



WINSTON CHURCHILL AND THE DRINK QUESTION

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Paul Addison is best remembered for his studies of Britain in the era of the Second World War, when Churchill dominated the political agenda as the wartime Prime Minister. However, as Paul pointed out, the focus on Churchill's war leadership led to a relative neglect of his domestic policy. Paul rectified that bias with his 1992 book, *Churchill on the Home Front 1900-1955*, which was an insightful and wide-ranging survey. It did not, however, examine all the details of Churchill's domestic policies due to the large amount of relevant material. In particular, Churchill's views on the drink question – the licensing, taxation and regulation of intoxicating liquor – were largely neglected save for a brief reference to his attitude to the 1908 Licensing Bill [*Churchill on the Home Front* : 83-84]. Yet the drink question was an important and controversial political issue during the first half of Churchill's life and one on which he had decided views.

Churchill's interest in the drink question has been obscured by his well-publicised fondness for alcoholic drinks [STELZER, *Dinner with Churchill, passim*]. For much of his adult life, he drank champagne and brandy both at lunch and dinner. He also sipped whisky, diluted with soda, through the day – a habit he acquired while campaigning on the North-West Frontier in the mid 1890s [CHURCHILL, *My Early Life* (1943 Reissue) : 140-142]. The high consumption of wine and spirits by Churchill and his household was made possible by generous credit from various wine merchants, which he was slow to repay [LOUGH, *No More Champagne : Churchill and His Money* (2015)]. In the 1930s his spending on alcohol was more than his salary as an MP. In 1935 he refused Lord Rothermere's offer of £2,000 if he turned teetotal for the next year, on the grounds that life would not be worth living. He did, however, accept Rothermere's other offer of £600 if he abstained from brandy and

spirits [Winston to Clementine, 30 December 1935, *Speaking for Themselves* : 404-405; CLARKE, *Mr Churchill's Profession* : 135-137].

Churchill's capacity for alcohol has led one eminent geneticist to suggest that he possessed an exceptional gene that protected him from the harmful effects of alcohol [*The Times*, 19 February 1992 : 1]. That might explain why Churchill, when Prime Minister during the Second World War, was never apparently the worse for drink [WHEELER-BENNETT : 182-183]. It is more likely, however, that his intake of alcohol was diluted with water and somewhat less than he appeared to drink [JAMES (1973) : 389]. In 1952, at a dinner on the yacht of the U.S. President, Churchill declared that he had drunk, on average, a quart of wine or spirits everyday for sixty years. He then asked his scientific advisor, Lord Cherwell – a teetotaler – to calculate the level to which all that alcohol would have reached in the room where they were dining. He was disappointed to learn that it would only have reached up to their knees.¹

Despite Churchill's reputation, in later life, as a heavy drinker, he had been brought up to have the utmost contempt for people who got drunk. His paternal family supported the growing temperance movement in the later Victorian period. Winston's grandfather, the seventh Duke of Marlborough, was a member of the Oxford branch of the Church of England Temperance Society [*Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 13 November 1880]. In 1878 the duke, then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, supported the Irish Sunday Closing Bill, which was passed despite much opposition [*The Times*, 5 February 1878]. His wife, Frances, regarded intemperance as the curse of England [Frances, Duchess of Marlborough to Winston Churchill, 27 February 1890. *The Churchill Documents* 1 : 200]. She had personal experience in that regard for the drunken behaviour of her younger son, Randolph, while an undergraduate at Oxford, was criticised by the United Kingdom Alliance, which campaigned for the suppression of the liquor trade [HARRISON, *Drink and the Victorians*, citing *Alliance News*, 2 April 1870 : 204]. Yet eight years later, Randolph, by then the Conservative MP for Woodstock, chaired a local meeting of the Alliance [SHIMAN, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England*, citing *Alliance News*, 9 February 1878 : 191].

As Conservatives, however, the Churchill family supported a party that had close links with the producers and distributors of alcohol. They opposed the Liberal government's 1872 Licensing Act, which imposed limited restrictions on public houses. They then helped to defeat the Liberal government at the 1874 general election, which Gladstone attributed to 'a torrent of gin and beer'

¹ Recollection by the U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Acheson. GILBERT, *'Never Despair'*, 1945-1965 : 675.

[See CLARKE, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* and BLEWETT, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*].

