pressures of war led to an increased drive for sobriety which produced tough restrictions on the drinks trade with many countries, such as Belgium and Canada, adopting prohibition as a wartime measure. After World War One, prohibition remained a viable legal option; Finland, Norway and Russia were among the countries who upheld its implementation for several years after the war and, in 1919, the USA amended its constitution in order to make the trade in alcohol illegal. Prohibition was not the only wartime drink measure; France banned absinthe while Sweden strengthened its existing system of municipal ownership and introduced an alcohol rationing regime.<sup>7</sup> Britain, however, refrained from implementing radical policies of alcohol control; prohibition and the full-scale nationalisation of the drinks industry were much debated, but never enacted. This paper highlights how, despite the international context and the pressures of war, the British government resisted pressure to implement radical measures to regulate alcohol.

This peculiar comparative situation becomes more curious if we consider Britain's strong history of temperance campaigning which had been sustained since the 1830s. The British temperance movement was one of the largest and most pervasive social movements of the Victorian period. The early movement was dominated by moral suasionists, who believed that the individual pledge of abstinence and the routine of self-denial it entailed was the best means to overcome the problem of alcohol. But by the 1860s, this approach was in decline and prohibitionists, such as the UK Alliance, had taken over the campaigning momentum. For prohibitionists, the law was a crucial means through which the population could be

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<sup>5</sup> John Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics since 1830* (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Nicholls, *Politics of Alcohol*, p.154.

<sup>7</sup> For an examination of alcohol policies in USA, Russia and Sweden in the 1910s, see: Mark Lawrence Schrad, *The Political Power of Bad Ideas* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

reformed (and improved) and supporters favoured some form of prohibition, usually the 'local option', to achieve this. This policy was based around the idea that local communities would vote on whether or not they wanted the alcohol trade to continue in their area. If they voted 'no' (usually with a two-thirds majority), as the Alliance fully expected, the drinks trade would be outlawed locally. Although moral suasionists were not overly-concerned with legal measures, for prohibitionists legal developments, such as the Licensing Act 1872, did not go anywhere near far enough in curbing the drinks trade. Restrictions may have engendered some incremental improvements, but the law still amounted to a 'legalized system of temptation'<sup>8</sup> that was incapable of truly solving the drink problem. Given these campaigns for strict drink controls in the near past, alcohol policies during the war appear odder still.

The links of the temperance movement to the Liberal Party also complicate the issue. The Liberal Party grew closer to temperance groups in the 1870s, although some blamed these associations for electoral losses. The Liberal Licensing Bill 1871 proposed a cap on the number of licensed premises per number of inhabitants of any given area but was rejected by Parliament. The Liberals did succeed in getting the Licensing Act 1872 through Parliament but this was a more tempered piece of legislation, and the controversial licence cap had been dropped. The Liberals lost the 1874 general election heavily and Gladstone, declaring that 'we have been borne down in a torrent of gin and beer',<sup>9</sup> blamed the defeat on a reaction against Liberal attempts to restrict the drinks trade. Given Gladstone's views, it would have been understandable if the Liberal Party had shied away from formulating strict alcohol measures in the aftermath of 1874. But, nevertheless, they continued to maintain links with the temperance movement and, after once again forming a government in the 1890s, presented to Parliament two separate, but unsuccessful Bills which enshrined variants of the (prohibitionist) local option. Not dissuaded, the Liberals included a limit on the number of licensed premises per head of population in the Licensing Bill 1908, although again this provision failed to get Parliamentary approval.<sup>10</sup> The Liberals did not, therefore, distance themselves from temperance measures post-1874 and actually seem to have retained an active interest in strict drink laws up until the outbreak of war.

Pre-war temperance sympathies are not the only reason why the Liberal Government's response appears odd. Although, temperance mobilisation decreased noticeably after the

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Pope, 'Reply by the Honorary Secretary', *The Times*, 2 October 1856.

