

# W. Waters Butler and the Making of a Progressive Brewer in Britain, 1890-1922

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*W. Waters Butler's career as a prominent Birmingham brewer fell into two distinct periods. In the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, he exhibited brewers' traditional conservatism, distrustful of governmental intentions and strongly averse to collaborating with any authorities. Participation in the government's Central Control Board from 1916 transformed him into a Progressive: he turned to the government, a key characteristic of Anglo-American Progressives, to achieve the long-sought goal of an orderly marketplace and imbibed a diverse reform agenda. Now, too, his attitudes exemplified the businessman as a Progressive reformer: he cared more about suppression of drunkenness than maximizing his company's beer sales; public esteem outranked in his mind the size of his company's profits; and his concern with restoring the pub's respectability demonstrated the emergence of a pronounced social conscience. In articulating a vision of a society in which all shared responsibility for restrained, disciplined, and orderly drinking, Butler became the quintessential Progressive businessman.*

*La carrière de W. Waters Butler, de Birmingham, comme éminent brasseur, comporte deux périodes distinctes. À la fin de l'ère victorienne et au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, Butler affichait le conservatisme traditionnel des brasseurs, qui se méfiaient des intentions du gouvernement et détestaient franchement collaborer avec les autorités quelles qu'elles soient. Or sa participation, à partir de 1916, au Central Control Board mis sur pied par le gouvernement l'a transformé en progressiste : il s'est tourné vers l'État, trait caractéristique essentiel des progressistes angloaméricains, pour que le marché soit bien ordonné — but recherché depuis longtemps —, et a absorbé un programme de réforme divers. De nos jours aussi ses attitudes sont l'exemple de l'homme d'affaires en tant que réformateur progressiste : Butler, en effet, était plus intéressé à supprimer l'ivrognerie qu'à maximiser les ventes de bière de son entreprise; l'estime du public avait à ses yeux plus d'importance que l'ampleur des profits de son*

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*entreprise; quant à son souci de restaurer la respectabilité des pubs, il témoignait de l'émergence d'une conscience sociale prononcée. En présentant clairement une vision de la société dans laquelle tous partagent la responsabilité de boire de façon modérée, disciplinée et ordonnée, Butler en est venu à constituer le parfait exemple de l'homme d'affaires progressiste.*

ACCORDING TO received historical wisdom, Birmingham's successful Edwardian licensing reduction and redistribution programme, later known as the "fewer and better" policy, inspired the model instituted by the government at Carlisle during World War I. Renowned architect Basil Oliver inaugurated this myth with a pamphlet in the 1930s in which he pointed to Birmingham's pre-war "achievements" as the foundation for the Central Control Board's wartime experimentation and expansion. Central to this view was the role of W. Waters Butler, chairman of Mitchells and Butlers, Birmingham's pre-eminent brewery. Surely it was no coincidence that he joined the Central Control Board early in January 1916, months before it advanced a new concept of the public house at the Gretna Tavern, different in architecture, layout, and amenities? None other than Sir Patrick Hannon, a Birmingham MP, reinvigorated this myth on Butler's death in 1939, when he recognized Butler as the initiator of public house reform. At nationalized pubs, Butler had encouraged "the same amenities as he had introduced in his modern [pre-war] public-houses in the Midlands, in which food and drink and healthy recreation are provided in a cleanly and wholesome setting."<sup>1</sup> Scholars embraced this interpretation, too. In his 1981 doctoral dissertation, Kevin Hawkins argued that the CCB "enthusiastically adopted ... the model pioneered by Mitchells and Butlers before 1914." Giving this myth the stature of incontestable truth, the industry's official history dismissed Carlisle's relevance as a factor promoting improved interwar public houses and portrayed the brewing industry itself as pivotal in promoting change. "Much progress was made before 1914 with the [Birmingham] policy of 'fewer and better'," wrote Terry Gourvish and Richard Wilson in *The British Brewing Industry, 1830-1980*.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, brewers and magistrates had reached a stalemate in solving interrelated problems in Edwardian England: numerous redundant licences in the city's inner ring, under-licensed suburban districts, and magisterial approval to upgrade old or build new premises on a much larger scale.<sup>3</sup> Thus Birmingham's famed pre-war "fewer and better" scheme really served as no "model" in any sense for wartime government policy. Much impetus for Butler's conversion into a Progressive thus derived from his inability to find a satisfactory method of redistributing, reducing, and improving licensed premises acceptable to brewers and magistrates alike.

1 Basil Oliver, *The Modern Public House* (London: Westminster Press, 1934), p. 5; also see *Brewers' Journal*, April 19, 1939.

2 Kevin Hawkins, "The Conduct and Development of the Brewing Industry in England and Wales, 1880-1939" (PhD dissertation, University of Bradford, 1981), pp. 482-483; T. R. Gourvish and R. G. Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry, 1830-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 421-422.

3 David W. Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives: Reinventing the Public House in England, 1896-1960* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), chap. 4.



**Figure 1:** W. Waters Butler, with the characteristic flower in his buttonhole.

This failure predisposed him to other alternatives to moving forward, and soon state wartime intervention offered him a pragmatic solution to Edwardian liquor problems with a different philosophy altogether.

Historians, however, have also overlooked the intensifying commercial rivalry among brewers in Birmingham that likewise drove Waters Butler, this Midland city's pre-eminent brewer, to embrace the brewing industry's nationalization as a solution (Figure 1). Rooted in the practice known as the "long pull," wholesale strife in the brewing trade escalated in Edwardian England, fostering law-breaking, excessive drinking, and rising drunkenness, together with widespread opprobrium that the industry incurred. Repeated efforts to banish the practice of overmeasure proved futile and, like the barren "fewer and better" licensing policy, compelled Butler to contemplate the loathsome policy of State Purchase as the only tenable remedy.

Before 1914 advocates for public control (more commonly called disinterested management or the Gothenburg system) had been predominantly temperance reformers strongly hostile to the alcohol industry who had renounced prohibition as a reform strategy. From 1905, former prohibitionists Thomas P. Whittaker (Liberal MP), Joseph Rowntree, Arthur Sherwell, Lord Peel, and Lady Henry Somerset (leading women's temperance official) campaigned for the Temperance Legislation League and its policy of disinterested management.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> David W. Gutzke, "Gothenburg Scheme/Disinterested Management" in Jack S. Blocker, Jr., David M. Fahey, and Ian R. Tyrrell, eds., *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopaedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC Clío, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 274-275; John Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics since 1830: A Study in Policy Making* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 70-72; Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Women's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 269-272.

Exposure to state management as a member of the government's Central Control Board (CCB) proved the making of Butler as a social reformer during World War I. Though he envied Carlisle's achievements, he saw similar progress for Birmingham under unregulated capitalism as unthinkable. That despair eventually motivated his adoption of Progressivism, the inspiration indeed for much of the "Carlisle experiment." Birmingham did not shape the wartime state management scheme as much as it benefited enormously from its policies. From the wartime experience at Carlisle, Butler and the chairman of Birmingham's magistrates embraced Progressivism, based on their fruitful relationship promoting public house improvement, expressed in the term "fewer and better." All the key ingredients—ethical competition, suppression of the long pull, reduced drunkenness, brewers' irreproachable behaviour, and a diminished number of licences, redistributed evenly and improved overall—that had been sought unavailingly in Edwardian Birmingham were now achieved.

### Traits of Victorian and Edwardian Brewers

Well into the early years of the First World War, suspicious, obstinate, unimaginative, often elderly men hostile to change dominated the brewing industry. They formed a homogeneous group and held identical views on drunkenness, competition, serving of food, and attitudes to the government.