At the 1880 general election, Lord Randolph opposed temperance legislation on the grounds that it would unfairly discriminate against workingmen and could not, on its own, make people sober [*Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 20 & 27 March 1880]. He was aware, however, of the growing political weight of the temperance movement and in 1883 he called on the Conservatives to adopt temperance measures as part of a social reform agenda [CHURCHILL, *Lord Randolph Churchill* : 202]. In 1884 he praised the temperance movement as the most important popular reform effort since the days of Wesley, although he wanted to avoid a 'perhaps unwarranted' attack on the drink interest [Randolph Churchill to H.L. Pratt, 7 February 1884, RCHL II/295]. He remained opposed to further burdens and restrictions on publicans and their working-class customers.

Lord Randolph's strong opposition to Irish Home Rule increased his concern with the drink issue. After the 1886 general election, the Conservatives depended for their parliamentary majority on the Liberal-Unionists, many of whom supported licensing reform. It was claimed that the Liberal-Unionist temperance vote was a critical factor in by-elections [HAMER, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure* : 241-243 & 256-259]. Consequently Randolph sought a compromise settlement of the drink question in order to keep the Liberal-Unionists attached to their alliance with the Conservatives. In 1886, as Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lord Salisbury's second ministry, Randolph supported the principle of Local Option – allowing popularly elected local authorities to decide licensing policy [Randolph Churchill's speech at Dartford. *The Times*, 4 October 1886].

Although Randolph resigned from Salisbury's government at the end of 1886, he continued to urge the need for licensing reform. He supported the 1888 County Councils Bill on the grounds that it provided licensed victuallers with compensation if their licences were removed, while it established the principle of Local Option [Randolph Churchill's speech at Birmingham. *The Times*, 10 April 1888]. He also claimed that alcohol was the parent of more than half the crime and two-thirds of the poverty, misery and disease in the nation [Randolph Churchill's speech at Paddington. *The Times*, 18 November 1888]. His parliamentary lieutenant, Louis Jennings, hoped that Randolph would demolish the old 'alliance between Toryism and the gin palace' [Jennings to Churchill, 18 November 1888, RCHL 1/23/2983]. James Whyte, of the United Kingdom Alliance, urged Randolph to lead the Tory temperance movement [Whyte to Churchill, 27 November 1888, RCHL 1/23/2996]. He replied that the drink question was inseparable from the housing question –

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as long as much of the population lived in miserable conditions then ‘the warmth and false cheerfulness of the public house will be largely sought after’ [Churchill to Whyte, 29 November 1888, RCHL 1/23/2997].

In a speech at Walsall, in 1889, Randolph criticised the influence of the large brewers, who controlled nine out of ten of the public houses and had a political organisation ready for action at any moment – ‘almost like a Prussian army’ [*The Times*, 30 July 1889]. His comments led Conservatives at Rotherhithe – a working class constituency – to decline Randolph’s offer to speak there on the grounds that they could not afford to offend the brewers and publicans [C.E. Hamilton to Churchill, 6 August 1889, RCHL 1/24/3239]. Nevertheless he believed that the time was ripe for a non-partisan attempt to solve the licensing question [Churchill to Wilfrid Lawson, 7 December 1889, RCHL 1/25/3345].

In 1890 Randolph introduced his own private member’s Licensing Bill, in a speech that his son later described as his last great speech in the House of Commons [*Lord Randolph Churchill* : 775]. Randolph claimed that his Bill was ‘the first attempt at a final and comprehensive licensing law since the days of Mr Bruce in 1872’. The Bill proposed to give elected local authorities control over licensing and even the power to prohibit the sale of alcohol in certain cases. It also provided for compensation to publicans for the withdrawal of a licence in certain cases [*Parliamentary Debates* (April 1890); Randolph Churchill to Harcourt, 24 January 1890 (Bodleian Library)]. Wilfrid Lawson, of the UK Alliance, largely welcomed Randolph’s Bill but not the proposal for compensation. Randolph hoped that the Bill would receive cross-party support but Salisbury’s Conservative Government declined to support it. Consequently Randolph withdrew the Bill although he continued to harbour hopes for its re-introduction until his death in 1895.

Randolph’s Licensing Bill aroused the interest of his son, Winston, who was then a sixteen year-old schoolboy at Harrow. He wrote to his father:

When does your Bill come on again? It will be sure to go up for a second reading. Everybody down here is excited about it one way or another. ‘I zay zir, yor feyther goin to shut up the Pubs, tip us a drink sir while we can get it’ and on the other hand I hear the respectable tradesmen say that they hope it will pass especially those who live near the Public Houses. [Winston to Lord Randolph, ?1 June 1890. *The Churchill Documents* 1 : 203]