<sup>9</sup> David W Gutzke, *Protecting the Pub: Brewers and Publicans against Temperance* (Boydell Press: Suffolk, 1989), p.1.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol*, p.150.

turn of twentieth century<sup>11</sup> it was resurgent during wartime. This was particularly evident in the formation of the Strength of Britain Movement in 1916, a prohibitionist group, who argued that sobriety and hard work were needed to maximise efficiency (both military and industrial) during the war effort.<sup>12</sup> The advent of new prohibitionist groups shows there was some momentum behind calls for strict, radical measures and general opinion was certainly more supportive of strong legislative action during World War One than at previous times. At a meeting of the 'free churches', Mr Parr claimed that 'During the war, patriotism demands prohibition',<sup>13</sup> and, towards the end of the war, the National Liberal Federation came out in favour of full local control of the liquor traffic.<sup>14</sup> Nicholls reports that Lloyd George supported nationalisation,<sup>15</sup> and the *Manchester Guardian* argued that 'State ownership would for the first time make it possible to legislate other than by mere prohibition on the vice of drinking'.<sup>16</sup> The paper went on to claim that, although it is more visible in wartime, private vice always impacts upon the state and so the state can legitimately intervene. The interventionist attitude of new campaign groups and sections of public opinion again render the British wartime alcohol policies curious.

So, the British Government's refrain from implementing radical alcohol policies during World War One is not just a curious riddle when compared to the actions of other country's governments during the same period. This central riddle is wrapped in the mystery of Britain's temperance history and concealed within the enigma of Liberal Party connections and public opinion at the time. So if strict measures such as prohibition and nationalisation were avoided, what exactly did the British Government do?

## 2 What was the British Response?

To many, war intensified the need for tighter restrictions on alcohol as national survival was seen to hinge on both the combat readiness of large swathes of the young male population, and the productive capabilities of workers in certain strategically important industries. Lloyd George added a sense of urgency to this situation by claiming, in 1915, that 'drink is doing

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<sup>11</sup> Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (Faber & Faber: London, 1971), pp.387-405.

<sup>12</sup> See: 'Food versus Beer: Demand for Prohibition During the War', *Daily Express*, 23 March 1917.

<sup>13</sup> 'The Free Churches. National Sobriety: Pledge to Support the Government', *Manchester Guardian*, 11 March 1915.

<sup>14</sup> 'The Aims of Government', *Manchester Guardian*, 5 September 1918.

<sup>15</sup> Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol*, p.155.

<sup>16</sup> 'The Reform of the Drink Traffic', *Manchester Guardian* 17 January 1917.

us more damage in the war than all the German submarines put together'.<sup>17</sup> So how did the governance of alcohol change in response to the outbreak of war?

Some aspects of the governmental response were entirely predictable. One such unremarkable measure was the increase in levels of taxation levied on the trade in alcoholic drinks. By the twentieth century, it was well-established in Britain that taxation could be used to either discourage consumption or raise government revenue; the Gin Act 1729 raised the excise duty on gin in an effort to discourage consumption and Lloyd George's 1910 budget also contained considerable tax rises for both brewer and pub licences.<sup>18</sup> Slightly more novel was the decision, enforced by the Central Control Board (CCB) which oversaw most British alcohol policy during World War One, to limit the strength of alcoholic spirits available for public purchase.<sup>19</sup> Such a measure, not dissimilar to France's banning of absinthe, had never been enacted before. However, the Gin Act 1736 did inflate the cost of a licence to such an extent that it amounted to a prohibition of gin.<sup>20</sup> Moreover various licensing initiatives, from the Beer Act 1830 to Gladstone's liberalisation of the wine trade in the 1860s, were at least partially motivated by an attempt to wean people off spirits by promoting the trade in weaker alcoholic drinks. Increased taxation and restrictions on the strength of spirits do not, therefore, amount to any radical new departure in alcohol policy.

