

Women, ale and company in early modern London

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Introduction

This article explores attitudes to female ale- and beer-drinkers and the nature of social interactions between women and men in public houses from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century. Beginning with an overview of the current historiography, the article provides an indication of the numbers of public houses in the capital, describes some of the means by which women funded their drinking, discusses early modern judgements of female drinkers in cheap print and legal records, and examines the often sexualised power dynamics between female and male drinkers, including discussion of the ambiguities surrounding such interactions. Although London contained a vast range of drinking establishments selling a wide range of forms of alcohol, the connotations of these locations and beverages varied considerably, so attention focuses on women drinking ale and beer in those venues where such drinks could be purchased.

Historiography of gender and the alehouse

Following the pioneering work of Peter Clark over a quarter of a century ago it is

now widely accepted by social historians that although women were not excluded from early modern alehouses their visits were regulated by certain social conventions. Wives visited with husbands whilst travelling, girls accompanied young men they were courting if other couples were present, and women of all ages attended betrothals, christenings and churchings. Such behaviour was not usually detrimental to women's honour, but those who ventured into alehouses alone, or in all-female groups, risked being accused of drunkenness or whoredom, whilst wives going to retrieve their husbands risked facing abuse from proprietors, customers, or their husbands. Moralists and magistrates believed alehouses threatened patriarchal families by separating children from parents, servants from masters and husbands from wives. In practice alehouses often did function as locations for brief sexual encounters: amateur prostitutes plied their trade, many brothels doubled as victualling houses, and some maidservants and landladies provided sexual favours for male customers. During the pre-civil war years respectable women may have been reluctant to visit alehouses, but by the later seventeenth century individual alehouses were increasing in size as well as gaining more respectable landlords

and more prosperous clientele. These changes, facilitated by economic improvement and the decline of Puritanism, meant that whilst alehouses remained male-dominated spaces, many became acceptable places for women to visit.¹ Keith Wrightson, also writing in the early 1980s, suggested that between 1590 and 1660 rural alehouses were primarily locations of sociability for men from the lower echelons of society, that middling sorts and gentlemen customers were becoming rarer, and that servants and young people were often present as alehouses offered opportunities for courtship and recreation.²

Feminist scholarship has modified these findings, but nonetheless has emphasised that although their function as spaces for the provision of victuals meant that public houses resembled the domestic household environment, the women who worked in such venues and female customers who ventured in alone were at best uncomfortable and at worst subject to verbal and physical abuse. In her analysis of brewing in late medieval and early modern England Judith Bennett argued that female brewsters became marginalised within the trade as it grew more complex, industrial and professional with the shift from ale to beer production, and that alewives were culturally ambivalent figures, depicted offering their customers pleasure and refreshment, yet simultaneously subjected to derogatory misogynist accusations.³ Barbara Hanawalt described late medieval London public houses as

'ambiguous territories', recreational rather than domestic, and often disorderly, places where wives of landlords, female proprietors, tapsters, domestic servants and customers were suspected and accused of sexual promiscuity.⁴ Shannon McSheffrey has shown that in late fifteenth-century London drinking houses were common and acceptable locations for courtship, announcing engagements, and sealing marriage contracts, but that it was more problematic for women to enter such establishments without male company.⁵ Referring to the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Laura Gowing defined the alehouse as 'an occupational domestic space especially prone to economic and social tensions'.⁶ Most recently Amanda Flather suggested that many alehouses were run out of private, profit-making spaces that served primarily domestic purposes, with customers entertained in parlours, halls and kitchens, and that as a result of the ambiguous nature of such environments women present therein were often victims of drink-induced male violence.⁷ The ambiguities of public houses and the potential dangers faced by women present in such establishments are illustrated by the case of Christopher Bannister, who in 1700 kept a victualling house in East Smithfield. Since Christopher was also officer of the Marshalsea Court and kept a gunlock maker's shop, he left the daily business of selling ale to his wife Mary and his daughter Anne, who deposed that her father 'never concerns himself with the drinking trade in his house and never

draws any drink for any persons'. The role of Mary and Anne in running the victualling house was only recorded because of a brawl that occurred on the premises, which were being used by a prostitute and her client.⁸

Despite the difficulties in deciding how to characterise the space of public houses there is broad agreement that alehouse culture was becoming increasingly dominated by young unmarried men during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Paul Griffiths emphasised how alehouses offered opportunities for male youths to forge alliances, construct identities and indulge in behaviour that often ran counter to patriarchal values.⁹ Jessica Warner suggested that the social and economic upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries encouraged hostility to excessive alcohol consumption, particularly by women. Male consumption of alcohol increased, but was undertaken mainly in public houses, whilst households became imagined as havens of sobriety guarded by virtuous wives, in contrast to the drunken disorder of male-dominated alehouses.¹⁰ From a literary perspective Patricia Fumerton has argued that depictions of alehouses in broadside ballads celebrated them as offering a welcoming homely environment for male vagrants and a liberating space which freed poor husbands from domestic politics, while Alexandra Shepard, following the work of Griffiths, has interpreted drinking rituals as key to the construction of age-related fraternal bonds of male comradeship which

simultaneously bolstered and undermined patriarchy.¹¹ The work of many feminist scholars as well as those working on masculinity and youth culture therefore suggests that although women were not absent from alehouses, their status was more peripheral than that of men, and that most of the women to be found in such venues were employees or accompanied by men.