When Winston embarked on his own political career he followed his father’s example with respect to the drink question. In his first election campaign, as a Tory candidate at Oldham, in 1899, he favoured voluntary temperance but opposed ‘compulsory abstinence’ and the removal of licences without full and

fair compensation [Election address, 26 June 1899. *Complete Speeches* I : 36]. After his election to Parliament, in 1900, Winston pointed out that since the Tories now depended on the working classes for their electoral predominance, they needed to resolve social problems, including the liquor question [Birmingham, 6 June 1901. *Complete Speeches* I : 86]. In 1903 Winston observed that for more than fifty years the temperance question had made little progress because it has been mixed up with party politics. He pointed out that although nine out of ten Conservative MPs had ties with the liquor interest, his father had been the first to shape and embody in a bill the principle of the local veto. He then declared: 'I share to the full the sentiments and views which my father held and worked for in connection with temperance' [Kidlington, 2 June 1903. *Complete Speeches* I : 183].

Winston's conversion to Liberalism, in 1904, was facilitated by what were called his 'advanced views' on temperance [W. Finemore to Herbert Gladstone, 25 January 1904. *The Churchill Documents* 3 : 307-308]. When he was adopted as the Liberal candidate for North-West Manchester he declared:

I have long felt a great desire to have a freer hand in regard to the traffic in strong drink than is permitted to a Conservative member. The liquor interest is highly organized ... almost as highly as the German army ... and in many constituencies its influence on an election is decisive. [Manchester, 29 April 1904. *Complete Speeches* I : 281]

Winston's description of the drink interest as organised like the German army repeated an analogy that his father had used at Walsall in 1889.

Churchill was strongly opposed to the Conservative Government's 1904 Licensing Bill. That measure was a response to pressure from the licensed trade, which was alarmed by recent developments: a fall in beer consumption, higher excise duty and a sharp increase in the number of licensing applications that were rejected. The 1904 Bill provided compensation, from a tax on licences, for the withdrawal of a licence if it was made on grounds of public policy rather than misconduct. It also ruled that magistrates could only suppress licences if sufficient compensation was available [NICHOLLS, *The Politics of Alcohol* : 146-147]. Winston was not opposed to reasonable compensation being paid to the publican providing there was no charge upon public funds [Churchill to Samuel Lamb, 26 March 1904. *The Churchill Documents* 3 : 324]. But he opposed compensation for the brewers – as his father had in 1889. Winston also pointed out that a reduction in public houses would not necessarily lead to a reduction in consumption [*Parliamentary Debates* (27 June, 1904)]. When the committee stage of the Licensing Bill was limited to just six days, Winston complained that the drink lobby 'pulled the coat tails of Ministers'. He alleged that the Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour,

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was returned to Parliament by the votes of liquor sellers in his Manchester constituency [*Parliamentary Debates* (1904)].

In the autumn of 1904 Churchill denounced the Licensing Bill in speeches at Caernarfon, where he spoke with Lloyd George, and at Newcastle, where he shared the platform with Sir Wilfrid Lawson of the UK Alliance [*The Times*, 19 October & 6 December 1904]. At a Manchester meeting he denounced the Licensing Act and claimed that only 'a real movement toward true temperance' would alleviate the misery of the working classes [Churchill's speech at Cheetham Town Hall. *The Times*, 29 November 1904 : 10]. He was amazed that his Tory opponent, Joynson-Hicks – a temperance advocate and total abstainer – supported a measure that was opposed by men such as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, and by all sections of temperance opinion [Churchill to the Editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, 9 December 1904. *The Churchill Documents* 3 : 382]. During the 1906 general election campaign, Churchill ridiculed Joynson-Hicks as a temperance advocate who was soliciting the vote of every brewer and publican in the constituency [Manchester, 11 January 1906. *Complete Speeches* I : 551]. However Winston's election success was part of the general Liberal landslide and primarily a victory for Free Trade, rather than temperance.

Although Winston joined the new Liberal government, as Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, he still linked his support for temperance to the example of his Tory father:

The cause of temperance is one of the most vital elements in the work of social regeneration ... I have always felt bound to take a sentimental interest in the cause, for I remember that my father, Lord Randolph Churchill, spoke without hesitation or qualification in favour of the course which you all have at heart ... I remember that at a great meeting in Scotland he said – it is strong language to use – 'This damnable traffic is the cause of half the crime in Scotland'. He described it as a 'devilish and destructive traffic'. I feel a hereditary interest, a continuity, in much of the work which he did. [Speech to the United Temperance Police Court Mission Bazaar, Manchester, 22 October 1906. *Complete Speeches* I : 686]

In his life of his father, published in 1906, Winston included a long extract from Randolph's Walsall speech and brief details of his 1890 Licensing Bill. He observed, however, that licensing reform was one of a number of issues that trenched 'too closely upon current politics to be conveniently examined here' [*Lord Randolph Churchill* : 775].