The same point can be made in respect of one of the key planks of the wartime alcohol policy, restricted hours of sale. During the war, the CCB restricted public houses to opening from Midday to 2:30pm and 6:30pm to 9:30pm.<sup>21</sup> The implementation of morning and afternoon closure was a new idea (and one that was retained in the Licensing Act 1921), but the idea of restricted hours of sale was not new to the drinks industry. In the Victorian era, Beer Houses had operated within set hours from their creation by the Beer Act 1830. Public Houses (which could sell wines and spirits as well as beer, ale or cider) were restricted for the first time in the mid-1860s and, building on these reforms, the Licensing Act 1872 introduced fixed closing times for public houses, which were either 10pm, 11pm or midnight depending on the size of the town. Although it is now commonplace to hear that closing times were first introduced in Britain during World War One, they were actually significantly

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<sup>17</sup> Nicholls, *Politics of Alcohol*, p.154.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp.36-45 and p.153-155

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pp.155-156. Also: Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics*, p.98.

<sup>20</sup> Nicholls, *Politics of Alcohol*, p.36-45.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p.155-156.

older. Wartime opening hours were stringently reduced but, as with taxation, this was the tightening of an existing regulation rather than the creation of a new one.

Some of the Government's measures had less historic precedents. On the outbreak of war, the 'treating' of soldiers and sailors to drink<sup>22</sup> immediately became a public issue and, in September 1914, H.H. Croydon, of the Church of England Temperance Society, wrote to *The Times* imploring people to refrain from this popular custom.<sup>23</sup> This call was echoed by both the Minister of War Lord Kitchener and his sister, Mrs Frances Parker, who asked people not to 'treat' servicemen in the interests of their 'efficiency and wellbeing'.<sup>24</sup> While initially the justification for concerns about treating referred to the need to reduce the consumption of alcohol by servicemen in order to maximise military effectiveness, the terms of the debate quickly came to encompass the drinking habits of the civilian population also. In late 1914, a letter in *The Times* from E.F. Chapman asked 'Do we, as a nation, realize that temperance is necessary to efficiency in war? Can we understand that it must be adopted by our civilian population as well as by our sailors and soldiers as a national habit?'<sup>25</sup> There was a certain logic at work here, as the continued productivity and wealth of a nation becomes particularly important during wartime. Thus, under the auspices of the CCB, treating was banned in 1915. The ban on treating attracted much comment at the time and it was, historically speaking, an unusual measure.<sup>26</sup> But if it is compared to some of the measures, such as prohibition or nationalisation, contemplated at the time, it hardly appears radical.

The concentration on maximising the productive capabilities of the civilian population was also behind one truly radical policy pursued by the wartime administration. In certain areas the CCB did enact a kind of localised nationalisation of the drinks industry. In 1916, the state began purchasing pubs in Enfield Lock, Cromarty Firth and, on a huge scale, Carlisle and its environs. These areas were selected due to the fact that they were home to large munitions factories and so the sobriety of the local population, many of whom worked in these factories, was seen to have a strategic importance for the war-effort. Inspired by the 'Gothenberg Model' of municipal ownership, the CCB replaced the profit motive with a

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<sup>22</sup> 'Treating' refers to the practice of buying a drink for another person.

<sup>23</sup> Croydon, H.H., 'To the Editor of *The Times*: "A teetotal war"', *The Times*, 26 September 1914.

<sup>24</sup> 'Duration of War Pledge', *Daily Mirror* 28 October 1914.

<sup>25</sup> Chapman, E.F., 'To the Editor of *The Times*: Social Welfare in War Time', *The Times*, 14 October 1914.

<sup>26</sup> Unusual in the sense that regulating who a person may buy a drink for had never been attempted before.

system of 'disinterested management'. Freed from the need to pursue financial gain, pub managers (usually on a fixed salary paid by the CCB) began making a number of improvements to the pubs they ran: they encouraged the sale of food and soft drinks, as well as improving the physical condition and decor of many premises.<sup>27</sup> The pubs were often operated as works canteens, in the hope that the provision of food would mean workers would not opt for a 'liquid lunch'. But this was also an attempt to change the culture of the pub, to make it more comfortable, more respectable, and more family-friendly. The nationalisation of the drinks industry as an effort to promote sobriety and productivity was, therefore, a radical measure; but it was pursued in only a handful of areas.