Recently Bernard Capp has modified these findings in a number of ways. Capp shows that not only did male youths frequent such establishments but that public houses offered married men escape from domestic drudgery, although spousal conflicts were liable to ensue if husbands consumed excessive quantities of alcohol (or lavished time and money on other women in such establishments, including attractive female staff). In London women and men visited alehouses alone or in single- or mixed-sex groups, and invited each other to such establishments for drink and flirtation since many had private rooms that facilitated such activities, although such invitations could be mere excuses to rob an unsuspecting party. Some female customers drank to excess and were disorderly, immoral and dishonest, but other respectable women abided by unwritten rules and ate, drank, lodged and attended weddings and dances at alehouses without jeopardising their reputations.¹² Building on these findings what follows examines in greater depth the nature of women's social interactions in those venues which sold ale and beer. The

analysis is indebted to recent work by Phil Withington, who suggests that greater attention needs to be paid to the 'interpersonal dynamics of drinking' and 'the practices, rituals and attitudes surrounding the consumption and meaning of drink', arguing that early modern understandings of sociability included the notion of being in or keeping 'company', either habitually or irregularly, and asserting that 'the dynamics of co-presence' deserve greater exploration.¹³

These arguments are based on analysis of diverse primary sources. Material up to the 1640s is drawn from ecclesiastical court records and the Bridewell court-books and from the 1670s from Old Bailey sessions papers. Pamphlets and ballads from across the century provide additional evidence. None of this offers direct unproblematic access to past events and the connections between printed material and manuscript legal evidence are complex. As commercial products seeking to appeal to a large audience plays and cheap print, including the Old Bailey proceedings, were suffused with hyperbolic sensationalism, sentimentality and titillation, or rhetoric which promoted civic grandeur and efficient public justice. Although based on narratives recounted in court events were distorted or omitted, but astute readers were aware of this and drew their own opinions about the events depicted. Indeed the stories witnesses told in court were shaped not only by legal protocols and their own experiences, but in many cases also by such published accounts.

The interconnections between these sources thus means that to varying degrees they all reflect the experiences and perceptions of everyday life in the metropolis and therefore constitute valid forms of evidence.¹⁴

Obtaining ale in early modern London

The number of women in alehouses was significant. No gender breakdown of attendance exists for the capital, but in Essex women accounted for 40% of individuals recorded as being in alehouses between 1580 and 1640, 38.8% of whom were working as alewives or servants, and 36.2% of who were socialising. Of those socialising 28.6% were from the middling sort, whilst the rest were mostly labourers' wives, poor widows and servants.¹⁵ Even if women in early modern London did not choose to spend time drinking on the premises they were unlikely to have been able to avoid entering an alehouse since ale, beer and food were frequently purchased from public houses and cook-shops, often on credit, rather than being brewed or baked domestically.¹⁶ In addition some visits were unplanned, for example when alehouses were used as places of shelter during bad weather. On Boxing Day 1661 Sir William Penn came for dinner at the house of Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys with his son and daughter, and the couple took them by coach to Moorfields to walk, but because of bad weather they went to an alehouse and consumed cakes and ale whilst being entertained by a wassail-

ing woman and girl. In June 1664 Samuel and Elizabeth sought shelter 'in a little alehouse' after leaving a playhouse until they could get a coach home.¹⁷

Although it is impossible to calculate exactly how many public houses operated in the capital they were copious in number. The census taken in 1577 did not include the City, but recorded 720 alehouses and 132 inns in Middlesex, equating to one alehouse for every 76 people. By 1610 it was claimed that one in four houses in the London suburbs was an alehouse, and in 1612 the inhabitants of Bishopsgate denounced 'the great number of unlicensed victuallers' and 'daily increase' of alehouses. In 1614 further complaints were made about the 'excessive' number of alehouses, and in 1620 it was recorded that there were nearly 100 taverns between Charing Cross and Temple Bar. From February that year the Court of Aldermen also allowed chandlers to sell ale and beer, whilst in July 1622 the Privy Council reported that tobacco sellers were using their premises as tipling houses. In 1626 the city marshals were ordered to crack down, but complaints resurfaced in 1629. In 1630 26 alehouses were licensed in Wapping and a similar number suppressed, whilst in March 1631 Surrey JPs recorded 228 alehouses in Southwark and Kentish Street, and 551 in Westminster. Two years later 15 alehouses were reported in Covent Garden, five in Russell Street, and 37 in Wapping, whilst the Privy Council ordered Westminster J.P.s to reduce the number