Victorians widely assumed individual poverty arose from character flaws and so was self-inflicted.<sup>5</sup> Drunkenness loomed large in this diagnosis. As temperance reformers repeatedly insisted, drink "leads to the bad home rather than the bad home [leads] ... to the drink." Well into the Edwardian era, drink critic Thomas Whittaker contended, "[T]he number who drink because they are poor is small compared with the number whose poverty is due to drinking."<sup>6</sup> Axiomatic was the belief that the cure for drunkenness rested firmly with the individual, not with the dearth of food sold in licensed premises, much less other socio-economic factors such as low wages, unemployment, illness, disease, or disability.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, debate on reducing insobriety focused on diminishing temptation, with fewer drink premises as the ultimate goal. Introduced from the early 1870s and continuing into the Edwardian years, temperance remedies proposed successive schemes for cutting the number of licences, from radical prohibition to gradual withdrawal of pub and beerhouse licences.<sup>8</sup>

5 For a superb overview of this topic, see J. B. Brown, "The Pig or the Stye: Drink and Poverty in Late Victorian England," *International Review of Social History*, vol. 18 (1973), pp. 380-395; Roy M. MacLeod, "The Edge of Hope: Social Policy and Chronic Alcoholism, 1870-1900," *Journal of the History and Allied Sciences*, vol. 22 (1967), pp. 218-220; Carl Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England, 1834-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

6 *National Temperance League Annual for 1889*, p. 103; Thomas P. Whittaker, "Will the Licensing Bill Promote Sobriety?" *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 63 (1908), p. 708. For the role of insobriety in fostering poverty, see, for example, Francis Peek, "Intemperance: Its Prevalence, Effects, and Remedy," *Contemporary Review*, vol. 29 (1876), pp. 31-32; Sir Wilfrid Lawson, "The Drink Difficulty," *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 5 (1879), pp. 405-406; *Report of the Select Committee on Habitual Drunkard*, 1872, vol. 9 (242), p. iii.

7 Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, p. 98.

8 Greenaway's *Drink and British Politics* provides an excellent overview.

Typifying the industry's conservatism, brewers not only subscribed to the theory of self-inflicted poverty, but took their pessimism further in viewing drunkenness as an unavoidable prerequisite to the industry's prosperity. "It was almost universally considered that public sobriety must necessarily react adversely on the profits of the trade," recollected Sydney Nevile, managing director of Whitbread & Co., one of the oldest and largest London breweries, in a speech before the Institute of Brewing in 1919.<sup>9</sup>

Opposition to increased governmental regulation preoccupied brewers, who exhibited an almost pathological distrust of the government and, as an article of well-established faith, discountenanced any misguided attempt to approach it for any reason. "It was not the business of the [brewing] trade, but of the government, to frame proposals, which the industry could accept or contest as seemed suitable," went the conventional wisdom. "For the Trade to initiate legislation was merely to invite trouble by admitting shortcomings," thought hidebound conservatives.<sup>10</sup> F. P. Whitbread, director of Whitbread & Co., exhibited brewers' usual paranoia in 1915 when he assailed a proposed meeting between the National Trade Defence Association, the trade's political lobby, and David Lloyd George, Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer. Attacks on drunken workers and, by implication, on the brewing industry for jeopardizing the country's production of war materials had rattled some prominent brewers, who had indicated their willingness to entertain the merits of a State Purchase scheme. An alarmed Whitbread expressed fears that the government was using these preliminary discussions as a pretext for extracting from brewers acceptance of further restrictions on selling alcohol. Instead, a policy of inaction, urged by Sir George Younger, MP (Younger & Co.), carried the day.<sup>11</sup>

W. Waters Butler, managing director of Mitchells & Butlers, the country's leading provincial brewery, shared this distrust of the government. His response to the government's proposal to nationalize breweries as a wartime measure was unequivocal: "They'll buy my brewery over my dead body." He even refused to countenance the government restricting beer output. When the government forced brewers to cut the strength of beer owing to shortages of raw materials, Butler saw no virtue in it as a temperance measure and stoutly derided the diluted product as unworthy of the name.<sup>12</sup> For him, as for other brewers, high-gravity beers were synonymous with beers of quality. Weak beers, those of low gravity, appealed

9 Sydney O. Nevile, "The Function of the Brewing Industry in National Reconstruction," *Journal of the Institute of Brewing*, vol. 25 (1919), p.123; see also Sir W. Waters Butler's obituary in *A Monthly Bulletin*, vol. 9 (May 1939), p. 66.

10 Sydney O. Nevile, *Seventy Rolling Years* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), pp. 65, 73; and Sydney O. Nevile, "My Ideals for an Improved Public House," *A Monthly Bulletin* (February 1933), p. 27; Cecil Lubbock's comments made following Nevile's public speech, "The Function of the Brewing Industry," pp. 125, 132; Frank Nicholson, "An Appreciation of Sir Edgar Sanders," *Brewing Trade Review*, May 1942; Evidence of the Royal Commission on Licensing, November 12, 1930, p. 2105.

11 John Turner, "State Purchase of the Liquor Trade in the First World War," *Historical Journal*, vol. 23 (1980), pp. 600-602.

12 Waters Butler's comment made following Nevile's public speech, "The Function of the Brewery Industry," *Journal of the Institute of Brewing*, p. 137; Nevile, *Seventy Rolling Years*, p. 103.

neither to the brewer nor to the consumer and, validating this perspective, were “difficult to sell.”<sup>13</sup>

Butler, though conservative in outlook, was not an entirely reliable ally of either Whitbread or Younger. A second-generation brewer and son of a publican who had married into the trade, he came from a background that contrasted sharply to those of virtually all brewers. His training too as a chemist gave him a broader perspective than others in the trade.<sup>14</sup> Not only did he abhor drunkenness, but he thought it susceptible to treatment. By reducing the number of licences, brewers could transform the drinking context to “make the drunkard ashamed to put his head in the place.” There were gains, too, for brewers. Fewer licensed premises not only facilitated control and management, but protected licence renewal.<sup>15</sup> In these two critical senses Butler already possessed some traits of Progressivism: a belief in environmentalism, the ability of surroundings to influence directly the conduct of individuals, and his strong commitment to social justice.<sup>16</sup> As *The Times*’ obituarist later recorded, Butler “would never be a part to anything connected with the trade which he did not feel was in the public interest.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Birmingham as the Centre of Conflict Over the Retailing of Beer**

What propelled Butler into prominence in the immediate pre-war years was his home city, Birmingham, which became a battleground over the retailing of liquor owing to various interrelated factors. Suburban expansion and widespread poverty in the older parts of Birmingham, congested with licences, all raised broader questions of suburban housing and liquor licensing.<sup>18</sup> Dearth of amenities naturally loomed large. Waters Butler’s nephew, Robert H. Butler, who would himself in turn become chairman of M & B, joined the brewery in 1919, giving him keen insight into the interwar years. “Bowling greens and rooms for social gatherings were particularly short,” he remembered, and new larger licensed premises obviously provided a solution for many working-class drinkers of both sexes.<sup>19</sup>

Birmingham’s two original geographic rings lacked satisfactory housing, with the inner central wards reputedly so overcrowded that an official report deemed 50,000 dwellings as unacceptable for habitation.<sup>20</sup> Annexing seven outlying

13 Interview with John Gretton, *Weekly Dispatch*, August 31, 1919.

14 Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, p. 81.

15 *Brewing Trade Review*, January 1, 1903.

16 Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 48, 50, 56, 81, 110, 130. Stanley Buder’s *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), chap. 6, has a superb introduction to environmentalism.

17 W. Waters Butler’s obituary, *The Times*, April 8, 1939.

18 Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, p. 85.

19 “Robert Henry Butler” in Norman Tiptaft, ed., *My Contemporaries* (Birmingham: Norman Tiptaft Ltd., 1952), p. 53. For a discussion of amenities at Birmingham’s suburban interwar improved pubs, see “Refreshment Houses for the People: The Improved Public Houses of Birmingham,” *Fellowship*, vol. 8 (July/August 1928), pp. 153-154, 159-160, 180; Basil Oliver, *The Renaissance of the English Public House* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), pp. 84-92.

20 Bournville Village Trust, *When We Build Again: A Study Based on Research into Conditions of Living and Working in Birmingham* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1941), pp. 7, 12, 16, 19-21, 31, 43-44; Gordon E. Cherry, *Birmingham: A Study in Geography, History, and Planning* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons,

areas between 1909 and 1911 transformed Birmingham, tripling its overall size, which now overshadowed Glasgow, Manchester, and Liverpool. Into this newly acquired municipal area, forming a third concentric ring around the city, came working-class residents from the two older rings, forcing local authorities and magistrates to address the related questions of liquor licensing and town planning. Thinly licensed suburban areas generated escalating conflict between brewers and magistrates across diverse topics: How many licences would be allowed? Would existing but redundant inner-ring pubs be removed to the newer areas? To what extent would the total of licensed premises be reduced?<sup>21</sup> Nowhere else were these issues of such magnitude, with the ultimate economic and demographic outcomes so controversial for divergent groups—brewers, retailers, magistrates, town planners, housing reformers, and, of course, pub drinkers.