Prior to World War One, Britain already had reasonably restrictive drink laws. It was established practice for British governments to regulate who may sell alcohol, when, and (through taxation) at what price; the governmental response to World War One instigated no paradigmatic shift away from these legal frameworks. The legal response to alcohol during World War One was therefore moderate; it was a mixture of tightening existing restrictions, implementing a new but hardly radical ban on 'treating', and implementing a radical yet small scale scheme of nationalisation. But were these moderate legal measures the sum-total of ways in which sobriety was promoted in Britain during the war?

### **3 New Perspectives of the British Governmental Response to WW1**

In line with the theoretical premises of this paper, this section will examine public discourse on alcohol during the war in an effort to understand public attitudes to alcohol.

#### ***The Pledge Campaign***

An examination of popular discourse during World War One provides some fascinating new perspectives on this issue. Press coverage in the early years of World War One reveals that voluntary, as well as legal action was demanded. As with treating, these demands were initially directed at servicemen; Robert B. Batty wrote 'the greatest enemy to military efficiency has been insobriety, and its greatest support abstinence'.<sup>28</sup> Batty cited the Russo-Japanese War as evidence, claiming that the humiliating Russian defeat was due to the drunkenness of many of their officers. In another letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, one S.M. Mitra echoes Batty's concerns and calls for military clubs, whose clientele were officers,

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<sup>27</sup> Nicholls, *Politics of Alcohol*, p.155-158.

<sup>28</sup> Batty, Robert B, 'To the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*: Drink and the War', *Manchester Guardian*, 12 October 1914.

to stop selling alcoholic drinks. The basic idea was that it was unfair to expect the rank-and-file to abstain from alcohol unless their superiors were prepared to observe the same form of teetotal conduct. Mitra explained that 'an example set by a military club would go a great way towards making Tommy a teetotaler and would be an object lesson to Germany'.<sup>29</sup> There appears, therefore, to have been a strong belief that teetotal soldiers were markedly more effective soldiers. Batty's quotation of the late Field Marshall Lord Roberts encapsulates this point: 'Give me a teetotal army', he said, 'and I will lead it anywhere'.<sup>30</sup> While 'Tommy the Teetotaler' was promoted as a behavioural ideal to be aspired to, his German enemies were constructed as beer-drinking savages to be reviled. H.H. Croydon (Church of England Temperance Society) contrasted good sober soldiery, as apparently typified by the British campaigns in Egypt, with the alleged drunken savagery of German soldiers. He explained that 'the trail of the German troops is marked, as innumerable witnesses testify, by myriads of empty bottles', and went on to claim that 'in some measure, the horrors of the German atrocities have had their origin in intemperance'.<sup>31</sup> This was not an isolated point: in 1915, John Rae of the National Temperance League connected beer-drinking with the 'animal and uncivilised habits' of German soldiers in Belgium.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, a cartoon by Sidney Strube in the *Daily Express* on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 1915 depicted Kaiser Wilhelm II and Admiral Tirpitz celebrating the death of women and children onboard the *Lusitania* by drinking beer.<sup>33</sup> Temperance activists had long seen their campaign as fighting the evils of drink; it was part, as T.H. Barker put it in 1871, 'of the great war between Heaven and Hell'.<sup>34</sup> Following Croydon and Rae, it is clear that, for many people, World War One represented a physical, literal manifestation of this moral and existential struggle which had long been perceived. The war was not just Britain versus Germany; it was teetotalism versus drink, civilisation versus savagery.

As with the ban on treating, behavioural standards initially demanded from servicemen were soon required from civilians also. Soon after the declaration of war, a letter in *The Times* from Gertrude S. Gow called on civilians, as well as soldiers, to take a pledge of

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<sup>29</sup> Mitra, S.M., 'To the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*: Prohibition in Military Clubs', *Manchester Guardian*, 6 April 1915.

<sup>30</sup> Batty, 'Drink and the War'.

<sup>31</sup> Croydon, "A teetotal war".

<sup>32</sup> 'Partnership with the Devil!', *Daily Express*, 14 April 1915.

