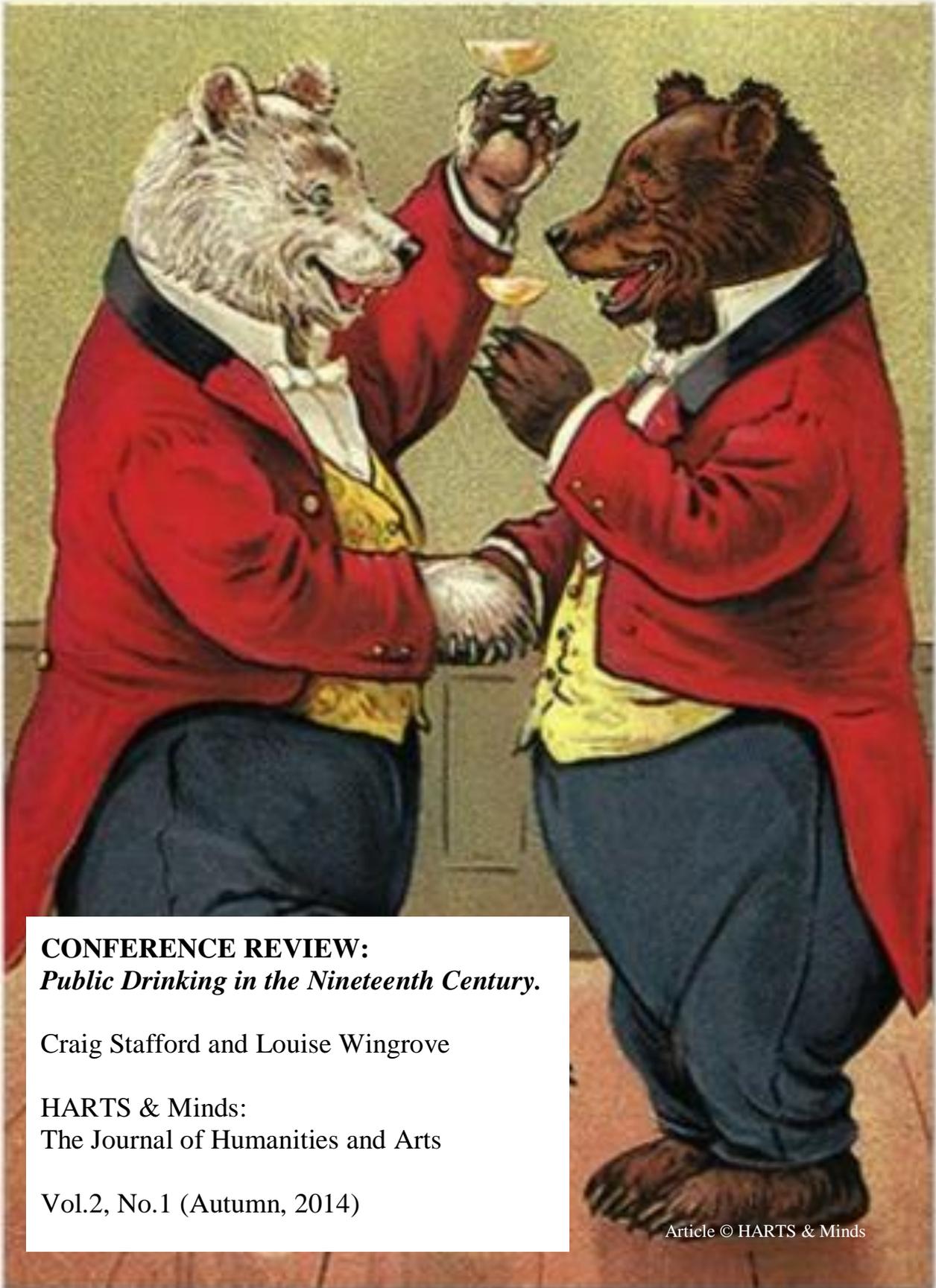


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Public Drinking in the Nineteenth Century.

Craig Stafford and Louise Wingrove

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**CONFERENCE REVIEW: *Public Drinking in the Nineteenth Century*.
Saturday 22 February 2014.
Clifton Hill House, University of Bristol.**

Craig Stafford and Louise Wingrove

The *Public Drinking in the Nineteenth Century* conference, held at the University of Bristol, brought together both seasoned academics and postgraduate researchers from varying disciplines: Historians, geographers and English scholars all delivered diverse papers, linked by the common theme of alcohol. Each panel represented a different focus on the subject of public drinking and provided a coherent and entertaining look at the subject. Despite this conference being a nine-hour binge discussing public drinking, there were no ill effects, just a heady and interesting cocktail of information and collaboration from a wealth of departments and universities.

For Louise, coming from the Theatre department and researching comediennes in Victorian Music Halls, there was a mixture of excitement about the elements that would benefit her studies and a sense of nervousness about the potential gaps in her knowledge thus far that could render her out of her depth. However, the friendly atmosphere and clear, but not patronising, papers delivered through the day both aided her understanding of the topic and left her longing to probe these fascinating topics further.

The two papers of the first panel 'Public Spaces and Places' immediately reflected and effectively engaged with these diverse strands. Paul Jennings presented a study of 'The Gin Palace' from the late eighteenth century to Edwardian times, interestingly by not reflecting too much on the impact of Hogarth's famous 'Gin Lane'. Rather, his talk concentrated on the urban phenomenon of gin palaces, their changing nature and attitudes towards them. He concluded that gin palaces came to represent the image of the archetypal pub and that there are still many examples of their designs in existing establishments. For Louise, Paul's paper considered establishments that reflected her own research, being close to the heart of many music hall patrons, performers and songs. Charting their development socially, economically, politically and legally as well as architecturally all combined to help explain their popularity as well as the fears surrounding them. Steve Earnshaw's 'Private Sots in Public Spaces' then combined historical research with literary examples by arguing that the voice of the habitual drunkard, missing from official papers such as Select Committees, could be found in the fictional works of Dickens, Eliot and Zola. This overlap between literature and history was a recurring theme of the day.