Falling total beer production after 1899 exacerbated overcapacity in breweries, contributing to ever-growing numbers of superfluous licences.<sup>22</sup> Brewers' problems, however, were really more systematic. New drinking habits had caused per capita beer consumption to decline from 1876. Rising purchasing power of the working class, the main consumers of beer, and a greater array of cheap consumer goods (mass produced with a philosophy based on high turnover and low profit margins), together with unchanged retail beer prices, also drove beer consumption down in late Victorian England.<sup>23</sup>

Some idea of burgeoning economic pressures can be inferred from estimates of redundant licences. To the almost 500 licenses closed between 1905 and 1914, authorities wanted another 500 shut, suggesting 40 per cent constituted the overall proportion of redundant licences. Because the 1904 Licensing Act had instituted a procedure for withdrawing superfluous licences with prescribed compensation raised on surviving drink premises, available funds in the compensation levy dictated how fast the scheme would work. Limited funds (£26,000 annually) and many superfluous licences (500) meant reduction would require at least 25 years to reach the target.<sup>24</sup>

Competition intensified on two different fronts: between brewers and retailers, on one hand, and among retailers, on the other. Inter-trade rivalry took the form of competition with direct delivery of beer to working-class homes<sup>25</sup> and has attracted some historical investigation, whereas retail competition derived from price reductions and has been ignored by scholars. In canvassing for orders of bottled beer in residential working-class neighbourhoods, some brewers inaugurated a

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1994), pp. 90-93, 106-107.

21 Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, p. 71.

22 K. H. Hawkins and C. L. Pass, *The Brewing Industry: A Study in Industrial Organisation and Public Policy* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 41; Gourvish and Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry*, p. 285; R. G. Wilson, *Greene King: A Business and Family History* (London: Bodley Head & Jonathan Cape, 1983), p. 133.

23 A. E. Dingle, "Drink and Working-Class Living Standards in Britain, 1870-1914," *Economic History Review*, vol. 25 (1972), pp. 616-619.

24 Birmingham Licensing Committee Report for 1914, quoted in *Brewing Trade Review*, February 1, 1915 and September 1, 1925; Cherry, *Birmingham*, pp. 107-108.

25 David W. Gutzke, *Protecting the Pub: Brewers and Publicans Against Temperance* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press/Royal Historical Society, 1989), pp. 203-212.

convenient system of direct beer delivery that undercut retail prices at pubs and beerhouses. Mass-produced beer bottles made this practice both possible and profitable.<sup>26</sup>

Beer hawking, as critics dubbed it, infuriated retailers and seriously disrupted trade defence. Davenport's Brewery assumed the lead in Birmingham, with aggressive canvassing and advertising sales tactics. In a highly uncharacteristic move demonstrating the animus against cutthroat competition, the Birmingham and Midland Counties Wholesale Brewers' Association, chaired by Waters Butler, prosecuted this renegade company for fostering unfair competition. This rare resort of distrustful but enraged brewers to the government for redress utterly failed: the city magistrates upheld the practice in 1910. Defiantly, Davenport's published a pamphlet entitled *Beer Hawking, or the Penalties of Pioneering*.<sup>27</sup>

Retailers competed directly against each other with a second practice, the long pull, the practice of serving customers more beer than had been ordered without charging extra. Assumptions rather than research guide the current historical orthodoxy. In an early economic survey of the brewing industry, John Vaizey contended that brewers competed against each other, not over prices, but over their "reputation for the quality of their beer and the amenities of their houses." Terry Gourvish and Richard Wilson, in contrast, in the most comprehensive survey, characterized the long pull as a legitimate long-term but unchanging problem that persisted until the government abolished it during World War I. For Kevin Hawkins and C. L. Pass, price competition among brewers did rise after 1900, but never became severe owing to declining per capita consumption, the ineffectiveness of lower prices in stimulating trade, and brewers' fears of temperance criticism. None of these broad surveys thus saw conflict over the long pull as either escalating after 1900 or having critical long-term consequences.<sup>28</sup>

Efforts at suppressing the "long pull" constituted a classic struggle between large brewers, who rigidly adhered to licensing laws and forced tenants or managers to do so as well, and small brewers, who exploited any legal loopholes to offset limited capital; between big brewers, who sold a superior product and charged competitive prices, and smaller ones, who cut corners on the brewing process as a marketing strategy for underselling their bigger rivals; and ultimately between immense pubs, where drunkenness, gambling, and after-hours drinking were tightly policed, and small beerhouses, where the line between legal and illegal often became blurred. In a wider context, the struggle pitted big brewers like Birmingham's Waters Butler, eager to transform brewing and retailing into respected occupations, against smaller rivals, intent on securing short-term economic advantages, competition, and survival. As managing director of Mitchells & Butlers, Butler became the pivotal figure in the controversy.

26 For the development of bottling, see Gourvish and Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry*, pp. 299-302; Wilson, *Greene King*, pp. 153-154.

27 Gutzke, *Protecting the Pub*, pp. 203-212.

28 John Vaizey, *The Brewing Industry, 1886-1951: An Economic Study* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1960), pp. 17-18; Hawkins and Pass, *The Brewing Industry*, p. 39; Gourvish and Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry*, pp. 39, 208-209, 255, 324.

### Attempted Suppression of the Long Pull

The long pull was a quasi-legal practice, not equivalent, as one historian would have it, to today's "volume discount."<sup>29</sup> Authorities could prosecute retailers who poured beer directly into the customer's mug or jug. Licensing law stipulated that they must first draw the beer into an officially stamped container and only then transfer it into the customer's vessel. Giving a customer free beer violated no law, as an important test case, *Pennington v. Pinock*, established in 1908. It was ruled that publicans could follow the above procedures and then add extra beer to a customer's container because they had satisfied the legal requirements by first giving the full amount of what had been ordered.<sup>30</sup>

No standard governed amounts given to customers as overmeasure. When temperance advocate Harriet Mary Johnson visited Liverpool pubs in the 1890s and ordered a pint, the publican nearly filled her entire quart bottle. "That is a general custom throughout Liverpool and I believe it extends to Manchester also," she affirmed before the Royal Commission on Liquor Licensing Laws in 1897. Elsewhere, when customers requested beer, ale, or cider, retailers dispensed up to twice as much as ordered.<sup>31</sup>

Isaac Turner, president of Licensed Victuallers' National Defence League, the premier publicans' provincial protective organization, dubbed Liverpool "the home of the long pull."<sup>32</sup> There, large brewers such as Peter Walker & Son had apparently used it as an aggressive tactic to extend trade until they secured dominance over rivals. As a result of this strategy, one Liverpool JP testified in 1877, Peter Walker & Son had acquired "much larger and more showy establishments," which "do a larger business."<sup>33</sup> By the 1880s, the practice had become pervasive in other urban areas.<sup>34</sup>

During the 1890s retailers consistently attacked the practice. So angered in fact did they become at the Beeston Brewery Company's expansion of the long pull in Nottinghamshire and surrounding counties in 1895 that they resolved to stop financially supporting the Midland District of the National Trade Defence Fund, the chief political organization of the brewing industry. Officially brewers in the Fund adopted a policy of focusing exclusively on political issues, refusing

29 Alastair Mutch, "Magistrates and Public House Managers, 1840-1914: Another Case of Liverpool Exceptionalism?" *Northern History*, vol. 40 (2003), p. 331.

30 *Brewers' Guardian*, January 6, 1880; Cecil Whiteley and Sidney Herbert Lamb, *The Licensing Acts; Being the Licensing (Consolidation) Act, 1910*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Stevens & Haynes, 1911), p. 601.

31 *Evidence of the Royal Commission on Liquor Licensing Laws, 1897* (Cmnd. 8523), vol. 35, p. 34; Staffordshire Record Office [hereafter SRO], D 3163/1/2/4, Birmingham and Midland Counties Wholesale Brewers' Association, J. Porteous to A. Bennett, December 9, 1899; Anonymous to Editor, July 24, 1889, *Brewer & Publican*, July 26, 1889.

32 National Union of Licensed Victuallers, Half-Yearly Meeting, LVNDL Annual Report for 1910, pp. 39-40; also see *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, July 14, 1900.

33 *Evidence of the Select Committee on Intemperance, 1877*, vol. 11 (418), p. 181; Alastair Mutch, "Manchester and Liverpool Public Houses Compared, 1840-1914," *Manchester Region Historical Review*, vol. 16 (2003), p. 25, and "Liverpool Exceptionalism?" pp. 328-331.