<sup>33</sup> This cartoon can be viewed at:

[http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon\\_item/anytext=lusitania?page=1](http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=lusitania?page=1) .

<sup>34</sup> Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p.372. The rhetorical similarities of temperance and war goes further; in 1872, Mr Hayle of Bury applied Admiral Nelson's famous words, "England expects every man to do his duty", to the war against drink. See: 'Conference on the Reform of Temperance in Corn Exchange', *Preston Guardian*, 16 November 1872.



abstinence.<sup>35</sup> A letter one week later echoed these sentiments, asking 'can we understand that it (abstinence) must be adopted by our civilian population as well as by our sailors and soldiers as a national habit?'<sup>36</sup> But this pledge campaign really began to gather momentum when prominent establishment figures began to endorse it. In November 1914, a letter in *The Times* reported that a conference presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury had endorsed a general pledge of abstinence for the duration of the war.<sup>37</sup> Many senior clergy soon began to echo this call; the Bishop of Durham,<sup>38</sup> the Bishop of London<sup>39</sup> and the Archbishop of York<sup>40</sup> were vocal in their support for this measure. Most notably, King George V, and later Lord Kitchener, forbade the consumption of alcohol in all their households. These public declarations apparently had an effect on civilian behaviour: both the *Daily Express* and *The Times* reported that workers were steering clear of pubs.<sup>41</sup> In late 1914, F. Milne claimed that 'greater self-control, along with greater self-denial, is expected of every citizen in the land'.<sup>42</sup> By April 1915, Milne's wish appears to have been, partially at least, fulfilled.<sup>43</sup>

The 'official' rationale for the pledge campaign, as with treating and teetotalism within the military, was about civilians doing their utmost to help the war effort. The Bishop of London justified this rationally by highlighting that £160m was spent annually on drink, money which could be spent on either paying off the war loan or used to provide relief to Serbia or Armenia.<sup>44</sup> The precise mechanics of this proposal, however, were unclear. There was the issue, firstly, of how it was imagined these savings would contribute towards the war effort: would tax, voluntary donations, or something else be used? Secondly, expenditure on drink, unlike the Bishop of London's vague ideas, did make a direct contribution to the nation's coffers due to the high level of taxation levied on alcoholic drinks.<sup>45</sup> There was also the issue of falling revenues for wine exporting countries. A Frenchman wrote to *The Times* in 1914

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<sup>35</sup> Gow, Gertrude S., 'To the Editor of *The Times*', *The Times*, 7 October 1914.

<sup>36</sup> Chapman, 'Social Welfare in War Time'.

<sup>37</sup> Harford, Charles F., 'To the Editor of *The Times*: The Liquor Problem', *The Times*, 31 March 1915.

<sup>38</sup> Bishop of Durham, 'A Great Opportunity. The Clergy and the Pledge', *The Times*, 19 March 1915.

<sup>39</sup> London, A.F., 'To the Editor of *The Times*: Drink or War Loan?' *The Times*, 24 December 1915.

<sup>40</sup> 'Lord Kitchener's Pledge', *Daily Express*, 2 April 1915.

<sup>41</sup> See: 'Lord Kitchener's Pledge' *Daily Express*; 'The King's Example', *The Times*, 7 April 1915.

<sup>42</sup> Milne, F., 'To the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*: Drink and the War', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 November 1914.

<sup>43</sup> Aggregate national alcohol consumption, as recorded by Excise figures, did fall sharply during the First World War. Although with so many young men abroad at the time, this trend does not necessarily reveal greater sobriety on the part of those who remained behind.

<sup>44</sup> London, 'Drink or War Loan'.