The second panel, 'Public Control' was, for Craig, the most valuable part of the day, representing as it did material relevant to his own PhD research. This was especially true of Guy Woolnough's paper, looking at the discretionary policing of a small rural town in Westmorland. His unique paper discussing the policing of drunkenness in Cumbria offered a fascinating insight into the legal repercussions of drinking as well as the reasoning behind prosecuting in different areas of the country. From an archival point of view, his showing of evidence gleaned from arrest books and police documents offered a fresh perspective of where to look for more information about Louise's case studies.

David Beckingham's paper was also relevant to Craig's studies, by looking at the drink legislation of the 1870s and its impact on local municipal control. For Louise, David's paper corresponded with Ed Lilley and Dan Malleck's papers of later sessions in offering

international studies of drinking that put her microcosmic study of London into perspective. The London music halls were a hotbed of cross-cultural exchange and so hearing more about other countries drinking habits and control offered another interesting viewpoint. Sandwiched between these two speakers was Jennifer Diann Jones, who gave a thoughtful and considered paper on the depiction of gin in the life of a fictional preacher in the work of George Eliot.

Session Three, 'Public Display' commenced with Annemarie McAllister's work on temperance, 'The Alternative World of the Proud Non-Drinker: Nineteenth Century Public Displays of Temperance'. This often under-researched subject provided the conference with an alternative look at the world of alcohol by looking at a world that eschewed the 'demon drink' and became a hugely popular movement with six million members by the end of the nineteenth century. Annemarie's paper was of particular interest to Louise, as it was an area quite far removed from the bawdy halls that she usually analyses and yet was integrally entwined. Far from the expectations many would have about the very serious and dour temperance movement, Annemarie presented an engaging paper showing how active and vibrantly performative the movement could be. The support and options that the movement offered to the community showed the caring, public service providing side of a movement largely thought of as nagging. The literary side of the day was again well-represented in this panel, by Francesca Mackenney's study of attitudes towards working-class poets and drink, and Jonathan Buckmaster's paper on Dickens and the depiction in his work of the routines of excessive drinking displayed in nineteenth century pantomime. Francesca talked of how certain poets, especially Burns, were portrayed and reviewed in the press after their deaths, and how their personalities were shaped, erroneously, by exaggerating their relationship with alcohol. Jonathan presented an intriguing look at how Dickens was influenced in some of his characterisations by the clowns he had seen as a younger man in the music halls. The clown Joseph Grimaldi's feats of eating and drinking on stage can be traced to characters in several Dickens' novels.

The fourth session looked at the issue of Public Progress by examining Art and Fiction that was self-reflective on the dangers of excess. Ed Lilley's paper provided a look at drink through the eyes of the modernist painters, particularly Manet, and his portrayal of beer and beer drinkers and was punctuated by images which brought to life his arguments; for example Manet's portrayal of women public drinkers not as prostitutes but as respectable members of the bourgeoisie. It was then back to the written word as Mary Lester, in her socio-political study of a drunken tram ride in London and Pam Lock in her study of alcoholism in two of the Bronte's novels gave further depth to the importance of alcohol as the subject of fiction. The latter also showed how these works were linked to contemporary debates on the body of the alcoholic. The authors in both these studies had first-hand experience of the damaging effects of drink, either through riding a packed London tram on a Friday evening, or the more personal experience of the Bronte sisters concerning their brother Bramwell and his struggle with alcohol.

The final session 'Public Drinking' took us back to a more strictly historical study of drink, by offering exciting case studies about public figures associated with drinking. Exploring the newly appreciated and printed medical dangers and healing abilities attributed to drink gave us yet another lens through which to view Victorian Society. Geographer James Kneale looked at the complicated, diverse and controversial life of Joseph Granville. Granville, a doctor, became a proponent of 'rational drinking' – his reaction to the temperance movement – and a man who used the press to push his arguments in public. Kneale's argument was that the view of the public to drinking at the time could have been more complicated than simply

being a battle between temperance groups and the drink interest. Finally, Dan Malleck's study of pre and post-prohibition Ontario provided an international flavour to the day and explained how prohibition had little effect on the overall development of the region's public drinking spaces over time.

Overall the day was hugely enjoyable and provided delegates with the chance to hear research from a variety of spectrums. Both of us felt it was a great opportunity to meet researchers in our field, if pursuing it from a different perspective, establish new relationships, and swap and gain new ideas for our own work. A diverse day linked by a common theme which worked extremely well; it was a varied, absorbing and, most of all, entertaining conference and its interdisciplinary nature helped bring this unusual topic to life.

Biographies

Craig Stafford is a part-time History PhD student at the University of Liverpool. His research focuses on south-east Lancashire and the women arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned for drunkenness during the mid-Victorian period. His work encompasses theories of ethnicity and gender, as well as themes concerning the attitudes of the police, press and prison staff to the issue of female drunkenness. Craig also teaches History at GCSE and A-Level on a part-time basis.

Louise Wingrove is full-time Theatre PhD student at Bristol University examining the success of and comic devices used by comediennes in Victorian Music Halls, focusing on case studies of Jenny Hill, Bessie Bellwood, Marie Lloyd and Vesta Tilley. Within this she is looking at the social backdrop to these performer's careers and the use of humour in the fight for women's suffrage. Having performed herself, she is also interested in the ongoing development of stand-up comedy and women's success within the industry.