in their district to four. Such attempts had limited, if any success, as in 1636 it was claimed that alehouses 'abounded'. By 1641 as many as one in six houses was a drinking establishment in poor extramural wards such as Farringdon Without and Portsoken, and between one in 30 and one in 40 in wealthier central areas such as Aldgate and Cornhill. In 1711 Gregory King calculated that for every twelve Londoners there was an establishment from which alcohol could be purchased.¹⁸ By the 1730s London had around 200 inns and an estimated 6,000 alehouses, figures which may be gross underestimates.¹⁹

Poor women used various means to fund their drinking, one of the most popular being to sell other consumer commodities. On 5th July 1623 Abraham Thomas of St. Sepulchres parish deposed that he had known Marie Lewis since the previous Michelmas, and that 'from yt tyme ... untill Christmas last past ... [had] lyved nere unto her in Chicke Lane'. Marie owed between 16 and 20 shillings 'for bread beare and ale' to 'Stamford and his wife' who kept a victualling house and 'was reported and taken to be a verie poore woman and little or nothing worth' who maintained herself 'by selling of tobacco' which she sought 'oute out of dores by the ounce and half ounce her meanes being then such as she co[u]ld purchase noe more besides'.²⁰ Decades later Alice Fowler, a poor widow from King's Street in Shadwell, funded her drinking by selling biscuits in bawdy houses 'where she generally got drunk'.

Not all women worked to pay for drink. One pamphleteer bemoaned that his wife was 'away to the alehouse' as soon as she woke, her drinking funded by his money and by her pawning 'Gown, Petticoat, Smock and all'.²¹

Attitudes to women drinking in alehouses

Lynn Martin has argued that

two different images of women emerged that were dependent on the quantity of alcohol consumed: the good image of the woman who drank a little and the bad image of the woman who drank too much and as a consequence gained a reputation for unbridled sexuality.

A drinking as well as a sexual double standard existed in pre-modern Europe, and

the two were linked because of widespread beliefs that 'a sober woman was chaste whilst a drunk woman was promiscuous'.²²

Contemporaries made similar observations. The Jacobean pamphleteer Ester Sowernam noted that it was considered

an hatefull thing ... to see a woman overcome with drinke, when as in men it is noted a signe of good fellowship', claiming that 'for one woman which doth make a custome of drunkenesse, you shall finde an hundred men: it is abhorred in women, and therefore they avoyd it: it is laughed at and made but

as a jest amongst men, and therefore so many doe practice it.²³

One of the main reasons that women who drank to excess were condemned was because of their vulnerability to men's sexual advances when intoxicated, and the associated risk of unwanted pregnancy. *Pasquils Jestes* described Mother Bunch selling strong ale in Cornhill near the Exchange, detailing how her best customers were initially Dutch men, but that once 'report of her Ale had spread it selfe all England over' more young men and maids came to her alehouse than to 'either Pymlico, or ... Totnam-Court'. Many of the maids became pregnant and blamed their state on Mother Bunch's ale.²⁴ More generally women who drank heavily were deemed to be immoral. Pamphleteers and playwrights even suggested that prostitutes and whores were the bi-products of brewing and that ale and loose women had similar effects on the male body. One satirist claimed that the supposedly disreputable women who frequented the Royal Exchange emerged from the froth 'tunn'd up in the musty vessel of some gouty hostess', whilst the proverb

as the hop well boiled will make a man not stand upon his legs so the harlot in time will leave a man no legs to stand upon

was recited on stage and set down in print.²⁵

Not all printed texts depicted female drinkers in a negative light. Pamela Allen

Brown notes that the pamphlets of Samuel Rowlands depict a 'candid social realism' in which gossiping women buy drinks for each other, and suggests that 'in 1600 women could gather in London to drink ale made by another woman, at an alehouse she owned and ran, hear a female ballad seller pitch a song complaining about drunken husbands and impotent lovers' and 'combine sociability with neighbourhood duties'.²⁶ The likelihood of finding many such venues, even in the capital, was probably slim, but Brown is correct to emphasise that many depictions of women drinking in alehouses were celebratory and emphasised their empowerment. One ballad told of a 'lusty, couragious and stout' woman from Wales who as soon as she arrived in London headed to The Sign of the Crown, 'called for a pitcher of Ale of the best', and 'drank a good health to the King of England'. Having consumed half of her ale in one swig, the tapster refilled the jug repeatedly each time her back was turned. The Welsh woman continued to drink until she began to 'stagger and reel' and vowed never to return to her homeland since in London she had 'tasted Rich liquor good store/the like in all Wales her had ne'er drank before'.²⁷ Whilst the depiction of the Welsh woman is not completely complementary she is mocked because of her nationality and naivety rather than her gender, whilst her loyalty to the monarch and praise for English ale are depicted in a positive fashion.

