

‘WE ARE NOT DRINKING DENS!’: WORKING MEN’S CLUBS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR RESPECTABILITY, 1862 - 1920s

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Introduction

As the Working Men’s Club and Institute Union (CIU)¹ marked its 150th anniversary in June 2012,² it faced tough challenges caused by declining membership, internal disputes and external interference in the form of government legislation. Since 1974, the number of affiliated working men’s clubs (WMCs) has halved, from just over 4,000 to around 2000.³ During my research, respondents often expressed the view that those outside the movement, including politicians, misunderstood the nature of their clubs and underrated what they provided for their members as well as the wider community. They were too often viewed as part of the ‘binge drinking’ culture, complained CIU officials and club members. As they currently seek to show this view to be mistaken, how instead they encourage responsible drinking in a self-regulated environment, it is useful to reconsider the early decades when similar criticisms came close to putting them out of business. This paper looks at how the early CIU sought acceptance as a respectable and legitimate arbiter of working class leisure. This involved putting a distance between their own clubs and disreputable places collectively referred to as drinking dens. It also necessitated a high level of self-regulation because as private, members only institutions they were exempt from some of the licensing arrangements that applied to other drinking establishments such as public houses. Apart from formal controls and rules, there were informal arrangements about what members could and couldn’t do, what can be termed implicit cultural policy that was also part of the effort to achieve acceptance.⁴ The period under consideration takes us from the CIU’s

establishment in 1862 to the immediate post-WWI period by which time WMCs had become an established part of working class leisure.

Setting up the early clubs - the context

Across centuries and continents, some form of drinking establishment has been central to people’s leisure time. In England, taverns, inns, ale and public houses were popular destinations right across the class divide. Customers could find companionship and entertainment, not only beer, and they provided an escape from the harsh realities of everyday life.

Beer might have washed away the thirst and dirt of the working classes but to some historians this was merely part of passive popular culture. Beaven reminds us that in their critical perspective, pubs and after the 1860s WMCs offered little more than a ‘culture of consolation’, which failed to improve the position of the working class or to reduce social inequalities.⁵

A number of 19th century reform movements sought to address the so-called ‘problem’ of leisure and to encourage people, especially the working classes, to participate in ‘improving’ activities. The rational recreation movement aimed to better not only people but society as a whole by halting a perceived moral degeneration.

Bailey views the early WMCs as ‘the most prominent example of rational recreation formally organised on

a national scale'.⁶ Clubs were intended to be better leisure venues where self-improvement could take place. What we see on the one hand is the desire of working men to have their own leisure spaces and, on the other, higher ranking people who felt too much time and money was wasted in ale houses and pubs wanting them to do something more useful in their free time.

As groups of men in different parts of the country were getting together to plan and set up clubs, wealthy and religious club patrons were discussing what they should provide for their members. The co-existing ideals and desires of the membership and patrons did not always come together, simultaneously helping and hindering the early club movement with clashes of opinion about the best way forward.

There were contemporary concerns about the 'deplorable state of the working classes' with excessive 'intemperance, ignorance, improvidence, and religious indifference',⁷ according to temperance minister and CIU founder, Reverend Henry Solly. What can be described as a moral panic about drink and its effects on the lives of the working classes linked drunkenness to wife beating, poverty and homelessness when men spent the rent on beer.

With these concerns uppermost in their minds, two 'excellent' Victorian ladies, Mrs Bayly and Miss Adeline Cooper opened two early London clubs in 1860. 'Both women believed that the wives and children of working men were being degraded by the amount of time and money their menfolk spent in public houses'.⁸ They wanted their clubs to be free from alcohol and were highly praised by Solly for their efforts.

There was a clear patronizing tone to much written at the time about the drink-related moral decline of the working classes which was not balanced by similar analysis, let alone condemnation of the upper classes. They were viewed as possessing better education and a higher level of civilization.

The fact that London's East End pubs and music halls in the late 19th century were frequented by 'swells' from the richer parts of the capital was usually overlooked or conveniently forgotten. In the author's view, this can be described as a form of local drink and sex tourism

with customers including the wealthy sons and husbands of Victorian society, but this not the focus of discussion in this paper.