34 Diana M. Knox, "The Development of the London Brewing Industry, 1830-1914, with Special Reference to Whitbread and Company" (B. Litt. thesis, University of Oxford, 1956), pp. 40-41; Gourvish and Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry*, p. 208.

to consider, much less to arbitrate, economic disputes.<sup>35</sup> Privately, they shunned the issue because, as brewer Laurence Hodson (William Butler & Co.) confessed to Waters Butler, “the difficulties seemed so great.”<sup>36</sup>

As slumping beer consumption made the practice more prevalent, retail protest escalated. At the annual conference in May 1901, delegates at the Licensed Victuallers’ National Defence League passed a resolution denouncing the long pull. At two subsequent annual conferences, in 1905 and again in 1909, licensed victuallers likewise endorsed resolutions against it. “Every year the evil grew and the relations between the Brewers & the Retail trade became ... strained,” Laurence Hodson recalled.<sup>37</sup> Competition was especially fierce in the midlands, where excessive numbers of licences, declining consumption, and cutthroat retail practices produced rock-bottom prices, drunkenness, and plummeting respect from the general public.<sup>38</sup>

Waters Butler spearheaded the drive to suppress rising cutthroat competition. As Chairman of the Birmingham and Midland Counties Wholesale Brewers’ Association, he forged a coalition with representatives from retail organizations on an unparalleled scale. Seeking cooperation from the 8,000 publicans, beerhouse keepers, and off-licence holders in the midlands, he proposed an elaborate scheme in which all retailers would sign a commitment to serve imperial measure for on-consumption and 125 per cent for off-consumption beginning July 16, 1900. To enforce the off-consumption level, Butler arranged for Gaskell & Chambers, beer engine manufacturers, to produce a patented pewter measuring mug, approved by the government, which contained a lip at the top for holding the extra 25 per cent (Figure 2). The Birmingham Brewers’ Association distributed placards describing the new guidelines and had them prominently displayed in bars.<sup>39</sup>

Violators immediately imperilled the scheme. In response, Butler and the Birmingham Brewers’ Association introduced far more autocratic rules: defaulters’ applications for licence renewal would be opposed at the next Brewster Sessions; and retailers who lost custom owing to their enforcing the agreed limits would receive compensation from brewers. This latter proposal was indispensable to ensuring that retailers continued to uphold the standards, but even so the economic pressure made compliance extraordinarily difficult. By November, one retailer’s experience underlined the problem with suppressing the long pull. Having adhered conscientiously to the guideline, he helplessly watched as his customers melted away, frequenting a nearby house still giving the long pull. Reluctantly, he resumed dispensing overmeasure. Less fortunate was a manager ordered to enforce the

35 East Midlands Brewers’ Association, Leicestershire and Rutland Brewers’ Association, Minute Book, June 23 and July 7, 1894, January 5, 1895, and January 7, 1899; *Licensed Trade News*, September 1, 1900; also see SRO, D 3163/1/2/3, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, E. W. Dodd to Bennett, March 11, 1899. The East Midlands Brewers’ Association has disappeared, together with its records.

36 SRO, D 3163/1/2/5, L. W. Hodson to W. W. Butler, May 12, 1900; also see *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, August 31, 1900.

37 Licensed Victuallers’ National Defence League, Annual Reports: 1901, p. 100; 1905, p. 87; and 1909, p. 67; SRO, D 3163/1/2/5, L. W. Hodson to W. Waters Butler, May 12, 1900.

38 Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 80-81, 99, 120.

39 SRO, D 3163/1/2/5, L. W. Hodson to W. W. Butler, May 12, 1900; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, July 14, 1900; SRO, D 3163/1/2/4, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, Minute Book, July 12, 1900, p. 86.

... The Patent ...

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Figure 2: Advertisement for the government-stamped, patented measuring mug manufactured by Gaskell & Chambers, Limited.

agreed limit. Complying with the instructions, he was soon evicted because “he was not taking enough money.” Similar fates befell off-licence holders, placed in the forefront of the battle over fair competition. Incapable of observing the standard and still making a liveable wage, many went out of business.<sup>40</sup>

At Brewster Sessions in 1900, the Birmingham Brewers’ Association took an unprecedented step, opposing the renewal of 50 licences, including 23 in Birmingham, because these retailers had encouraged drunkenness with the long pull. Justices of the Peace rather surprisingly declined to intervene, however. According to the *Licensed Trade News*, some magistrates saw the dispute as “a Trade squabble,” while others regarded the struggle between brewers and free licence holders as “some form of Trade tyranny.”<sup>41</sup>

Reacting to what they construed as the highhanded behaviour of big breweries in contesting the renewal of licences associated with the long pull, 120 small brewers and free house retailers defected from established trade associations. In August 1900, these dissidents inaugurated the Birmingham & Midland Counties Free Licence Holders’ & Brewers’ Association. By Christmas, the rift in trade ranks had escalated. Birmingham free house retailers founded a cooperative venture, the Fountain Free Brewery, at Redcap, near Blackburn, as a tactic for boycotting

40 SRO, D 3163/1/1/2, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, Minute Book, July 12, 1900, pp. 89-90; *Licensed Trade News*, November 24, 1900, and May 10, 1902.

41 SRO, D 3163/1/2/4, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, Memorandum on Over-measure, October 11, 1900; D 3163/1/2/4, Birmingham Brewers’ Association to Chairman of Oldbury JPs, August 20, 1900; *Licensed Trade News*, August 2, 1902.

local breweries.<sup>42</sup> When trade officials sought to explain the campaign, they discovered it “utterly impossible to obtain an interview at all” with these malcontents. Small brewers, owners of usually one to three houses, became notorious for disobeying the new July guidelines on the long pull. On a list of offenders issued on January 31, 1901, members of the Free Licence Holders’ and Brewers’ Association ranked first, even outnumbering all other violators combined.<sup>43</sup>

Inability to impose a uniform standard was exacerbated when a leading member of the Birmingham Brewers’ Association, the Holt Brewery, a medium-sized company headed by W. L. Hodgkinson, formerly chairman of the association, defected. Complaints had been lodged against 100 Holt houses, with 79 instances of gross violations of the agreed standard. In nine cases, customers received an astonishing 225 per cent overmeasure. If the campaign failed, warned the Birmingham Brewers’ Association, “the Holt Brewery will be largely responsible for it.”<sup>44</sup>

Non-local breweries also exhibited recalcitrance. Soon after the campaign officially began, Archibald S. Bennett (secretary of the Birmingham Brewers’ Association) noted that “many of the houses of the Manchester Brewery are still continuing [to give] the overmeasure, and that the Brewery officials had expressed their intention of continuing to do so.” This intransigence partly stemmed from knowledge of apathetic benches elsewhere in the country: magistrates refused to regard long pull practices as a sufficiently compelling reason for denying renewal of licences.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, some small breweries balked at assisting in the campaign against the long pull, notably George Pim & Company (Stoke-on-Trent) and the North Worcestershire Breweries (Stourbridge). One of the largest transgressors of the limit was Benjamin Kelsey & Company, which owned several dozen tied houses in the city. Moore & Simpson, a tiny brewery in deep financial trouble running a handful of tied houses, blamed managers of other breweries for engaging in the long pull as a ruse for withholding assistance.<sup>46</sup>

Unable to obtain magisterial support, the Birmingham Brewers’ Association exerted its utmost influence to quash the long pull. In May 1901, the association decreed that managers found guilty of giving overmeasure be blacklisted among all association members. One backer of vigorously prosecuting the campaign against the long pull, Laurence W. Hodson, gave Butler assurances of continued support: “Something must be done at once if we are to continue to exercise any

42 *Birmingham Daily Press*, August 28, 1900; *Licensed Trade News*, September 1, 1900; *Brewing Trade Review*, December 1, 1900; SRO, D 3163/1/2/4, F. Hayden (Secretary of the Worcester City and County Beersellers’ Protective & Benevolent Association) to Bennett, July 10, 1900.

43 SRO, D 3163/1/2/6, Black List of Overmeasure Offenders, January 31, 1901; Arthur Chamberlain, *Licensing in the City of Birmingham: Birmingham Surrender Scheme*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, [1903]), p. 18.

44 SRO, D 3163/1/2/6, Bennett to W. L. Hodgkinson, March 22, 1901.

45 SRO, D 3163/1/2/4, Overmeasure Memorandum, October 11, 1900; D 3163/1/2/4, Bennett to ?, July 24, 1900; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, August 30, 1900.