Westward for Smelts told of a fishwife from Standon the Green who 'lou'd good

Ale' and described another from Kingston who was 'a bosse/that lou'd to tosse/ the ale pot round'. 'Few was there found/ Could with her drinke,/But they would winke,/And fall asleepe' remarked the author, explaining how the latter would 'call for more' even after her drinking companions had collapsed into drunken stupor. The author describes rowing the fishwives to Kingston where they went 'straight to the signe of the Beare' and enjoyed ale 'of great strength and force'.²⁸ The tone of the pamphlet is comic, and the women are praised for being able to consume larger quantities of alcohol than their fellow drinkers in much the same way that men would have been. *Five Merry wives of Lambeth* which told of Sarah, Sue, Mary, Nan and Nell, who 'lov'd good Wine, good Ale, and eke good chear'. Disliking 'Dullige water' the women went to the Bell in Camberwell where they drank sack, 'wine to make their heart full glad,/and liquor of the best'. One of the women was married to a carpenter and Quaker, which the balladeer claimed led her to 'use a Gardiner, sometimes as her partaker'. In his drunkenness the gardener took a ring from the carpenter's wife, which later he gave to his own wife. Being suspicious the gardener's wife went to see the carpenter, who recognised the ring as belonging to his wife. 'If this your wives ring be/for certain I will slit her nose/for she hath wronged me', the gardener's wife threatened. 'My husband hath full twenty pound/upon her vainly spent:/with feasting of her whorish chops/in mirth and merriment'. Despite these threats of

violence the balladeer concluded by claiming that news of these events provoked laughter and 'great mirth' amongst the neighbours.²⁹ In a similar vein to Taylor's pamphlet the independence and carousing of the 'merry wives' is intended as a source of amusement. Connections are drawn between women drinking and sexual promiscuity, but it is the men who are the objects of mockery and condemnation: the Quaker for being cuckolded and the gardener for being foolish enough to allow his wife to discover his adultery, as well as for misusing household resources by spending money on entertaining his lover.

These printed depictions of women in alehouses support the assertions of Barbara Hanawalt with regard to medieval popular poems; namely that they conveyed mixed messages to women about being in such venues. Some warned them to stay away because of the presence of pimps and the frequent violence perpetrated by young men, but others celebrated the camaraderie of collective female drinking.³⁰ Whilst connections are often drawn between women's drunkenness and sexual promiscuity, others celebrate women's intoxication or ability to drink heavily, and make no reference to their potential vulnerability when drunk.

By contrast legal records, perhaps unsurprisingly, primarily reveal hostility to female drinkers, although the emphasis on sexual promiscuity found in cheap print was not always explicit in condem-

natory depositions. Women who were known or suspected to frequent alehouses on a regular basis were criticized and abused, both by other women and by men, as lazy, drunken and immoral, especially if they did so either on the Sabbath or late at night. When one of her neighbours challenged Alice Collet for washing on a Sunday, Alice replied that 'it was better to do so than to go from alehouse to alehouse', suggesting only idle women who drank heavily visited such places.³¹ John Stocke told how he had heard it reported credibly that Mary Lymet

did frequent the company of one Baker and did use to goe with him from alehouse to alehouse in very unseemly fashion at unsu[er]table hour.³²

Who women drank with also mattered. Catherine Barnaby claimed that Grace Dickenson was a drunken quean who 'goest a drinking from house to house everyday' and kept company 'with none but peddlers and roagues and theeves', whilst Sara Lee referred to Elizabeth Wyatt as 'a great frequenter of taverns and alehouses' and claimed to have seen her overcome with drink several times between 1633 and 1635. About Christmas 1634 Elizabeth had become so drunk at The Red Cross alehouse in Christ Church parish that 'she was unable to goe stedfastly but reeled and staggered up and downe the streetes as she went home', and Elizabeth Selby claimed that the market women would call out to each other that someone

should grab hold of Wyatt so she did not collapse in the street. Wyatt was seen in taverns and victualling houses in the company of Abraham Brand, a husband and father, and Judith Simnell deposed that they had been 'com[m]on frequenters of each other's company these three years', staying out drinking until midnight or one o'clock in the morning.³³ Elizabeth Wyatt was not the only intoxicated woman to be found wandering the city streets. Between 1618 and 1642 one in twelve women brought into Bridewell for nightwalking was either found in an alehouse or drunk, and between 1559 and 1657 forty-five women were brought in accused of drunkenness.³⁴ Elizabeth Hench was drunk 'in idle company' and when interrogated claimed to be 'the Lady Cliffords daughter', whilst Margaret Orlin, brought in for nightwalking, was 'soe drunke she could not tell her name'.³⁵