This one-sided analysis of demonizing the lower class drunkards was, according to Price, 'based upon the essential premise that working men were neither morally strong enough nor sufficiently educated to resist the temptations of the public house'.⁹ Club members would have to consistently prove their detractors wrong in order to attain the respectability and acceptance they desired. They would have to show a high level of self-regulation and discipline in the running of the clubs and behavior of the members especially in terms of drinking. They would also need to distance themselves from those who couldn't show self-restraint. This self-regulatory theme can be viewed as part of what Bailey refers to as 'the dynamic properties of working-class respectability'.¹⁰

This combination of fear of the drunken mob and the desire of working men to have their own leisure spaces helped to spread the club idea. Queen Victoria was a supporter and made a donation, as did many members of the aristocracy on Solly's list of early patrons. He was certainly skilled in lobbying the higher echelons of society and attracting enthusiastic support. 'His success in persuading the most unlikely people to contribute donations show that he was able to convince them that here was an idea which deserved to flourish'.¹¹

The downside of courting wealthy patrons was that they might want to be involved in the running of the clubs they supported which was at odds with the ideal of WMCs being for their working class members to own and manage. They were not too keen on being told what to do in the new WMCs that were meant to offer a haven from bosses and other authority figures.

Adherents to the aims of the rational recreation movement tended to be positive about the possibilities of WMCs. Some employers also saw clubs as healthy alternatives to pubs whose temptations could lead to absenteeism and lost production. This may have been part of the thinking of Dorset landowner Horlock Bastard when he set up a village club in 1855 for local farm labourers.¹² Later on, paternalistic industrialists established large sports and social clubs attached to

their works but these were distinct undertakings from WMCs.

There was some agreement about the need for venues that would occupy the middle ground between the pub and the educational institutes such as those established by Dr Birkbeck. Solly held these in high regard but saw an emphasis on education as a possible deterrent to men seeking a place to relax rather than to study.¹³ His ideal club was to be a place of sobriety, having all the sociability of the pub but without the temptations of drink and other vices. The men could participate in low-key educational activities such as use of reading rooms and attendance at lectures and talks if they so wished- it would be their choice.

This early vision for WMCs shows that they were not intended to be glorified public houses or drinking dens, with an associated desire for respectability and acceptance. Solly firmly believed that ‘unrestrained social intercourse, the means of chatting with one another, without or without refreshments,’ was ‘the first great want of working men after their long day’s toil.’¹⁴ A club was meant to fulfill this need and to have, in Ashplant’s view, the basic appeal of ‘comfort and companionship: it provided somewhere, brighter and more cheerful than many homes, to meet friends and have a drink’.¹⁵

The role of the CIU

According to Linstead, the CIU was established at a time ‘when memories of radical movements and potentially revolutionary initiatives were still relatively fresh.’ Although wide-scale reform had failed, there were still demands for social change. This reforming zeal ‘found acceptance amongst a workforce which had few opportunities for leisure or social contact other than in public houses’.¹⁶

The ‘loose array of clubs,’ as Beaven describes it, was given some direction with the establishment of the CIU in 1862.¹⁷ Solly wanted to see WMCs springing up all over the country, offering them advice, supervision and coordination. It is reported that when the Postmaster General Henry Fawcett introduced Solly to his wife, he did so by saying, ‘This is Henry Solly, my dear, who believes that Heaven consists of working men’s clubs’.¹⁸

The CIU certainly added to the movement’s rational recreation credentials with its ideal of temperance and conviviality coupled with opportunities for learning and self-improvement. It was formed

for the purpose of helping Working Men to establish Clubs or Institutes where they can meet for conversation, business and mental improvement, with the means of recreation and refreshment.¹⁹

The CIU sought to give fledgling clubs a helping hand as it was one thing to open a club, but another to keep it going. Solly observed that some had ‘a good deal of sociable spirit but they were seldom long-lived’.²⁰ The members running them, often with little or no management experience, could struggle with tasks such as book-keeping.