46 SRO, D 3163/1/2/4, Overmeasure Memorandum, October 11, 1900; D 23163/1/2/6, Black List of Overmeasure Offenders, January 31, 1901; D 3163/1/2/4, Moore & Simpson to A. S. Bennett, April 4, 1900. The company dissolved in 1907.

control whatever over competition among ourselves.” Mindful of these sentiments and eager to overcome a stalemate in the campaign, Butler and the Birmingham Brewers’ Association espoused a policy of fining brewers for violating the standards and compensating those who incurred any losses in adhering to the official policy.<sup>47</sup> This plan proved too drastic for several brewers, however, notably Edward Ansell (Ansell & Co.) and Frederick Smith (Frederick Smith & Co.), who dismissed it as “most objectionable” and “unworkable.” Even if it succeeded, warned Smith, the penalties “would tend to create a large amount of [ill] feeling amongst members of the Association.”<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, Waters Butler was undeterred. Summoning supporters of the compensation plan to a meeting in June, he suggested that, while refraining from competing against each other, they “act jointly in competition with the houses of Messrs. Ansell, Holder, and Rushton, and ignore any complaint against houses in competition with these firms.” Amid a possible brewers’ war over unfair competition, brewers balked at endorsing Butler’s combative tactics. On August 2, 1902, the *Licensed Trade News* delivered a post-mortem editorial: “the Long Pull cannot be abolished while any section of the Trade refuse to fall in line, and make the action of the trade absolutely unanimous.”<sup>49</sup>

The long pull was thus rooted in excessive rivalry. “Competition compels the publicans to wink at practices they acutely dislike,” Butler knew from first-hand experience. Brewers could do nothing to impose order on a marketplace with cutthroat practices. Laurence Hodson expressed to Butler a truism of the industry that both had bitterly discovered from the failed campaign: “It has been proven that the small man can beat us on that [25 per cent over-measure] standard.”<sup>50</sup>

For more than a decade, elimination of the long pull eluded them both. They and other Birmingham brewers tried again to suppress the overmeasure in 1909 in the less populated area of Tipton. Having reached an understanding with brewers and retailers to stop the practice, magistrates this time went so far as to oppose renewal of all licences of Atkinson’s Brewery as a punishment for one of its tied houses persisting in dispensing overmeasure, defined as giving more than 125 per cent for the outdoor trade. At the behest of magistrates, brewers inserted a clause in contracts with retailers authorizing owners to dismiss without notice any tenant or manager guilty of giving the long pull. By February 1911, however, the scheme had virtually collapsed, largely because non-local firms exceeded the limit. Members of the Birmingham Brewers’ Association vowed to match the amount of anyone who breached the stipulated 125 per cent maximum. When the Tipton bench asked them to report transgressors, association members

47 SRO, D 3163/1/1/2, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, Minute Book, November 8, 1900, p. 97; D 3163/1/2/6, L. W. Hodson to W. W. Butler, April 30, 1901; D 3163/1/1/2, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, Minute Book, May 9 and 13, 1901, pp. 116, 120.

48 SRO, D 3163/1/1/2, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, Minute Book, May 13, 1901, p. 120; D 3163/1/2/5, E. Ansell to W. W. Butler, May 21, 1901, and F. Smith to A. Bennett, May 23, 1901.

49 *Licensed Trade News*, August 2, 1902; SRO, D 3163/1/2/7, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, Minute Book, Unofficial Meeting of the Birmingham Brewers’ Association, June 22, 1901.

50 *Licensed Trade News*, October 18, 1919; Butler interview in *Westminster Gazette*, October 1919, quoted in Sir Frederick William Chance, “Public-House Reform at Carlisle,” *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 88 (1920), p. 1074; SRO, D 3163/1/2/6, L. W. Hodson to W. W. Butler, April 30, 1901.

reluctantly refused: “They did not desire a reversion to the old state of things, but they required liberty of action in the case of unfair competition.”<sup>51</sup> This response underlined brewers’ pronounced distrust of government intervention.

Impatient with this failure, Gerald Beesly, as chairman of Birmingham’s magistrates, finally adopted a tougher stance in February 1914. After coercing most retailers into controlling the practice, the bench declined to renew the licences of the remaining eleven offenders, six of whom had defied the anti-long pull campaign in 1900. Again the bench achieved general compliance only by agreeing to 125 per cent overmeasure for off-consumption. Retailers now for the first time also promised to report violators to the bench. Despite this unity, the long pull not only survived, but defiantly flourished. A report in mid-July 1915 documented 425 complaints against the city’s houses for giving the overmeasure.<sup>52</sup>

Why did the practice prove so difficult to eradicate? No one factor fostered it. Gerald Beesly pointed to the city’s vast numbers of superfluous on-licences as the fundamental cause. “The excess trade in an over-licensed district was largely fed by an undesirable class of customers, who had been used to heavy drinking all his [sic] life, and who was encouraged by the long pull.” Waters Butler concurred. Numerous redundant licences caused cutthroat competition, depriving retailers running small houses of a decent income. “The greater the number of small, low profit-earning houses,” he stressed, “the poorer must be the type of person who will be attracted to occupy and control the business carried on.” He also blamed managed houses, where frequent changes of managers primarily accounted for the city’s annual turnover of 25 per cent. “Cases frequently came up of managers replacing tenants, no doubt frequently to work up the trade with the long pull.”<sup>53</sup>

Innumerable redundant licences by no means fully explain the resiliency of the long pull, however. Birmingham also became the centre of conflict over the practice owing to its plentiful beerhouses, which outnumbered pubs. Of the city’s 2,238 total licences, 1,386 of them—over three-fifths—were beerhouses, the fourth highest number in the country (Table 1).<sup>54</sup> Lower rateable values, fewer rooms (and less space), just beer and wine sales, and far more rudimentary premises meant that beerhouses stood at the bottom of the retailing hierarchy. Because beerhouse keepers needed little capital to run such a shop, they entered the business as inexperienced petty capitalists, with minimal chances for upward mobility into licensed victualing and uncertain prospects for success in an increasingly competitive occupation.<sup>55</sup> Beerhouses were not held indiscriminately by all brewers. Just a few companies monopolized ownership, as the *Brewers’*

51 SRO, D 3163/1/1/4, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, Minute Book, January 20 and March 3, 1910, pp. 514-515, 540-541; D 3163/1/1/5, February 2 and 16, 1911, pp. 680-682, 693-694.

52 SRO, D 3163/1/1/6, Birmingham Brewers’ Association, Minute Book, December 3, 1914, p. 1365a; D 3163/1/1/7, December 23, 1914, p. 1345a; D 3163/1/1/8, July 15, 1915, p. 1249.

53 *Birmingham Daily Post*, February 13, 1914; *Licensing World*, August 15, 1925.

54 Gutzke, *Protecting the Pub*, pp. 112-113, 158; Chamberlain, *Licensing in the City of Birmingham*, pp. 34-42.

55 John Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Entrepreneurs* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), pp. 199, 121. These generalizations are also based on East Riding Archives and Local Studies, Pol 4/8/3/4-8, Kingston upon Hull, Beerhouse Characters, October 1885-Jan. 1893.

**Table 1: Beerhouses in Large Industrial Cities, 1901**

City	Total Licences	Beerhouses	Percentage Beerhouses
Manchester	2923	2252	77
Bradford	1121	730	65
Leeds	1181	745	63
Birmingham	2238	1386	62
Sheffield	1851	1130	61
Leeds	1241	737	59
Kingston-upon-Hull	857	470	55
Liverpool	2052	275	13

Source: Guy Hayler Collection, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Memorial Library, Arthur Chamberlain, *Licensing in the City of Birmingham: Birmingham Surrender Scheme*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, [1903]), pp. 66-7, 69-72.

*Journal* put it, of “a large number of small licensed houses crowded together within the comparatively small area of a densely-populated city.” No more than twenty breweries held at least two-thirds or perhaps as many as three-fourths of all liquor licences.<sup>56</sup>

That legal supervision over beerhouses was far less exacting than over pubs also proved troublesome in enforcing statutes.<sup>57</sup> Given these circumstances and temptations, beerhouse keepers naturally acquired an unsavoury reputation. Arthur Chamberlain, Chief Magistrate of Birmingham’s JPs, expressing a truism among authorities, castigated dingy beerhouses as leading instigators of social problems: “the largest amount of drinking was going on in the low, small, hot, secret [beer] houses, ... where there was ... [a] tendency to sit and consume drink injuriously.” Magistrates and police authorities linked beerhouses with disreputable practices, drunkenness, and crime. So did Waters Butler, who recalled that beerhouses posed the greatest obstacles to the “the strict enforcement of laws.”<sup>58</sup> Beerhouse keepers clearly fostered fierce competition, but brewers who owned the premises leased under a tied covenant were willing accomplices. “As a rule the small brewer owns the lowest type of licensed house,” who instructed their beerhouse tenants to

<sup>56</sup> *Brewers’ Guardian*, August 11, 1896; *Evidence of the Royal Commission on Liquor Licensing*, 1897, vol. 34 (Cmnd. 8356), pp. 232-233, 243.