These cases bring together three issues regarding the consumption of alcohol and frequenting of alehouses by women: firstly, when a woman could go to an alehouse; clearly not on a Sunday when her attentions should have been focused on religious observance, or at the very least respectable domestic duties, rather than on idle recreation and drinking. Secondly, who one went to the alehouse with; 'peddlers, rogues and thieves' were unacceptable company to be keeping, and going to an alehouse alone with either a single or a married man who was not her husband could get a woman into trouble. Thirdly, moving between establishments,

especially at night, was problematic; women were subject to condemnation for gadding of any sort, but if a woman was staggering and reeling through the darkened metropolitan streets, barely able to keep on her feet and unable to remember her own name, concerns and vilification heightened. It should be noted too that drinking in an alehouse at unlawful hours and staggering through the streets in a drunken fashion were offences which men could be prosecuted for as well.

Many of the women described in the aforementioned cases appear to have chosen to go to alehouses to seek entertainment and perhaps deliberately to get drunk, but in other cases the motives of women who went to alehouses were more ambiguous. In December 1662 Samuel Pepys was shocked to discover that one of his ex-maidservants, Sarah, had become 'a great drunkard', and six months later discovered that she had been 'taught to drink' and 'gets out of doors two or three times a day without leave to the alehouse', behaviour that led her to fall out with her new mistress. Sarah claimed she ventured forth 'to warm herself', but her mistress did not believe her and turned her out of doors. 'And so she is gone like an idle slut', Samuel remarked.³⁶ The reference to Sarah being 'taught to drink', suggests that she drank with other people in alehouses, and that perhaps she had fallen into bad company, whilst exiting the house 'without leave' made her behaviour subject to greater condemnation. Sarah's defence, that she went to the alehouse to

keep warm could well have been true; drinking before a communal fire in December was no doubt preferable to sitting alone in the sort of cold upper chamber where most servants lodged. Alcohol often provided the sole refuge and comfort from the harshness of daily life for many early modern people and, considering the drudgery of their work and vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse, it would be unsurprising to find many female servants using it as 'an essential narcotic that anaesthetised [them] ... against the strains of everyday life'.³⁷

Not all women were censured for drinking in alehouses. Shortly before Midsummer's Day in 1633 John Hall went with one Mr Holloway to The George, a victualling house in St. Sepulchres parish in Smithfield, where Eleanor Meade was talking to the wife of the owner, Peter Hallewill, about 'fallings out' between her and Holloway. As Hall and Holloway sat down in a low room next to the street and began drinking, Eleanor came over and sat at a little table opposite them. She spoke with Holloway about various matters over which they had fallen out, specifically a derogatory comment by Eleanor which she denied making, suggesting that Hall's wife was not worthy to wipe her floors. The pair laid a wager of six shillings each concerning such words as had allegedly passed between them and John Hall requested that Eleanor sit down to drink with them so that she and Holloway should be friends. Holloway took a can of beer and drank to Eleanor

and offered her the can to pledge him in return. Eleanor refused and said that she would call for her own can of beer to offer a pledge, and that

if she had in mind a drink she had a penny in her purse to call for a pot of beere as well as they and did call for her pott and that being drunk she would have been gone

at which point the owner's wife intervened, asking Eleanor to stay and drink with Holloway. Eleanor pointed out that there was no drink, so Holloway sent for two more cans. Eleanor took one and told both Hallewill's wife and Holloway that she would drink to him, 'but not to flatter with him or curry favour with him'. After the pair drank together John Hall reported that they appeared to be good friends, but Peter Hallewill was unsure if they had parted on such amicable terms.³⁸