Clubs wanting the CIU’s support could affiliate by paying an annual fee. They could then proudly display the CIU sign outside the entrance: this became a marker of quality and agreed standards, in fact of respectability in many senses.

With the CIU’s assistance, the movement began to take hold possibly helped by Solly’s demotion of its educational role and the acceptance of the need for some light entertainment. Taylor views the subsequent development and expansion of entertainment as leading to a form of ‘hegemony’ with the related demise of the early WMC ideals of self-improvement.²¹ The early mix of education and entertainment, however, did appear to make clubs more attractive and they were able to influence working class culture after earlier attempts had failed.

At the end of its first year, the CIU had helped to form 13 clubs with 13 others joining the organisation and another ten established under its guidance.²² Six were established in London including Bethnal Green WMC, which is still open for business. The others were in the Midlands, Chichester and the north of England. Solly’s governing style was not popular with everyone and in 1867 he gave into pressure and stepped down as the CIU’s first full-time paid Secretary. He was succeeded by three honorary secretaries who sought to strengthen existing clubs and found other ways of financing them apart from calling upon patrons.

Key characteristics of early WMCs

If we walked into an early club, what would be going on? According to Halsbury, we would find 'a society of persons associated together for social intercourse, for the promotion of politics, sport, art, science, or literature, or for any purpose except the acquisition of gain'.²³ WMCs were private membership institutions and this key characteristic set them apart from pubs. Any one can walk in a pub to buy a drink or use the facilities (unless specifically banned for some reason) but this was not so with clubs.

Those wishing to join a club had to be nominated by an existing member, seconded by another. Applications would be put on the notice board with members having the right to air objections. If there were none, there would be an interview with the club management committee. Once the applicant was accepted, he would have to pay the yearly 'subs,' and agree to abide by the rules. They received a membership card along with warnings that breaking the rules could lead to expulsion. This self-regulation in effect helped deter the 'rougher' elements of the working class and maintain a certain level of respectability.²⁴

In this regard, WMCs were like the gentlemen's clubs in London's Mayfair and other major cities, which Solly had in mind as a model. The gentlemen's clubs mostly sold alcohol, however, which was not part of Solly's original vision for WMCs. Milne-Smith writes of how the gentlemen's clubs were more than a home away from home for their members, offering a world in themselves.²⁵

Clubs were not intended to produce a profit for any individual but to benefit all the members by balancing the books and paying their own way. Many working people had the habit of spending their money in pubs but some objected to the pressure of standing a round and continually supping up, which benefitted the landlord or brewery. They wanted instead somewhere without this pressure and profit motive, where they could drink at a fair price beer that hadn't been adulterated by unscrupulous publicans.

WMC members could be seen playing card games, dominoes and cribbage and if there was sufficient space, there would be bagatelle or billiard tables, perhaps

skittles. No gambling was allowed with these games, although that is not to say it didn't take place. Other early club activities included educational and political lectures and talks. Larger clubs had a hall, sometimes with stages that enabled theatrical performances to be put on including scenes from Shakespeare and other classics. This brought nods of approval from the upper class patrons with these 'improving' activities lending an air of respectability.

Kettering WMC in Northamptonshire, for example, was praised for its concert facilities: 'The scenery on the stage is very pretty, and the entertainment was first class in every way. The club is the first to have a stage, I think, in the county, and it should encourage others' commented a CIU official in 1898.²⁶

This didn't mean, however, that early club goers didn't want to drink and the 'beer question' soon emerged alongside the issue of patronage. It was not the case that they wanted drinking dens but somewhere to relax and chat, play their card games and dominoes, read a newspaper with the choice about whether to have a glass of beer to accompany these activities or not.

Battling for beer

The sale of alcohol was one of the most 'threatening' and 'intractable' issues of the early club movement, according to Marlow.²⁷ Beer was viewed by those in the pro-temperance camp as 'a symptom of barbarism of working-class society,' according to Price.²⁸ With divided opinion among members, patrons, politicians, clergymen, supporters and critics of clubs, considering the beer question illustrates how leisure was indeed a disputed territory with various agencies involved. Working class people articulated their own preferences and exercised their own agency as much as possible.²⁹

Temperance campaigners were initially supportive of the club idea as they linked the downfall of men and the ruination of family life. Drinkers were viewed in their eyes as victims who needed rescuing from the road to ruin which was 'well dotted with "drink shops,"' as pub and club researcher Ernest Selley reminds us.³⁰ Support would turn to antagonism if beer was allowed, with clubs being seen to be on par with pubs. Yet the early CIU ruling against 'the demon drink' went against

the fact that social drinking was central to working class culture.