<sup>57</sup> Magistrates gained control over grants of new beerhouse licences first in the 1869 Beer Act, which left thousands of such pre-existing licences largely immune to legal authorities. Pre-1869 beerhouse licences could be withdrawn only on four grounds. See Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-7*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1971; Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), p. 232.

<sup>58</sup> *Brewers’ Journal*, February 15 and May 15, 1903; Chamberlain, *Licensing in the City of Birmingham*, pp. 36, 40, 66-67, 69, 72; *Brewers’ Guardian*, August 11, 1896; Butler’s interview quoted in Chance, “Public House Reform at Carlisle,” pp. 1073-1074; Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, p. 123.

indulge customers, at virtually any cost. “All kinds of abuses and evasions of the law creep in, which would not for a moment be sanctioned in the houses owned by the large firms,” complained Butler. When huge firms such as M & B threatened their retailers with dismissal for disobeying the law, customers inevitably sought another establishment “where greater laxity reigns.”<sup>59</sup>

For Butler, the frustrating, inconclusive, and demoralizing pre-war years had offered no viable solution to the trade’s interrelated problems—excessive rivalry, drunkenness, redundant houses, under-licensed outlying districts, and antiquated layouts of pubs.<sup>60</sup> His colleagues, he felt, grossly overestimated their capacity for solving them. “With the utmost goodwill in the world they are powerless to do so, so long as the competitive element remains, and that means so long as the trade rests in private hands,” he declared in 1919. There was, he knew, one outstanding culprit: “Competition compels me to brew and sell a stronger liquor than I would like to produce.”<sup>61</sup> It also caused flagrant, pervasive abuses of licensing laws at small licensed premises that small breweries typically controlled.

### Impact of World War I

Three factors became instrumental in ending this impasse: Lord D’Abernon’s drink reforms, embodying his Progressive ideals, instituted in state-managed areas (notably Carlisle) during World War I; his influence on Waters Butler, who metamorphosed into a Progressive; and the post-war convergence of licensing redistribution and reduction, on one hand, with suburban housing, urban redevelopment, and town planning, on the other. These last three issues had been critical to Progressives throughout the country.<sup>62</sup>

In 1916 the new government body, the Central Control Board (CCB), nationalized breweries and licensed premises in several ports and munitions areas—Carlisle, Gretna, Cromarty Firth, Invergordon, and Enfield—as a way of altering drinking habits, especially drunkenness, which posed a threat to the war effort.<sup>63</sup> One of the CCB’s first regulations outlawed the long pull. Speaking later that year, Lord D’Abernon as CCB chairman uttered a defence of this decree that Butler himself would have endorsed: “Law-abiding licence-holders must be protected from the menace of unfair competition with neighbours who evade the restrictions. The long-pull clause of the Board’s orders had undoubtedly had an effect in decreasing competition.”<sup>64</sup>

59 Butler’s interview quoted in Chance, “Public House Reform at Carlisle,” pp. 1073-1074; *Licensed Trade News*, August 20, 1898, and October 18, 1919.

60 For the pre-war struggle over improving Birmingham licensed premises, see Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 69-95.

61 Butler interview quoted in Chance, “Public-House Reform at Carlisle,” p. 1073-1074; *Licensed Trade News*, October 18, 1919.

62 Gordon E. Cherry, *Birmingham: A Study in Geography, History and Planning* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1994), pp. 112-114, 120; Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 85-86; Carl Chinn, *Homes for People: 100 Years of Council Housing in Birmingham* (Exeter: Birmingham Books, 1991), p. 37; David W. Gutzke, “Progressivism in Britain and Abroad” in David W. Gutzke, ed., *Britain and Transnational Progressivism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 35-36.

63 For the CCB’s early history, see Robert Duncan, *Pubs and Patriots: The Drink Crisis in Britain during World War I* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), chs. 4-5

64 Scottish Brewing Archives, GY 12/1/1, p. 93, unidentified newspaper, November 23, 1916.

Butler's experiences with the CCB soon transformed him into a Progressive. Pragmatism, efficiency, discipline, cultural uplift, order, experimentation, scientific inquiry, and environmentalism—all these characterized the Progressive outlook.<sup>65</sup> Each merged during the war under the guise of the Central Control Board, of which the chairman, Baron D'Abernon, guided his board members with Progressive policies.<sup>66</sup> Integral to these was the Progressive belief in pragmatism, which here was carried forward by bureaucratic momentum. As a result, the CCB's revamped public houses were quite different from those envisaged by the Gothenburg advocates in the quarter of a century before World War I.

Butler joined the CCB on January 31, 1916, six months before the opening of the Gretna, the first state-managed reformed pub. As a member of the CCB, he watched its policies revolutionize assumptions about drinking habits. Unrestricted by either policies of magistrates or government legislation, the CCB radically reduced the number of drink premises, while introducing an entirely new drinking regime. Food became integral to designated pubs, and tables and chairs standard in interiors. In the state-managed areas, small-scale breweries with their small licensed premises no longer obstructed reform.<sup>67</sup> For big brewers, the Progressive policies of the CCB promised to eradicate the unethical, cutthroat competition of smaller rivals who brewed inferior products and sold them at prices that at best were marginally profitable, at worst constituted a loss. As a result of the "Carlisle Experiment," government intervention became rehabilitated in Butler's eyes.

He soon also renounced other beliefs of traditional brewers.<sup>68</sup> Amid wartime experiences, he had come to reappraise his belief in potent beer as the only worthwhile product worth brewing. Previously, he had viewed beers with strength of 1043<sup>0</sup> as unacceptable; consumer taste had recalibrated during the war and accepted still weaker beers, averaging 1040<sup>0</sup>, with pleasure. "The public," observed Butler in 1920, "to-day speak of certain types of beer as strong which in pre-war days they would not have looked upon as such." He pointed to pre-war cutthroat rivalry as the cause of his having produced high-gravity beers that had fostered intemperance. Aware of plummeting drunkenness during the war, Butler now regarded weaker alcoholic beer as important to fostering sobriety.<sup>69</sup>

65 Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 55, 67, 100-101. There is an extensive literature on Progressivism. The most authoritative book is Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998). I explore its historiography in the following: David W. Gutzke, "Progressivism and the History of the Public House, 1850-1950," *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 4 (2007), pp. 235-260; "Historians and Progressivism" and "Progressivism in Britain and Abroad" in Gutzke, ed., *Britain and Transnational Progressivism*, pp. 11-64; "Sydney Nevile: Squire in the Slums or Progressive Brewer?" *Business History*, vol. 53 (2011), pp. 960-966; and *Pubs and Progressives*, chap. 2, "Transatlantic Progressivism." My most recent book, *Women Drinking Out in Britain Since the Early Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), chaps. 1 and 10, likewise uses Progressivism as a major theme.

66 Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 50-51, 54-55, 67, 104-106.

67 Michael E. Rose, "The Success of Social Reform? The Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic), 1915-21" in M. R. D. Foot, ed., *War and Society: Historical Essays in Honour and Memory of J. R. Western, 1928-71* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), pp. 77-81.