Although there is no reference to Eleanor going to the victualling house with any companions, female or male, the fact that she knew the owner and his wife meant she was probably assured of a friendly welcome, which would seem to confirm the assertion of Amanda Flather that some women visited alewives as friends or neighbours rather than as paying guests.³⁹ Eleanor appears to have regarded her male drinking companions as equals, laying wagers with them, pledging them and boasting that she was as able to buy her own alcohol as they were, the latter an action that was associated with male honour and 'right living'.⁴⁰ Her behaviour suggests that

some women who drank in early modern public houses were able to hold their own and be accepted as near equals by male drinkers, and that at least in the capital some women drank in all-female groups with no sense of anxiety or embarrassment. In 1632 Martha Scarle and Jane Kibble were discovered by the watch drinking in an alehouse 'at unseasonable houres', and in 1633 Joan Holt and Elsie Child were overheard chatting in an alehouse about their plans to swindle men by accusing them of sexual incontinency.⁴¹ These women were breaking the boundaries of respectable behaviour by drinking late at night and plotting acts of extortion, but not all women who drank together in alehouses did so in such problematic circumstances. In 1708 a waterman's wife and two spinsters hired a boat for the day to go from the Tower to Chelsea, where they dined, and called at several alehouses on the return journey, arriving home at nine in the evening.⁴²

Interactions between women and men in alehouses

Turning to the issue of how women interacted with their fellow patrons it is evident that many disreputable women were unafraid to intrude into the company of men in London alehouses. In February 1579 eight women were presented at Bridewell for spending all day at The Bear in Wood Street, eating, drinking and keeping company with the men who came into the alehouse.⁴³ In August 1661 Samuel Pepys entered 'a pitiful alehouse'

at Bartholomew Fair with Peter Luellin 'where we had a dirty slut or two come up that were whores'.⁴⁴ On 7th July 1686 Sarah Deane of St. Dunstan's in the West and an unnamed companion approached William Pool at about eight o'clock in the evening as he was drinking in an alehouse in Whitefriars and sat with him a while, during which time Sarah stole a linen bag from his pocket containing £4 15 shillings and ran away whilst William paid for the drinks.⁴⁵

'The sexual symbolism of alcohol made it an ideal gift from those who sought to gain another's affections', but what it meant to buy alcohol for and to drink with a member of the opposite sex was open to contestation.⁴⁶ In January 1676 a porter was prosecuted for burglary by a woman who claimed that he had broken into her house. In his defence witnesses told the court that the porter 'was very familiar' with the woman 'and that same Night did continue with her from Five at Night till Seven in the Morning' during which time he pawned his silver ticket for five shillings, sent for sixpence worth of ale 'and call'd in a Black-Pudding man to give her a Treat'. Although their relationship had clearly soured the fact that the couple had spent time drinking in each other's company suggested in the minds of witnesses that they had shared a degree of intimacy and familiarity. Similarly when Francis Leatherwood was accused of bigamy with the widow Ann Combs in 1717 he denied the charge but confessed to buying her four pipes of tobacco and two full pots of beer, the

implication being that when a woman and man drank together they engaged in behaviour which denoted a certain degree of familiarity.⁴⁷

Whilst some women downplayed the levels of intimacy implied by drinking with men, others took them at face value and were harshly exploited. Francis Longepée took Elizabeth Knolls, an orange seller of St. Dunstan's, to a public house and treated her to beer, cider and brandy. The pair stayed out all night and Francis was said to be 'very sweet upon' Elizabeth, 'courting her, telling her he was a single Man, importuning her to go home with him and be his Housekeeper'. Elizabeth was flattered by 'his Importunity and fair Offers' and one day Francis sent for a coach to take her to Coverlays Fields near his house, where he gave her money to go into the Sugar Loaf alehouse, telling her to stay there until his servant came to call her home. Elizabeth arrived at Francis' house where she 'was well receiv'd, and kindly admitted into his Chamber'. Francis sent for cider and brandy, and showed Elizabeth his cupboard of plate.

While she was pleasing herself with the thoughts of what she was brought to be mistress of [, Francis's wife] to her great surprize, came in, and made such a noise in her Ears, that she not sustaining the storm any longer, got away as soon as she could.⁴⁸

Such encounters were random and opportunistic, but public houses also offered lodgings for eloping couples and

meeting places for lovers. Henry Goodcole described how Elizabeth Evans, born in Shropshire of good parents and well-educated, was sent to London where some friends found her work in service. Elizabeth became acquainted with a young man 'who tempted her into folly', and the couple frequented 'playhouses, taverns, inns, alehouses, the open streets, and the fields', before he left her 'out of all credit, friends, money, apparrell, and service'.⁴⁹ The narrative Goodcole presented was a familiar tale because it told of a woman betrayed, but also because of the places where Elizabeth and her suitor spent time in company with each other. Elizabeth may have been coerced or agreed passively to visit alehouses, but other women deliberately selected such venues for romantic and sexual assignations. Dorothy Skelton conducted her affair with Charles Brookes in various alehouses and was condemned by her neighbours for doing so.⁵⁰ Thomas Franck deposed that his father, a Justice of the Peace also named Thomas, was having an affair with the wife of Mr Smyth, a Guildhall attorney. Thomas, his father and Mrs Smyth went to see a house near Brainford that was for sale and afterwards went to an alehouse called the Sign of the Pie where Mrs Smyth 'took up certayn chambers for her lodgings' and requested that Thomas's father lodged in the adjoining room. Thomas thought the room 'to[o] meane for his father to lye in beinge a carriers chamber', became suspicious and that night saw Mrs Smyth leave her own chamber and enter his father's room,