Although teetotal himself, Solly didn't want clubs to be part of the temperance movement per se. He saw that those who had signed the pledge could easily lapse as tea and sermons in cold church halls were not appealing enough after a hard day or week at work in the mill, pit or factory. His in-depth knowledge of the conditions of the working classes caused him to be wary of preaching in the new clubs, which could send them straight back to the pubs.

Pro-drink Lord Rosebery proclaimed that 'each Club should be free from all vexatious, infantile restrictions on the consumption of intoxicating drinks and similar matters'.³¹ Supporters argued that drink would popularize WMCs and sales would provide a source of income, thus ensuring their survival. Because of their private membership status, clubs would buy in and 'supply' beer to their members, which ultimately belonged to them, not to a profit driven brewery or publican. This was because:

A club is a co-operative society, a body of persons associated together for some common purpose. The property of the club belongs to the members as a whole and the refreshments supplied are also the property of the members; so that when a member of a registered club orders a glass of beer he is really ordering what is his own as a member of a co-operative society'.³²

The club could charge for supplying it to members and even make a profit in doing so but that profit was for the club members. Under licensing arrangements to 'supply' was different to selling it. Only club members could buy drink which they in effect they already owned as it was purchased from club funds. If outsiders were caught buying drink, clubs could be fined, if not closed down. That was the law.

At several specially convened CIU council meetings between 1865-67 this issue was debated with Solly conceding that, in order to keep alive his dream of seeing WMCs all over the country, the sale of alcohol had to be decided by clubmen themselves.

It was only with the greatest reluctance that I contemplated even the possibility of its being either right or wise for

members of clubs to be able to get the drinks there which had wrought them so much mischief in the public-house, and for several years I combated with all my power the arguments of those who contended for the opposite course.³³

Solly came to accept that drink was to be part of the clubs if they were to survive. The revised position was that if respectable working men 'would drink intoxicating liquors they had better do so in a club, where there was no compulsion to drink at all, than at a public-house'.³⁴ Whilst not all clubs gave up the teetotal ideal, many did and found the sale of alcohol a boost for their funds which then helped them to free themselves of the patrons who would sometimes 'meddle' in their affairs.

Beer not only quenched working men's thirst but provided a valuable source of income for club facilities and expansion. This antagonized pub landlords and breweries as they began to view WMCs as competitors and they made unusual allies of the temperance movement in wanting clubs regulated or closed. The battle for the beer may have been won but the need to maintain respectable levels of drinking and other behavior was high on the agenda for the CIU for decades to come.

The importance of self-regulation

Self-regulation was central to the way clubs were to run as they cast off patronage and elected management committees from within the membership. Their private membership status also made this a necessary part of how they operated as they were exempt from certain licensing arrangements. With fewer rules being imposed from outside, they imposed more of their own, giving CIU clubs the characteristic of having perhaps too many regulations.

These were from the outset fairly strict about drunkenness. They might supply drink to members but this was not their sole function and men who treated them as 'drinking dens' would not be welcomed. CIU affiliation also incurred another layer of responsibilities and standards to uphold. This did not prevent some WMCs becoming little more than glorified pubs but these were not the norm and they risked being expelled from the movement.

The CIU's own *Club & Institute Journal* (now known as the *Club Journal*) had a page that carried not only commendations of model clubs and members but also a public naming and shaming of those who broke the rules and brought disrepute to the movement. Those who fell foul of the rules were barred from their club temporarily or permanently, depending on the severity of their transgressions. Clubs that failed to uphold the CIU standards could themselves be expelled.