Winston's engagement with the licensing question peaked in 1908 for legislative and electoral reasons. The Liberal Government reintroduced a

Licensing Bill, deferred from the previous year, as its priority for the parliamentary session. The Bill provided for a graduated reduction in the number of public houses, by about one third, over a period of fourteen years, during which compensation, provided by a levy on the trade, was to be paid for the licences that were extinguished. At the end of that period compensation would cease and local communities would decide future licensing policy. Opponents of the Licensing Bill claimed that it endangered the rights of all property owners and undermined the savings of those who had invested in brewery shares, including widows and orphans.

In a speech at the Peckham by-election, in March 1908, Churchill rejected the notion that the State had no right to deal with the drink traffic. His declaration that the moral forces of the country were strong enough to bear down 'beer-fomented froth and rhetoric' occasioned loud cheers from the audience. He was proud that the government was prepared to deal with the issue even though it was possibly politically disastrous [Peckham, 17 March 1908. *Complete Speeches I*: 909-910]. That proved to be the case at Peckham, where the licensed trade mounted a strong opposition to the Bill, assisted by the Women's Freedom League, which was angered by the failure of the Liberal government to introduce female suffrage [Dundee, 8 May 1908. *Complete Speeches I*: 1047]. The Tory candidate there was returned by a large majority of votes but Churchill declared that 'the noble cause of temperance' was well worth losing by-elections for [Liverpool, 2 April 1908. *Complete Speeches I*: 929].

In April 1908 Asquith became Prime Minister and promoted Churchill to the Cabinet, as President of the Board of Trade. Consequently he had to resign his seat and fight a by-election at North-West Manchester. In his election address, he described the current Licensing Bill as 'a great forward heave in the temperance movement', which he hoped would attract support from many Anglicans [12 April 1908. *The Times*, 13 April 1908]. He also championed Free Trade but declared that he was against Free Trade in liquor [Manchester, 21 April 1908. *Complete Speeches I*: 996]. Churchill was again opposed by Joynson-Hicks, who denounced the Licensing Bill as 'pure Socialism', which could only be passed by muzzling the House of Lords [W. Joynson-Hicks's election address, 13 April 1908. *The Churchill Documents 4*: 775-776]. Countess Markievicz, who later achieved fame as a Sinn Fein supporter and the first woman elected to the House of Commons, drove a coach round North-West Manchester on behalf of the Barmaids' Political Defence League. The barmaids were angered by a clause in the Licensing Bill that barred women from working in pubs [TAYLOR, *Jix*: 89]. At the poll, Joynson-Hicks was returned with a majority of 429 votes. The main reasons for Churchill's defeat were a trade recession and the defection of the Irish vote but the opposition of

the drink interest was also a significant factor. Nevertheless Churchill hoped that the Licensing Bill would be enacted and that the political power of the liquor trade would be reduced [Churchill to Sir Edward Donner, 29 April 1908. *The Churchill Documents* 4 : 788].

Immediately after his defeat, Churchill accepted an invitation to stand for a vacated seat in the double member constituency of Dundee. The city, a seaport and the centre of jute manufacturing, had a reputation for both drunkenness and temperance. Dundee had many breweries and hundreds of licensed houses. In Scotland generally, the consumption of spirits and the number of licensed premises had declined somewhat from Victorian levels but there had been an increase in convictions for drunkenness and in alcohol-related deaths [SMOUT, Table 6: Drink in Scotland 1830-1939 : 135]. Winston's defence of the Liberal Licensing Bill, during his Dundee election campaign, attracted great cheers [Kinnaird Hall, 4 May 1908. *Complete Speeches* I : 1031]. But while he favoured local option, he opposed a ban on alcohol sales:

I hesitate to adopt the policy of the prohibitionists. When I am asked that Parliament should now pass a bill saying that not a drop of liquor shall be manufactured or sold I say you may get that when you get to heaven, but I am only thinking of being elected to the House of Commons. [Dundee, 2 May 1908. *Complete Speeches* I : 1024]

That was a riposte to the prohibitionist candidate, Edwin Scrymgeour. He was a Dundee councillor, who had founded the Scottish Prohibition Party in 1901. Scrymgeour had links with the Scottish Labour movement, which was overwhelmingly 'dry'. At the poll Scrymgeour gained only a few hundred votes and Churchill was elected with a large majority. He described his election as a victory for Free Trade, Temperance and Ireland [Dundee, 9 May 1908. *Complete Speeches* I : 1042]. Unlike at Manchester, he was supported by most of the 2,000 or so Roman Catholics of Irish extraction [*Dundee Catholic Herald*, 9 May 1908]. He also benefited from an unofficial alliance with the Labour candidate for the other seat.