<sup>45</sup> A point which the industry groups were quick to emphasise; an advert in the *Daily Express* stressed alcohol's many plus points, including that it is 'a Revenue Producer' and therefore, in an ironic twist, 'part of the Strength of Britain'. See: 'The Strength of Britain', *Daily Express*, 25 January 1917.

pleading with the British not to stop purchasing French wine as this would be 'another blow to the few remaining trades of France'.<sup>46</sup> Similar points were made at the time about Australia, another wine-producing ally – there seemed a genuine risk that collective teetotalism would deprive both the British Government and some of Britain's allies of much-needed revenue. Although it may do something to improve industrial productivity or military discipline, many of the arguments used to justify the wartime pledge simply do not stand up to scrutiny. Why must those not fighting or working in munitions factories abstain from alcohol? And why, for that matter, abstinence rather than moderation anyway?

### ***The Pledge and Providentialism***

Regardless of the dubious economic rationale of the pledge, there was a sense that self-denial in itself, as enshrined within the pledge, would bring benefits. Mrs Parker claimed that if civilians as well as soldiers abstained 'then the men who have rallied to the colours would be linked to their wives, parents and families at home by a bond which would be for good of all'.<sup>47</sup> A newspaper letter (signed by 'Curtail') in 1915 struck a similar note, arguing that 'the civilian should feel the sacrifice just as much as the soldier, the rich man just as the poor'<sup>48</sup>; and the Bishop of London elaborated by describing a widespread desire 'to make some definite sacrifice to show that country is to some extent worthy of its defenders'.<sup>49</sup> For many therefore, the civilian pledge was about creating a metaphysical bond of solidarity through mutual sacrifice and, to some degree, enforcing a notional parity in suffering between soldiers and civilians. But the Bishop of London's comments also demonstrate a preoccupation with moral worthiness; the pledge campaign was, in some ways, about the nation showing itself to be worthy of its defenders and worthy of the ultimate victory it aimed for.

Concerns with solidarity, shared suffering and national worthiness suggest that there was a potent moral dimension to debates about the wartime pledge, meaning the campaign looks less like a purely rational means to boost efficiency. But as with efficiency, it was widely believed that the discernable moral, even spiritual, elements involved in the pledge would help the war effort. As the Bishop of Durham explains: 'Given a nation virtuous, sober, God-fearing, those combatants will feel an indefinitely mighty force behind them and will be lifted even higher than before in courage and in the moral goodness which is of the soul of the

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<sup>46</sup> De L.G., W.H., 'To the Editor of *The Times*: France and her Wines', *The Times*, 20 November 1915.

<sup>47</sup> 'Duration of War Pledge', *Daily Mirror*, 28 October 1914.

<sup>48</sup> Curtail, 'To the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*: Temperance and the War', *Manchester Guardian*, 4 March 1915.

<sup>49</sup> London, 'Drink or War Loan?'

highest forms of valour'.<sup>50</sup> The civilian pledge is therefore connected to providentialism – if we do good, God will reward us. It was not (as far as I can tell) explicitly justified as an attempt to curry divine favour, but it was certainly a commitment to virtue and goodness that, it was widely believed, would help avoid total destruction.<sup>51</sup>

The civilian pledge, as a boost to 'moral goodness', has its roots in temperance ideas. Although abstinence from alcohol had been practised monastically for hundreds of years, the 'worldly asceticism'<sup>52</sup> of the teetotal pledge did not come about until the mid-1830s. This was not the cloistered self-abasement of holy men but a routine of everyday discipline and self-control to be lived out in wider society. The first teetotal pledges were taken in Preston, by a group of industrial labourers under the stewardship of Joseph Livesey. The idea was soon promoted by temperance societies who, like earlier groups aiming to morally reform the population, connected their project to issues of providence.<sup>53</sup> Teetotalism was partly about thrift, labour and material self-betterment. But it was also about moral self-improvement; alcohol was viewed as a corrupting influence, an absolute evil that was detrimental to both the drinker's earthly existence and, more importantly, their ultimate prospects for salvation. The temperance movement failed to achieve the total collective sobriety it aimed for, but some of its arguments do seem to have become standard ideological currency. It was common, during World War One, to see the pledge referred to as 'voluntary self-sacrifice'<sup>54</sup> or a 'heroic act of self-denial'.<sup>55</sup> Even when explaining his decision not to take the pledge, Lord Hugh Cecil acknowledged that 'all self-denial is admirable'.<sup>56</sup> Teetotalism specifically and self-denial generally were seen as positive moral actions, likely to providentially improve your, or your country's, prospects for salvation.