This was a very clear form of internal policing which contributed to the general aim of gaining respectability and demarcating between bona fide clubs and 'sham' or 'bogus' ones that existed purely for drinking rather than genuine sociability and improvement.

The Working Men's Clubs and Institutes are calculated not only to diminish excess in the use of intoxicating liquors, but also to promote self-culture and the growth of a healthy public spirit among the mass of the people.³⁵

Self-regulation was necessary to prevent giving fuel to their critics. The CIU's eagerness to maintain a respectable image was a constant struggle as just a few disreputable clubs could gain a bad reputation for them all. This self-regulatory feature would be vigorously defended over the years and was often at the centre of many disputes with outside bodies.

This key feature was emphasized whenever WMCs came under attack with the point made that the members were more likely to discipline themselves in order to stay open. Solly remarked on how

especially interesting to discover the extent to which men, when they had got a club of their own, and felt responsible for its good name, were jealous of its credit and honour, and carefully guarded against any excess on their own part or that of their fellow members.³⁶

The CIU expended time and effort clarifying what their bona fide clubs were and how they differed to the 'sham' ones just as nowadays it seeks to differentiate between the sensible drinking that goes on in clubs with the binge drinking that goes on elsewhere, including in people's own homes.

Having the CIU sign outside a club was considered a mark of approval, something like a quality assurance

symbol today, as well as an indication that the club belonged to a nationwide movement that eventually spread from the Home Counties and London, northwards to the Midlands, to the North East, North West and into Wales. CIU affiliation brought membership of this wider group and with the purchase of an Associate and Pass card, men were able to use other clubs. As inter-club games and sporting tournaments were organized, it meant people could travel with their club teams to others around the country, or visit them when on holiday.

The growing popularity of the club movement can be seen as both a success for the Victorian reformers and for the working class club membership who had won the 'battle of the beer' as well as overturning patronage. The clubs may have been viewed by some of their critics as part of the 'culture of consolation' rather than a radical social or political movement but the members had been involved in a struggle nevertheless for autonomy in these leisure spaces, which they wanted to run themselves.

Licensing developments

Although clubs were not just about the provision and consumption of drink it did come to play quite an important role in the social and economic side of club life. When the Licensing Act of 1872 restricted drinking in public houses to 11.00 pm, it was widely recognized that there would be problems caused by this 'placing restrictions on an institution at the heart of working-class culture'.³⁷

Social disturbances on the first night after it was implemented indicated that some people viewed this as a class specific piece of legislation: private clubs of middle and upper classes were excluded. Coventry's City Club, with its middle class membership, was attacked we are told by Beaven, with protesters claiming it shouldn't be open if their pubs were closed.³⁸

Another response to the licensing laws, however, was to set up more WMCs. Whilst cutting drinking time can be viewed as an impetus for club formation, it cannot be viewed as the sole reason as they were gaining popularity before changes to licensing arrangements. The argument that men formed clubs merely in order to drink beyond the hours the laws laid down is not proven.

Those that were set up purely to get around the law with little else on offer would have been referred to as ‘sham’ clubs by the CIU. Their use of a loophole in the law that a private member’s club could apply for extensions to drinking hours, was viewed in a dim light. They were seen as a source of immorality in urban Britain according to Beaven, beyond the controls that pubs had imposed on them.³⁹ CIU clubs, on the other hand, were to be above such things, striving for respectability in the way they were self-managed and the nature of their varied activities.

In 1875, bona fide clubs were put on a stronger footing legally by an Act of Parliament which defined them as ‘institutions for social intercourse, mental and moral improvement and rational recreation’.⁴⁰ There were still internal struggles to play out as well as external critics to appease and challenges to deal with especially in regard to ‘drinking dens’ which continued well into the 20th century.

The CIU, ever vigilant about distancing themselves from drinking dens, congratulated the police whenever one was closed down. In May 1898, several were identified in the pages of the *Club & Institute Journal*.

The ‘Vesuvius’ in London’s Clerkenwell district was run by a certain Domenico Rubino who had his own eruption of trouble in 1896. ‘When the Revenue paid attention to this “club”, Domenico, urged by filial piety, left England to bury his mother in Italy’.⁴¹ The police closed it down with outstanding unpaid taxes after the Italian owner made his dash back to his home country.