In the summer of 1908 Churchill actively campaigned for the Licensing Bill. In a speech in South Wales, where Methodist teetotalism was strong, he declared that the Licensing Bill was 'the sort of thing that makes Liberalism immortal'. He admitted that there were various ways to secure temperance, including shorter hours of labour, healthy working conditions and greater opportunities for leisure and education, but he claimed that the best way was by diminishing temptation. He cited his father's observation that an Act of Parliament could give the people the power to make themselves sober and declared that was the central principle of the Licensing Bill [Pontypool, 9 July 1908. *Complete Speeches* I : 1068-1069].

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Winston also spoke at a Hyde Park rally in support of the Licensing Bill, which attracted tens of thousands of demonstrators. He defended the Bill as a determined attempt to make the will of the House of Commons prevail over that of the House of Lords and as a blow 'in favour of democratic reform as opposed to capitalistic monopoly' [*The Times*, 27 July 1908]. His speech led Marie Corelli, the bestselling novelist, to offer herself as 'a humble worker on your side ... fighting for the sobriety of the nation' [Marie Corelli to Churchill, 27 July 1908. *The Churchill Documents* 4 : 833].

In October 1908 Churchill chaired the annual general meeting of the United Kingdom Alliance, in the Free Trade Hall at Manchester. He described the Licensing Bill as 'the indispensable forerunner of every important reform of social conditions'. When he told the delegates: 'this is not a time to talk of compromise ... this is a time to talk of war', they rose and waved their hats [Manchester, 13 October 1908. *Complete Speeches* I : 1100-1105]. Yet when the Bill came before the Lords, Churchill tried to persuade Asquith to make concessions to the Tories. The premier, however, thought that no satisfactory deal was possible [*A Liberal Chronicle, Journals and Papers of J.A. Pease*, entry for 27 November 1908 : 92]. The peers rejected the Bill by 272 votes to 96, which occasioned an indignant response from Churchill as Lucy Masterman recorded:

C. was perfectly furious at the rejection of the Licensing Bill by the Lords, stabbed at his bread, would hardly speak; murmured perorations about 'the heart of every Band of Hope in this country sinking with them. 'We shall send them up a Budget in June as shall terrify them, they have started the class war, they had better be careful' [Lucy Masterman's diary entry, 26 November 1908, in *C.F.G. Masterman* : 114].

Churchill, however, privately admitted that the Licensing Bill was unpopular throughout the English constituencies and that the Lords had gained strength with the electorate by rejecting it [Churchill to H.W. Massingham, 22 January 1909. *The Churchill Documents* 4 : 872]. Nevertheless, he remained committed to the temperance cause. As President of the Board of Trade, one of his main concerns was the rise in unemployment, which he claimed could be reduced by increased temperance [*Parliamentary Debates* (1909)].

After the rejection of the Licensing Bill the Liberal Government sought to limit alcohol consumption by fiscal means. Lloyd George, in his controversial 1909 Budget, greatly increased the duties on breweries, public houses and spirits. In November the Lords rejected the proposed new duties along with the rest of the Budget. That action, Churchill claimed, had 'sent a message of despair to every social worker, to every philanthropic body, to every Christian

minister, and to every little Sunday school throughout the land' [*The People's Rights* : 31].

After the January 1910 general election, Churchill became Home Secretary with responsibility for penal policy. He took the view that a fine was a better punishment for drunkenness than committal to prison because the end of a short sentence was often celebrated by heavy drinking, whereas a heavy fine enforced 'a period of temperance and saving' [*Parliamentary Debates* (1910)]. His support for temperance was again evident when he became First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911. In the Royal Navy it was the practice to issue a daily rum ration to all sailors who did not specifically apply for the money compensation of a halfpenny in lieu. Churchill reversed the process so that all men drew the halfpenny in lieu of the rum ration unless they were marked with the letter 'G' for 'Grog'. He believed that the change would considerably reduce the consumption of liquor on His Majesty's ships [*Parliamentary Debates* (1913)].