68 For a discussion of traditional brewers' traits, see Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 96-100.

69 Butler's comments on Nevile's "The Function of the Brewing Industry," p. 137; Butler's interview quoted in Chance, "Public-House Reform at Carlisle," p. 1073-1074; *Licensed Trade News*, October 18, 1919; *Brewing Trade Review*, September 1, 1920. Beer for the working classes averaged about 5 per cent in

D'Abernon's Progressive convictions, a mixture of pragmatism, experimentation, environmentalism, and scientific inquiry, profoundly influenced Butler.<sup>70</sup> Traditional brewers assumed that drunkenness was the basis on which the industry's prosperity literally floated.<sup>71</sup> CCB experience proved otherwise: rising sobriety, reflected in falling levels of drunkenness, could co-exist with the trade's prosperity. "That was something which would have been widely, if not universally, disputed before the war," stated Butler's obituarist.<sup>72</sup> Compared with the immediate pre-war years, ordinary dividends of representative breweries averaged slightly high levels of 9.8 per cent (1914-1916), and then soared to 17.3 per cent (1917-1920), though the rising cost of living as well as taxes made these gains somewhat less impressive.<sup>73</sup>

As the CCB's own scientific research had abundantly demonstrated, environmentalism was a potent weapon against insobriety. Since the individual was the product of the environment, Anglo-American Progressives could use social engineering to modify behaviour.<sup>74</sup> D'Abernon sought the cause of drunkenness not in the individual, but in the environment. "Men and women," he declared late in 1918, "mainly fell into drunkenness in the absence of reasonable facilities for avoiding it." Drunkenness owed nothing to character flaws, as Victorian dogma had postulated. His colleague agreed completely. "A good environment, afforded by a clean, artistic, and roomy licensed house," urged Butler in 1924, "will elevate the self respect of the individual, while a stuffy dingy hole will lower the resistance of the individual to unhealthy activities."<sup>75</sup>

Food assumed a central role in these environmental beliefs because its consumption delayed the absorption of alcohol, reducing the likelihood of drunkenness. Again, the CCB's philosophy, which made food vital to reform, became key in combating drunkenness and featured at eight pubs in Carlisle known as food taverns.<sup>76</sup> Imbibing this philosophy, Butler's M & B pubs would foster food consumption with catering facilities, gardens, and assembly halls in the interwar era (Figure 3).<sup>77</sup>

Food, environmentalism, scientific inquiry, empiricism, and experimentation—these became the hallmarks of D'Abernon's Progressive approach to reducing drunkenness. In 1917 he appointed an advisory committee of prominent medical authorities and directed them to examine what he called alcohol's "physiological"

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strength in Edwardian England, 2 to 3 per cent during the war, and 3 to 3.5 per cent following the Armistice. See Sydney O. Nevile, "Advances Made in the Sale and Distribution of Beer in Bulk and Bottle during the Last Fifty Years," *Journal of the Institute of Brewing*, vol. 42 (1936), p. 521.

<sup>70</sup> Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 50-51, 55, 64, 67-68, 105.

<sup>71</sup> See note 68 above.

<sup>72</sup> Butler's obituary, *A Monthly Bulletin*, p. 66.

<sup>73</sup> Gourvish and Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry*, p. 332.

<sup>74</sup> John Griffiths, "Civic Communication in Britain: A Study of the *Municipal Journal*, c. 1893-1910," *Journal of Urban History OnlineFirst*, April 8, 2008; Anthony Sutcliffe, *Towards the Planned City: Germany, Britain, the United States and France, 1780-1914* (New York: St. Martin's, 1981), p. 123; Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1983), pp. 21-22.

<sup>75</sup> *The Times*, November 28, 1918; *Brewing Trade Review*, December 1, 1924; Brown, "The Pig or the Styte," pp. 380-395.

<sup>76</sup> Rose, "The Success of Social Reform?" p. 79; Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, p. 67.

<sup>77</sup> Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 90-92.



**Figure 3:** Pleasure Gardens of the Stockland Inn, Erdington.  
Courtesy of the National Brewing Museum, Burton-on-Trent.

impact. Their findings, *Alcohol: Its Action on the Human Organism*, appeared in 1918, embodied Progressive beliefs, and extolled environmentalism as a powerful factor in promoting sobriety. From these medical experts came prerequisites for managing the drinking context: short, interrupted drinking sessions; food eaten with alcohol; and alcohol weaker in strength. The CCB had instituted radically shorter drinking hours in 1915 for the entire country, demonstrated with food taverns the efficacy of food in delaying the absorption of alcohol, and (owing to war-time shortages of brewing materials) presided over government edicts controlling production, dilution, and taxation of beer. D'Abernon summarized his contribution to modifying the culture of drinking: "Regulate on sound physiological lines the modes and times and circumstances of drinking, and, within reasonable limits, the amount of consumption may with confidence be left to the operation of economic forces."<sup>78</sup> Before a crowded gathering of brewers at the Institute of Brewing in 1919 and now in the guise of a Progressive, Butler himself expressed his wholehearted support for one of the principles of physiological control: "If they could produce a beer which met the requirements of the public without producing intoxicating effects until abnormal volumes had been consumed, they ought to brew such a beer."<sup>79</sup>

From August 1917, Butler publicly and annually endorsed State Purchase before the brewery's shareholders as the only tenable solution to the industry's myriad

<sup>78</sup> *Alcohol: Its Action on the Human Organism* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1918), p. 132; H. M. Vernon, *The Alcohol Problem* (London: Bailliere, Tindall and Cox, 1928), pp. 165-166; National Repository, HO 185/228, Dr. Sullivan's Report on Alcoholism in Liverpool, July 25, 1916, pp. 83, 85; Lord D'Abernon, "The Scientific Basis of Drink Control," *British Journal of Inebriety*, vol. 17 (1920), pp. 83, 85; Gourvish and Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry*, pp. 319-323.

<sup>79</sup> Butler's comments on Neville's "The Function of the Brewing Industry," p. 137.

problems.<sup>80</sup> That Lord D'Abernon had himself adopted this policy in December 1916 clearly influenced Butler. "He became Lord D'Abernon's principal agent in the experiment of State ownership" at Carlisle, Butler's obituarist remarked in 1939. Both men saw the concept of disinterested management, introduced on an experimental basis in the state-managed pubs, as a preliminary step to their shared goal, nationalization of the entire brewing industry.<sup>81</sup>

D'Abernon and Butler, though Progressives in spirit with shared ultimate goals, pursued drink reforms from quite different perspectives of the frustrated brewer and the perceptive bureaucratic administrator. Butler had endorsed State Purchase as the only tenable solution to insoluble problems plaguing the brewing industry, whereas D'Abernon was uninterested in brewers' economic woes and instead sought social reforms of wider societal interest. Lord Milner's 1917 scheme presented to the Cabinet stressed wartime control of the industry, with State Purchase delayed until after the war. Butler steadfastly continued to extol nationalization as the best policy for resolving the industry's myriad economic problems; D'Abernon viewed state regulation, reduced drunkenness, pub improvement, fewer licences, and changes in the culture of drinking as the critical issues, not state ownership, which he now jettisoned as a credible policy. Accordingly, he and Butler parted ways over this one key issue, though both remained staunch Progressives.<sup>82</sup>

Amid the government's renewed discussions of purchasing the brewing industry in 1916-1917, Gerald Beesly, chairman of the Birmingham licensing justices, also became a strong exponent of this policy. A vocal critic of the brewing industry, which he derided as "a huge private drink monopoly," Beesly saw reform as hopeless because brewers as capitalists displayed their self-interested fixation on selling beer and producing huge profits. To expect reform from them was unthinkable, but not, he reasoned, from the CCB's experimental work. Nationalization, in contrast, provided a practical solution, promising a quickened reduction of licences like that effected at Carlisle. Addressing the city's licensing justices in January 1919, he "appealed to the Government not to be afraid to profit by our war experiences, and to deal boldly with the drink evil." Invoking Waters Butler's recent rationale for State Purchase, Beesly reaffirmed his commitment to nationalization of the brewing industry.<sup>83</sup>

Characteristic of Progressivism was this turning to government as a tactic to achieve a long-sought goal, which in this instance meant an orderly marketplace. In participating in the CCB, Butler discarded brewers' habitual distrust of the government and "came to think of the law as a friend rather than as an enemy."<sup>84</sup>

80 *Brewers' Journal*, September 15, 1917; *Brewing Trade Review*, September 1, 1918, and September 1, 1920; *Licensing World*, September 6, 1919. Anticipating his stance, Butler had moved a resolution urging a decision on State Purchase at a Brewers' Society meeting on January 19, 1917 (Turner, "State Purchase of the Liquor Trade," p. 608).

81 National Repository, HO 185/262, Lord D'Abernon's Memorandum on State Purchase, December 16, 1916; Butler's obituary, *A Monthly Bulletin*, p. 66.

82 Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics*, pp. 109-110, 113.

83 *Birmingham Daily Post*, January 19, 1916; *Brewers' Journal*, February 15, 1919.

84 Butler's obituary, *A Monthly Bulletin*, p. 66.

Entering the inner sanctums of government policy-making at a high level, he worked closely with D'Abernon in administering policy and overseeing the CCB's widening control of drinking. From this experience Butler knew that "now the Government and the Trade depended on each other."<sup>85</sup> He came to appreciate that only government intervention could reorder the industry, eliminating excessive competition and redundant pubs while redistributing licences. Order, discipline, fair competition, ethical behaviour, social control, and efficiency—these were the goals Butler and other Progressive brewers would pursue as they turned to the government to forge a constructive postwar relationship.<sup>86</sup>

Whether of the brewing industry, coal mines, or railways, discussions of nationalization became ascendant from late 1916 until 1919.<sup>87</sup> This development was not surprising, as John Greenaway has noted, because "the intellectual climate moved sharply in favour of the principle of state control over prices, manpower, transport and the regulation of consumption."<sup>88</sup> Repeatedly, drink reformers such as Butler and Beesly cited the policy of government intervention as a solution to pre-war problems that had obstructed reform, rationalization, and efficiency.