Another one, the Tavistock club, was run by Mr R. Hulner. In the course of his dealings with the local police, Mr Hulner had casks of beer confiscated. ‘Now he wants these back, but Sir James Vaughan could not agree, and they remain, we trust, intact, in the possession of the police’.⁴²

Drinking dens might not have lasted longer than it took for the members to drink the barrel of beer they had bought. It only needed 25 men to come together to form a club. They were legally obliged to register with the authorities, gain relevant licenses and pay any taxes due, which is what reputable CIU clubs did. CIU clubs also paid regard to the members only status. Outsiders could not use the club unless a member of another CIU club

holding an Associate and Pass card, and known by a member of the club they were visiting who would have to formally sign them in as a guest. If non-members or unregistered visitors were found in a club, this would be a serious breach of their licensing conditions.

The same rule applied to non-CIU clubs- they were not meant to be open to outsiders. The beer they purchased wholesale was for members’ consumption only. It was a way of cutting out the middleman, of having a supply of beer at cost price. Selley wrote how registered clubs were ‘not analogous’ to pubs, differing fundamentally in purpose and function and ‘in fact, governed by separate laws and regulations’.⁴³ They were both granted by law the right to sell alcoholic beverages but as previously discussed, clubs had the right to supply alcohol to their members whereas pubs had to sell to customers.

Critics pointed to examples of excessive drinking, viewing clubs simply as ‘private conduit pipes for the supply of drink’.⁴⁴ Temperance people saw drink as a problem per se: they were never going to be convinced that CIU clubs, with regulations and self-discipline, conviviality and activities, could serve drink without it leading to intoxication. They placed all clubs into this lowest of the low category whether CIU or not. Such views could damage even the well-run clubs. The CIU continued to put across a respectable image by encouraging sensible drinking and punishing clubs and club members who went too far.

Selley, who visited scores of clubs across the country, saw that there were many misunderstandings about them and believed that much of the ‘public controversy’ was defective in two ways: it lacked candour and lacked knowledge.

Many of those who attack the club movement obtain their information at second or third hand and are often entirely incapable of appreciating or understanding the club man’s point of view. This type is unwilling to be enlightened.⁴⁵

Clubs were brought under further statutory control by the 1902 Licensing Act which included the need for a warrant to search the premises. This was followed by the 1910 Act which stated that ‘the premises of a registered club are not licensed premises and, therefore, the laws and regulations, such as supervision by the police authorities, do not apply’.⁴⁶ The police could not just

walk in to inspect clubs, they needed permission first. This difference was resented by publicans who would be quick to criticize all clubs when a badly run WMC came to their notice.

According to the first return of the Licensing Act of 1902, there were 6,371 registered clubs in 1903. In 1915 this number had risen to 8,902. Most of these were not CIU affiliated clubs. In 1915 there number stood at 1638, roughly a fifth of all clubs.⁴⁷ Clubs had all been affected by new licensing laws brought in at the beginning of the First World War. Hours of drinking were reduced quite dramatically as part of the war effort (a temporary measure that remained in place for over half a century!) There was a slight fall in the number of clubs during WW1 but then the numbers rose again, reaching 11,838 registered clubs in England and Wales in 1925.⁴⁸ The total of CIU affiliated clubs for that year was 2,470,⁴⁹ which represents once again around a fifth of all clubs.

There were two main reasons for more clubs being set up after the Great War. One was that some surviving servicemen were keen to keep alive the close links they had forged fighting in the trenches and elsewhere. They had experienced horrors that were difficult if not impossible to talk about to those who hadn't been there. Forming clubs could give those with common, if somewhat traumatic bonds, a place to meet up and socialize in.

It was not the case that they would be constantly reliving or discussing their experiences but by establishing Ex-Servicemen's, Old Comrades and 'Done our Bit' clubs, former servicemen could sustain a shared sense of identity that would last throughout their lifetimes. Men who simply got together to form drinking clubs had nothing like that shared bond to keep them together once the beer and money had ran out.