During the First World War, it was excessive drinking in the shipyards, rather than at sea, which threatened the efficiency of the Royal Navy. In 1915 Lloyd George alleged that 'drink is doing more damage in the War than all the German submarines put together'. The Shipbuilding Employers Federation, supported by officials at the Admiralty, called for the prohibition of alcohol in areas where munitions were produced. Churchill, however, believed that the naval officials and the shipyard employers exaggerated the weaknesses they noticed in workingmen. He advised Lloyd George not to dissipate his energies on a prohibition campaign but to favour 'small practical measures which would deal with local evils', such as a reduction of the alcohol content in drinks. He pointed out that the French were still drinking their wines and the Germans their beer [Churchill to Lloyd George, 7 April 1915. *The Churchill Documents* 6 : 775-776].

When George V made 'the King's pledge' – to abstain from alcohol during the war – Churchill told Lloyd George that he thought the whole thing absurd [Frances Stevenson's diary, 8 April 1915. *The Churchill Documents* 6 : 776]. Six months later, after resigning from Asquith's coalition government, Churchill went on active service with the Grenadiers, on the Western Front. There he chose to mess, not at battalion headquarters, which was strictly 'dry', but in the line where alcohol was permitted. He strongly believed in what he described as 'the moderate and regular use of alcohol, especially under conditions of winter war' ['With the Grenadiers' : 86-87].

In July 1917 Churchill returned to the Cabinet as Minister of Munitions in Lloyd George's coalition government and was consequently obliged to seek

re-election at Dundee. Scrymgeour was his only opponent, which prompted one Dundonian to declare that the issue before the electors was 'shells versus booze'. Churchill alleged that Scrymgeour wanted 'peace with Germany in order to suppress the liquor traffic in Scotland'. Nevertheless Winston also made it clear that he supported temperance:

It would be a pity if any voting down of the pacifist candidate seemed to indicate that we are not making any effort to eradicate the shocking evils of the misuse of strong drink. The vote which Dundee will give would not only be a vote for the continuance of the war but also a vote for the cause of temperance.

He promised that the government would not interfere with the powers given to localities to hold Local Option polls by the 1913 Scottish Temperance Act. But he viewed drink regulation from the point of view of winning the war and he did not commit himself to proposals for State purchase of the drink trade [Lochee, Dundee, 27 July 1917. *Complete Speeches* III : 2565]. His re-election, by a majority of over 5,000 votes, reflected his pro-war stance rather than his support for temperance.

At the 1918 general election, Scrymgeour stood again, which pleased Churchill who thought that he would take votes from the second Labour candidate [Winston to Clementine Churchill, 27 November 1918. *The Churchill Documents* 8 : 428]. In the event, Churchill was easily re-elected, along with Wilkie, the sitting Labour MP. He was helped both by Wilkie's endorsement and the absence of a Conservative candidate due to the 'coupon' arrangement by which Liberal supporters of the coalition were not opposed.

Lloyd George's post-war coalition government promoted temperance by taxation. When Dundee Liberals criticised the 1919 Budget, Churchill pointed out that the only increase in taxation was on alcohol and death duties [Churchill to Sir G. Ritchie, 9 May 1919. *The Churchill Documents* 8 : 647-648]. The duty per barrel on beer rose from 50/- to 70/- and was further increased to 100/- in the 1920 Budget. In that year, in Scotland, hundreds of local polls took place under the terms of the 1913 Scottish Temperance Act. Only a few middle class areas, however, voted in favour of prohibition or further licensing restrictions [SMOUT : 146-147].

At the 1922 general election Scrymgeour again stood for Dundee as a Prohibitionist and Labour candidate [*The Times*, 7 November 1922]. Churchill admired Scrymgeour's persistency and fidelity to his principles but claimed that a vote given to him would have no direct bearing upon the great issues being fought out in Dundee [Churchill's speech at Caird Hall, 11 November 1922. PATERSON : 248]. Yet the issue that concerned most Dundonians was

their poor living conditions, which had been made worse by the current economic recession. Clementine Churchill, who campaigned in Dundee for Winston, while he was recuperating from an operation, informed him that 'the misery here is appalling. Some of the people look absolutely starving' [Clementine to Winston, 9 November 1922. *Speaking for Themselves*: 265]. Churchill's recent role in combating the Republican insurgency in Ireland meant he was unpopular with the many electors of Irish extraction, whilst his anti-Bolshevik policy was blamed for the stoppage of jute exports to Russia. He had previously always headed the poll but in 1922 he came fourth out of the six candidates for the two Dundee seats. He lost the support that he had previously enjoyed from many Liberal, Labour and Conservative voters. By contrast, Scrymgeour, who had campaigned on various issues, not just prohibition, headed the poll [WALKER, 'Dundee's Disenchantment with Churchill']. It has been claimed that critical support for Scrymgeour came from the newly enfranchised working class women [SMOUT: 147]. Yet many of those women had also voted at the 1918 general election, when Churchill had easily beaten Scrymgeour. The difference in 1922 was that Scrymgeour jointly campaigned with the Labour candidate, Morel, and that the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers Union endorsed both men. Nearly two-thirds of Scrymgeour's support came from joint votes with Morel [DICK, 'Dundee']. As in earlier contests, his support for prohibition had limited electoral appeal. Churchill displayed no bitterness at the victory of his old opponent:

In Mr Scrymgeour's victory they saw the victory of a man who stood for endurance, and also for moral orderly conceptions of democratic reform and action. They would find he ... would have a useful part to play in representing Dundee, where there was such fearful misery and distress and such awful contrast between one class and another. He did not in the least grudge Mr Scrymgeour his victory. [Churchill at the Dundee Liberal Club, 16 November 1922. PATERSON, 283]

In 1924 Churchill returned to the Conservative Party as Chancellor of the Exchequer in Baldwin's second ministry. He thus became responsible for the taxation of alcohol. In his 1925 Budget, he imposed a small duty on imported hops and beer to countervail the tax on home-produced ale [*Parliamentary Debates* (1925)]. In 1927 he imposed a higher duty on port on the dubious grounds that it was a more alcoholic drink than whisky, 'our national product', which was usually diluted with water or soda [*Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 205 cc.804-806 (1927)]. More importantly, however, Churchill kept the excise duty on beer at the high rate of 100/- per barrel to which it had been raised in 1920. That reflected the government's need to raise revenue to pay off the vast war debt rather than a desire to induce temperance by fiscal means.

In 1927 Churchill conceded that there was a case for reducing the licence duty paid by publicans because licensing hours had been reduced during and after the war [*Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 209 (1927)]. In 1928, with the prospect of a general election next year, he wished to know if the Cabinet wanted to reduce the publicans' licence duty on electioneering grounds. As that would entail a loss to the revenue of about one million pounds, he was reluctant to do so unless it was 'absolutely necessary for our party interests' [Churchill to Stanley Baldwin, 12 April 1928. *The Churchill Documents* 11 : 1258]. He informed King George V that although Labour and Lady Astor would criticise any remission of the duty, it was justified on grounds of fair play [Churchill to George V, 22 April 1928 : 1268-1269]. On the next day, however, Churchill told the King that he had decided to postpone the remission of the duty until 1929 on the grounds that it would undermine the 'national and non-party' nature of his Budget [Churchill to George V, 23 April 1928 : 1271]. He held to that line in the Commons [*Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 219 (1928)]. In his 1929 Budget, Churchill honoured his earlier promise and reduced the duty payable by on-licence holders by 25 per cent. At the same time, however, he repealed the tea duty and increased the betting tax. He hoped that would enable the Tories to retain the support of the publicans, while posing as the friends of the sober poor and anti-gambling groups such as the Methodists. In the event, however, the Conservatives were defeated at the 1929 general election, which led to the resignation of Baldwin's ministry.

By the 1930s, the drink issue had greatly declined as a political question, which Churchill attributed to the decay of the Liberal Party and the rise of Labour [Churchill at the Allied Brewery Traders Association dinner, London, 17 March 1930. *Complete Speeches* V : 4726]. But, more importantly, there had been a dramatic drop in alcohol sales. Between 1920 and 1932 there was a 50% reduction in beer consumption per capita in Britain [GOURVISH & WILSON : 340]. As Churchill noted, high taxation and regulation had led to an immense decrease of drunkenness and the crimes and disease that it led to [*Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 214 (1928)]. But other developments, including economic recession, unemployment and the rising popularity of the cinema also played a part in reducing consumption.

In the United States, unlike in Britain, the drink question remained highly controversial due to the federal adoption of prohibition in 1920. Churchill always opposed outright prohibition – once again following the example of his father. In 1887 Lord Randolph had argued that total prohibition would have evil consequences [Sunderland, 20 Oct. 1887. JENNINGS, *Speeches* II : 231]. In 1926 Winston claimed that prohibition inevitably led to evasion and corruption on a vast scale, a general contempt for the law and an infringement of individual liberty. By comparison, he argued, in a speech to

the brewers association, that the British policy of highly taxing alcohol fostered respect for the law, while providing revenue for the State and advancing sobriety [Allied Brewery Traders Association dinner, London, 15 March 1926. *Complete Speeches* IV : 3871]. During his Budget speech in 1927, Churchill told Lady Astor: 'I do not think we are likely to learn much from the liquor legislation of the United States' [*Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 205 c.74 (1927)].