The tradition of promoting voluntary teetotalism was, therefore, alive and well in Britain in this period. Moreover, such acts of self-denial as the teetotal pledge were invested with a providential currency which forced routines of sobriety, as engendered by more

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<sup>50</sup> Bishop of Durham, 'A Great Opportunity'.

<sup>51</sup> Hunt identifies providentialism as a prominent strand in "moral regulation projects" from the eighteenth century onwards. It certainly featured in Victorian temperance and clearly was a strand in the pledge debates of WW1, as the fiery end that temperance campaigners had long feared appeared genuinely at hand. Teetotalism, even just a crash course, was seen as a necessary defence. See: Hunt, *Governing Morals*.

<sup>52</sup> See: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Unwin: London, 1965).

<sup>53</sup> See: Hunt, *Governing Morals*.

<sup>54</sup> Archibald, W.F.A., and Ross, R.E., 'To the editor of *The Times*: Work and Alcohol', *The Times*, 1 April 1915.

<sup>55</sup> 'Parliament and the King's Pledge', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 April 1915.

<sup>56</sup> 'Barley Water or Beer for Britons', *Daily Express*, 9 April 1915.

interventionist government responses, could not match. In a different social and moral climate prohibition or nationalisation may have been seen as essential; but in Britain behavioural governance did not end at the limits of the law. The pledge campaign was, therefore, an extra-legal supplement to the moderate legal response to alcohol during the war.<sup>57</sup>

#### **4 Assessments and Further Research**

The pledge campaign highlighted by this paper reveals several interesting points about attitudes to alcohol and the law, 1914-1918. Firstly, it demonstrates the existence of certain moral or ideological 'hangovers' from the nineteenth century; the salience of teetotal ideas and the understanding of the war as part of the great struggle between teetotalism and drink illustrate the enduring salience of Victorian attitudes. Secondly, the vivid discursive presence of preoccupations with civilisation and providentialism exhibit a rampant moral dimension to wartime understandings of alcohol. The drink question during the war was not, therefore, purely about efficiency as Greenaway implies. And finally, we can see the existence of a particular model of alcohol governance in Britain based around legal regulation and moral compulsion. The law is restrictive not prohibitive; through various legal frameworks it goes a certain distance toward enforcing sobriety, but outside of these parameters moral compulsion is relied upon to govern individual behaviour (See Appendix 1). This British model of alcohol governance, and the Victorian moral legacy it encompasses, helps explain the moderate and comparatively peculiar response of the British government to the issue of alcohol during World War One.

The wartime pledge campaign has received little scholarly attention up until this point and the British model of alcohol governance, of which it forms a part, is similarly under-researched. The author has argued elsewhere that this particular model of alcohol governance has its roots in the Licensing Act 1872<sup>58</sup> and also intends to investigate the extent to which it is still in existence today. But is this model as peculiar to the issue of alcohol in Britain as it appears to have been in the period 1914-1918? Is the use of moral

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<sup>57</sup> It is beyond the methodological scope of this paper to examine whether or not this dual approach of legal moderation coupled with moral compulsion was a deliberate government policy. But it seems reasonable to suppose that without it, it is likely that harsh alcohol policies would have been seen as more necessary.

<sup>58</sup> Henry Yeomans, 'What did the British Temperance Movement Accomplish? Attitudes to Alcohol, the Law and Moral Regulation', *Sociology*, (2011) 45(1).

compulsion alongside legal coercion apparent in other areas of governance or in other countries' regulation of alcohol? Did this normative culture, which prizes voluntary actions and self-denial, exist elsewhere? Has teetotalism ever been as forcefully linked to the ideas of providence and moral worthiness as in Britain 1914-1918? This analysis of the drink question in Britain, 1914-1918, has highlighted several avenues for future research as well as providing a new perspective on the employment of moderate alcohol policies during this period.

## **Appendix 1**

### *Promoting Sobriety: The British Model*