where he heard the couple talking in bed together before Thomas's father 'had thuse of her bodie twice'. Edie Bradley, servant of Thomas Gilderson, deposed that she had gone to an alehouse by Tower Hill with her mistress and one Thomas Kidde, who did 'resort often to her mistress', and that after they had been drinking 'a good while' in an upper room her mistress sent Edie away so that she could be alone with Kidde.⁵¹ Alehouses offered a degree of secrecy for those wishing to conduct extra-marital affairs. In November 1664 Samuel Pepys visited 'a little blind alehouse' in Moorfields with the wife of William Bagwell, where he 'did caress her and eat and drank'. Less than a month later, he took Mrs Bagwell

to an alehouse, and there I made much of her; and then away thence and to another, and endeavoured to caress her.

Such encounters were part of a casual affair which facilitated the advancement of William within the navy. Five years later Pepys went to 'a little blind alehouse within the walls' with Deb Willet. Here the circumstances were very different: Deb had been dismissed from the Pepys household after Elizabeth had caught the young woman with her husband, and resorting to an alehouse was an attempt to keep the meeting secret.⁵²

As noted above many sexual interactions between women and men in alehouses were more opportunistic than these, and often were by no means consensual. In

1577 Barbara Ride was accosted on her way to an alehouse in St. Katherine Colemans Street by John Shawe, a barber, who gave her sixpence and desired 'to have unlawfully thuse of her body' to which Barbara responded by reminding Shawe that 'he had a wife of his owne'. In July 1578 Robert Whitley, a shoemaker from St Martin's, propositioned the wife of Titus Maronees for sex whilst drinking in an alehouse, and in February 1579 Henry Venables, a porter, was taken with Margett Marten in an alehouse 'offeringe lewd usage to her'.⁵³ In June 1599 Robert Wells had the use of the body of a woman called Elysabeth whose 'surname he knoweth not' whilst visiting a brewer's house in Chick Lane which sold ale and beer.⁵⁴ In all these cases the sobriety of the men involved might be doubted, although in the first example Shawe may have approached Ride not because he was drunk, but because he believed a woman heading to a public house on her own to be of low morals, whilst the final example of illicit sex may well have been consensual. Nonetheless regardless of whether or not the women involved were pleased or outraged such cases reveal that men felt it acceptable to make spontaneous sexual advances to women in venues where ale and beer were available.

Sometimes such advances went much further than drunken lechery. Suzan More deposed that in the week before Easter 1607 Thomas Creed, a married man, had made frequent requests for her to drink with him, claiming that she resembled his first wife and that he 'must needs love'

her. Suzan was less than enthusiastic, so Thomas requested permission from her mistress, Anna Birke, who he 'desired ... to go with them herself'. All three went to The King's Head in Red Cross Street and drank wine together, after which Thomas walked the two women home. Around Midsummer that year Thomas and Suzan went to The Sun tavern in Aldersgate Street where Thomas bought Suzan 'so much wine as she was drunk and sick withal'. He then took her to the alehouse of Widow Grimes by Picket Hatch and as Suzan lay in a chamber to sleep off her drinking had the use of her body. Following this incident, Thomas attempted to entice Suzan 'sundry times' to go with him to taverns. When she refused Creed became angry and sent

tavern boys and sometimes the boys of ... Widow Grimes to come and stand over the way against her this deponent's mistress's house and shop and ask her this deponent to come to them.

Possibly on account of this pressure Suzan went to Widow Grimes' alehouse with Thomas twice more, and on both occasions he had sex with her, leading to Suzan becoming pregnant.⁵⁵ In this case the tavern offered Creede a location for polite sociability, or at least its pretence, whilst the more private less respectable environment of the alehouse of Widow Grimes provided the location for him to rape Suzan.

Part of the reason that men felt it was acceptable to accost women in alehouses

was because many were frequented by women who were willing to offer sexual favours, particularly to men with authority or wealth. In 1621 Dorothy Woodward informed the Bridewell governors that Marshalman Peel had taken her to an alehouse for food and drink, before going with her to a blind woman's house for sex, a routine that was so frequent that she could not remember how many times it had occurred.⁵⁶ Depending on whether Peel provided Woodward with lavish hospitality or basic victuals changes the complexion of her statement, but her claim that she was unable to remember how often this sequence of events had occurred reveals the repetitive nature of events and suggests that there was little emotional attachment between the pair. Another case involved Ed Harris,

a Gentleman well descended, well educated, and of some considerable fortune' [and Catherine Nash,] 'who sometimes was at service, and other times loitered at her own hands, taking evil courses past doubt to procure her necessities, having been divers times observed with People of lude conversation ... having in the end put herself into considerable habit.