With its sweeping powers of licensing reduction and innovative practices, the CCB instituted a standard that commercial brewers could envy but never emulate. "It is sheer rubbish for the Trade to assert that it can carry out all the reforms in the public-house which the community is demanding," asserted Butler in an October 1919 interview. To him, the outcome was patent: brewers "would be checkmated at every turn." Only the government could create a disciplined marketplace: directly through legislation imposing higher standards, or indirectly through local licensing benches imposing logical schemes, with licences fewer in number, redistributed to new growing suburban areas, and permitting far more drinking space and amenities. Nationalization of the industry, Butler contended, "would ensure a uniform standard of management, eliminate bad liquor, secure enormous economies in production and distribution; and provide amenities and improved accommodation on a scale which no private concern could do." Nothing mattered more to him than that, under State Purchase, the industry would become "the servant of the community."<sup>89</sup>

### **Post-War Progress**

By mid-1919 heady governmental discussions of State Purchase had rapidly receded, first in the coal mines, then in railways, and finally, late the following year, in the brewing industry.<sup>90</sup> Denied the efficiency, sweeping control, and tight supervision that had been hallmarks of the Carlisle experiment, two Progressives, Butler and Beesly, instead spearheaded a local partnership in Birmingham. It

<sup>85</sup> Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics*, p. 113.

<sup>86</sup> Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 55, 67, 100-101.

<sup>87</sup> Derek H. Aldcroft, "Control of the Liquor Trade in Great Britain, 1914-21" in W. H. Chaloner and Barrie M. Ratcliffe, eds., *Trade and Transport: Essays in Economic History in Honour of T. S. Willan* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 245, 249.

<sup>88</sup> Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics*, p. 99.

<sup>89</sup> Butler's interview reproduced in *Licensed Trade News*, October 18, 1919.

<sup>90</sup> Aldcroft, "Control of the Liquor Trade," p. 249.



**Figure 4:** Assembly Room of the Stockland Inn, Erdington, Birmingham. Completed in March 1923, the premises cost £23,850, one of the most expensive interwar pubs. Courtesy of the National Brewing Museum, Burton-on-Trent (Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, Appendix 3).

began in 1922 and was called confusingly the “fewer and better” scheme. Food served in improved pubs was its centrepiece (Figure 4).

Characteristically, Progressives turned to the government for solutions to diverse, insoluble commercial problems. Magistrates achieved accelerated licensing reduction in the city’s inner rings with a systematic policy of exchanges in which brewers surrendered numerous licences (sometimes without compensation) as the precondition for transferring some licences to growing suburbia. Huge new expensively improved pubs, their size permitting assembly halls, restaurants, gardens, and bowling greens, ringed the city. Of the overall 166 building projects in interwar Birmingham, all but 30 dotted the middle and outer ring landscapes. No other brewery could rival Butler’s: it accounted for well over half of the total building projects. Between 1918 and 1927, Butler’s M & B closed 155 on-licences to obtain permission to build 39 new pubs, mostly in the middle and outer rings.<sup>91</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Historical orthodoxy argues that the “fewer and better” licensing reduction scheme in Edwardian Birmingham served as a model for the Central Control Board, inspiring policies about food, amenities, gardens, and architecture in the interwar era. This would have been surprising indeed, given the layout of interwar improved public houses. Central to such premises was the introduction of the

<sup>91</sup> Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 85-86.

lounge, a gender-neutral room that women could enter, free of fears of being mistaken as prostitutes. Yet few pre-war pubs contained such a room.<sup>92</sup>

Far from pioneering new amenities and a new type of public house, the pre-war Waters Butler had reached an impasse, wholly frustrated at his inability to resolve the industry's economic problems. Excessive licences, as he knew from prolonged experience, had repeatedly thwarted reform efforts. Before a gathering of the nation's brewers in 1919, Butler expressed his commitment to eliminating excessive competition in Birmingham, urging closure of more than half of the total.<sup>93</sup> Carlisle as an experiment had converted him to re-envisioning the licensing environment. Radically fewer licences would permit remaining premises to be improved and new ones to be built, with each earning reasonable profits. Such a solution would ensure efficiency and a well-regulated market, two key traits of Progressivism.

Admittedly, Butler and other large brewers benefited commercially from their Progressive embrace of government intervention, which drove smaller competitors out of the marketplace. Given the limited numbers of city-centre houses they had to swap for new outlying suburban premises and the deep pockets of big breweries for building improved public houses at astonishing costs, small-scale competitors sold out.<sup>94</sup> Less efficient and less ethical, these breweries had plagued their larger rivals in Edwardian England, but no longer. Of the four private brewing companies in Birmingham in 1920, none survived the interwar years. Butler defended this unhappy fate of the small breweries, pointing to the need for "concentrated trading under the most efficient conditions if a reasonable commercial profit was to be obtained from the very low rate of gross profits." For him, capitalism combined with Progressivism to reorder the market.<sup>95</sup>

To benefit from a reform is not quite the same as contending that self-interest trumped everything else. In this sense, British brewers resembled American Progressives, as Robert Wiebe observed, in identifying "the general welfare with their needs."<sup>96</sup> As a heterogeneous group in the United States, Steven Diner concluded, "most businessmen did not rigidly oppose regulation, but tried to control it for their own purposes."<sup>97</sup> This equally applies to British brewers.

The government's advocacy of State Purchase during the war promised what had eluded Birmingham brewers—abolition of superfluous licensed premises, licences redistributed to outer suburbia, and rebuilding of existing premises on

92 The New Inn, Birmingham, constructed by M & B in 1913, contained a lounge, the first new licensed premises in the city to possess one (Birmingham Register of New Buildings, 1913, Birmingham Central Library Archives).

93 Butler's comments on Nevile's "The Function of the Brewing Industry," p. 137.

94 Of the leading midland pub improvers, M & B (6), Ansells Brewery Co. (10), and William Butler & Co. (13) ranked in the country's top 20, with £1 million or more of share capital. New or rebuilt interwar pubs should have cost £3,200, but big brewers spent prodigiously, raising the average to £7,800 (Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, pp. 202, 212).

95 Gutzke, *Pubs and Progressives*, p. 85; *Brewing Trade Review*, September 1, 1920.

96 Robert H. Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 217.

97 Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), p. 46.

a vastly larger scale—all regarded as prerequisites for an orderly marketplace. Only radically fewer licences, Butler knew, promised a tenable solution to the industry's interrelated problems of over-production, declining consumption, and excessive number of licences.<sup>98</sup> Convinced the government could be trusted to work with brewers in a constructive relationship, Butler turned to it, forging the most productive licensing reduction and redistribution scheme in the provinces and, in the process, reinventing the concept of public houses. Numerous improved public houses, rebuilt, built, or significantly elevated in character, testified to how Waters Butler and other enlightened brewers employed a new philosophy, Progressivism, to solve unmanageable pre-war economic problems.

In a wider context, despite prevailing historical assumptions, the internecine trade feud over the long pull had significant long-term consequences. It disrupted pre-war efforts to devise a comprehensive licensing reduction and redistribution scheme, vital for Birmingham brewers to place new licences in expanding suburbia. This stalemate would later make a mockery of the interwar portrayals of the Edwardian “fewer and better” policy as an unqualified success. For Birmingham, the pre-war era had been reinvented to confirm a steady upward trajectory of improvement. Waters Butler, of course, knew better. The Edwardian impasse had created such profound despair as to drive him to adopt nationalization as the sole business alternative. Ironically, from his Central Control Board experience during the war, Butler imbibed Lord D’Abernon’s Progressivism that would reach fruition soon after the Armistice, when the Birmingham brewer spearheaded cooperation with local magistrates to institute a meaningful programme of “fewer and better.” Diverse amenities, food offerings, pub layout, and gender-neutral drinking at Carlisle’s wartime nationalized pubs were thus the product, not of Birmingham’s pre-war licensing programme, but of the Central Control Board’s experiments across a broad spectrum. In disseminating the CCB Progressive philosophy, Butler, as the disciple of D’Abernon, became pivotal as one of the formulators of the improved public house philosophy that radically transformed drinking culture in interwar England.

98 Turner, “State Purchase of the Liquor Trade,” p. 608.