After leaving office, in 1929, Churchill toured the United States, an experience that reinforced his opposition to prohibition. His son, Randolph, who accompanied him, carried medicine bottles filled with whisky and brandy so that Winston never went without alcohol. They were served beer in a hotel despite the presence of the local prohibition officer who explained that the government was concerned not with the consumer but only with the bootlegger. Randolph concluded that 'prohibition is a complete farce' [Randolph Churchill's diary, 7-10 September 1929. *Twenty-One Years* : 78-80]. Winston, after his return from the States, denounced what he called 'the folly of intolerant idealism', which led to evasion, subterfuge and hypocrisy ['What I saw in America of Prohibition'. *Daily Telegraph* (2 December 1929) : 10].

Churchill's opposition to State policing of private morals had a long pedigree. In the mid-1890s, while a cadet at Sandhurst, he had opposed Mrs Ormiston Chant's campaign to close the bars at the Empire Theatre, in the West End of London, in order to combat prostitution and intemperance. He then drafted a speech – his first but undelivered – on 'the dangers of State intervention with the social habits of law-abiding persons'. Such a warning, he claimed in 1930, might have saved the United States from prohibition! [*My Early Life* : 66, 70].

In 1932, on his return to the U.S., Winston declared that Britain had been more successful in dealing with intemperance because 'we treated the problem as a disease rather than as a moral issue' [Brooklyn Academy of Music, 28 January 1932. *Complete Speeches* V : 5130]. In a newspaper article he pointed out that Britons now consumed only half the beer and less than a quarter of the spirits that they had drunk in 1900, when the population was smaller and poorer. He also noted that convictions for drunkenness in 1930 were less than a third of what they had been in 1913. He attributed the increase in temperance to the 300-400% rise in the cost of licensed alcohol ['Prohibition'. *Sunday Chronicle* (14 August 1932)].

As Prime Minister, during the Second World War, Churchill praised the benefits of moderate drinking. In 1940 he told the Minister of Food: 'The way to lose this war is to try to force the British public into a diet of milk, oatmeal, potatoes etc., washed down on gala occasions with a little lime juice'

[Churchill to Lord Woolton, 14 July 1940. *The Churchill Documents* 15 : 514]. In 1944 he minuted that the beer ration should go to the troops at the front before those in the rear got a drop [The Prime Minister to the Secretary of State for War, 20 November 1944. *The Churchill Documents* 20 : 1969]. In 1945 he insisted that whisky production should be maintained as it was not only an invaluable export and dollar earner but also a 'characteristic British element of ascendancy' [Churchill to the Minister of Food, 3 April 1945. *The Churchill Documents* 21 : 842].

During the war, however, alcohol consumption in Britain was reduced in various ways. Although beer was not rationed it was often unavailable or diluted in strength, while its price rose rapidly due to a more than five-fold increase in duty. Consequently excessive drinking posed less of a threat to war production than had been the case during the First World War. Not for the first time, Churchill's personal advocacy of the benefits of alcohol conflicted with the temperance-inducing policies of the government to which he belonged.

Churchill's long involvement with the drink question mirrored the trajectory of that issue in British politics. In the Edwardian period, his advocacy of temperance and licensing reform reflected the prominence of that issue in Liberal politics in that era. It also illustrated his support for social reform and the filial nature of his early politics. During and between the First and Second World Wars Churchill focused on regulation of alcoholic drink consumption by price rather than by licensing. That policy was facilitated by the national need for both additional revenue and sobriety.

The drink question was a controversial issue in all of Winston's parliamentary election campaigns between 1906 and 1922. Six of those contests were at Dundee where the prohibitionist candidate, Scrymgeour, stood against him at every election and finally defeated him in 1922. Nevertheless the electoral importance of the drink question was limited and it was never the predominant electoral issue. After 1922, moreover, the temperance movement rapidly declined as an electoral force, whereas the drink lobby continued to be an important electoral aid to the Conservative Party. Even so, Churchill, first as Baldwin's Chancellor, and then as wartime Premier, maintained high rates of taxation on alcohol, which largely ensured a dramatic reduction in consumption that lasted until the end of his career.

Churchill managed, over his career, to get the best of both worlds on the drink question. As a successful journalist and author he was able to indulge his large appetite for alcoholic drinks. As a government minister, however, he played a significant role in reducing the national consumption of alcohol and

thus helped to fulfil his father's desire for greater temperance. The contrast between his personal and his political behaviour in that respect illustrates the truth of Paul Addison's observation that Churchill, in his time, played many parts [*Churchill on the Home Front* : 1; 'The three careers of Winston Churchill'].