On 25th July 1684 Ed and Catherine went to an alehouse on Church Street in Cheapside kept by a Mr Minor, called the sign of the Pewter Platter, where they sat together in private and drank 'divers Liquors' including brandy until late into the night, when 'being over-pow[er]red with excessive drinking, and fired with

unlawful lust' they lodged in the alehouse. The night did not end well for Harris who 'began to complain that the brandy burnt his heart out', and soon after he died.⁵⁷ Nothing in the account suggests that the pair had met previously, but no doubt Harris's rank, education and wealth made him attractive to Nash, a woman operating an economy of makeshifts. Such examples support the assertions made by Faramerz Dabhoiwala that distinctions between prostitution and other forms of casual sex were blurred under a general category of 'whoredom', especially in London and particularly if such couplings continued for a significant amount of time.⁵⁸

However, another case reveals that transactions involving drink and sex were not always simply about wealthy men praying on vulnerable women, or prostitutes exploiting their clients' generosity. In September 1598 the bricklayers Peter Tucke and John Frye were going through Hogge Lane at about ten or eleven o'clock in the morning on their way to Walthamstow when they stopped at Thomas Nevell's victualling house to eat cakes and drink ale, served by Nevell's wife and her servant Susan Holland. Frye and Tucke remained in the house until two o'clock in the morning, during which time both of them had sex with Holland, who charged them six pence each. Frye also propositioned Nevell's wife to have the use of her body, offering her six pence also. Another bricklayer, Thomas Walton, then arrived with 'one Dick whom they call a Spaniard for that he is black',

and 'Tucke and Frye consented to make the said Walton drunk which they did accordingly'. The two bricklayers then sent Walton into an upper chamber with Holland, telling her 'they would now get her a father for her child and willing her to cosen him of some money'. Susan went upstairs to Thomas, who 'offered to use her bodye and pulled up her clothes ... but being drunk he could not affect his purpose', so the pair returned downstairs. Thereafter all the men left to continue drinking at the Sign of the Blue Anchor, also in Hogge Lane.⁵⁹ To some extent this account supports arguments which suggest that alehouses were male-dominated micro-sites; the victualling house appears as a home-from-home for transient labouring men, where women are servants, sexual commodities, and sometimes both, an environment wherein it was common practice to ask a woman to offer her body in exchange for sixpence. Yet the interactions between Frye, Tucke and Holland suggest the existence of alliances across the gender divide. The flow of the narrative positions Thomas Walton as the principle victim, forced to drink heavily by male associates who work with Holland to exploit him, although his comical failure to 'affect his purpose' foils their machinations.

Conclusions

This brief survey of women, ale and company in early modern London has sought to provide some modifications to existing views on women and the culture

of drink and public houses in early modern Europe. Many women went to considerable efforts to obtain ale and beer, working or pawning goods to gain the money to purchase such beverages, obtaining them on credit or persuading husbands, suitors and male customers to buy it for them. Attitudes to female drinkers were more diverse in printed texts than in depositions; whilst the former sought to warn women of the dangers of drinking to excess, and associated women who drank heavily with sexual promiscuity they also celebrated female camaraderie. Those who gave evidence before the church courts often condemned both women and men who spent significant time drinking in alehouses, but such rebukes evidently did not deter numerous individuals from frequenting such establishments. Women who drank in alehouses did so because of the company - both female and male - they encountered there. Sometimes the alehouse was a place of good fellowship just as it was for men, and some women felt they could hold their own with the male customers. It was a place of comfort, to escape a freezing household or shelter during bad weather, a place to resolve disagreements and a social site that offered women opportunities to flirt with men, although the shadow of rape and fears of unwanted pregnancy resulting from illicit sex must always have been in the background of women's minds. Most significantly the dynamics of gender relations in alehouses cannot be reduced to a simplistic male versus female dichotomy. The evidence present-

ed suggests that women and men might collaborate to victimize individuals of both sexes. Finally there appears to have been a great deal of continuity over several centuries. The diversity of attitudes towards female drinkers in seventeenth-century pamphlets and ballads is similar to that found in medieval poetry, possibly because similar stories were reused and adapted, whilst the presence of disreputable women in alehouses from the late sixteenth into the early eighteenth century contradicts the arguments put forward by Peter Clark that alehouses became increasingly attractive to respectable women after the Restoration.

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