The second reason was more practical, as Selley points out. 'Many clubs came into being shortly after the war owing to certain groups of men feeling they had been badly treated by publicans during the period of shortage of beer'.⁵⁰ Some club members told Selley that they had been dissatisfied with public houses and the way they were treated by landlords which encouraged them to set up clubs.

There was a good deal of pride felt by members about their clubs that came out in my own research when

talking to older club members which strongly reflected what Selley found almost a century before.

Where corporate loyalty, pride and sense of responsibility exist, and where clubs are founded with some social object and the provision of drink is only one item in the range of their activities, the registered club towers high above the best-managed public house.⁵¹

He believed that the majority of club members were decent, law-abiding people who regarded their clubs as social centres rather than as private drinking spaces.

His view that in most clubs, the supply of alcoholic beverages was secondary to the main purpose for which the club was formed certainly supported the CIU's claim that their clubs were far from being drinking dens. Instead, clubs were places to meet their friends and participate in many things other than drinking, being popular with teetotalers as well. There was often a preference for clubs over pubs because members could pop in at any time without drinking, there was no pressure to put money behind the bar.

The fact that strangers couldn't just walk in and cause trouble was also a precious characteristic of clubs for their members. One club man said,

The club is the property of the members and it stands to reason they are going to make the place comfortable and look after it. We are our own policemen. That is why we do not want any interference from outsiders.⁵²

In terms of the licensing justices that Selley interviewed, he found most were not averse to clubs as such but did find it inequitable that any group of 25 men could form what might become a drinking club and be immune from many of the restrictions of the licensing system.

While not pressing for the repeal of the club privilege they hold that, in the interests of the bona-fide club, it should be safeguarded by efficient control and supervision.⁵³

Regulation was recognized as the key and this was a feature the CIU repeatedly brought up about their clubs. Properly constituted and managed affiliated clubs offered games, sports, convalescent homes, charitable works, outings and Christmas parties for children and

older people. They were a far cry from those clubs that offered very little apart from cheap drink.

Concluding comments

By the early 1920s, WMCs were an established part of working class leisure time with the CIU having managed to gain acceptance as a respectable organization. There would be further attacks and battles to fight in the decades to follow. These are beyond the scope of this paper but in the CIU's 150th anniversary year (2012) we can see their member clubs still striving to prove that they are places of responsible and regulated drinking.

Former CIU General Secretary Mick McGlasham spoke in 2010 of how their member clubs had their own disciplinary procedures.

We believe drinking in well-ordered premises where older people can show youngsters how to handle alcohol and be an active part of their community should be encouraged.' He also appealed to the government to stop treating member clubs as part of the 'binge drinking culture'.⁵⁴

His words were not so different for earlier pleas made a century before.

The struggle to obtain respectability for CIU affiliated clubs has been a continual one and the plea that 'we are not drinking dens' has remained part of their discourse long after the period under consideration in this work.

We have seen here how respectability had to be earned by WMCs through self-regulation and restraint, the imposition of rules by club management committees and model behaviour. Those wishing to set up clubs based on drinking alone were not welcome by the CIU but drinking was a central part of what went on in their clubs nevertheless.

Club supporters in the early period could rightly point to CIU founder the Reverend Solly's own acceptance that having regulated drinking in clubs was better than the profit driven variety of pubs. His acceptance may have been reluctant but the largely self-policing CIU clubs did show themselves to be, on the whole, better places than the disreputable drinking dens, with excess-

es curbed through their own formal rules and informal norms of behaviour.

Solly, upon deciding that drink would not be such a bad thing after all, referred to one particular man to illustrate the point.

... a thoughtful man, with a will of his own- telling us that before he joined the club he regularly got fuddled every Saturday night, but that since he became a member he had never once been intoxicated the whole year through- adding, however, very emphatically, that if he couldn't have got a glass of ale there he should never have become a member ... they didn't want more, but they wouldn't take less.⁵⁵

This was the ideal balance, some drinking but not more than anywhere else with plenty of other activities going on for the men and, increasingly throughout the 20th century, for their families. The balance was not always achieved with some clubs slacking on self-regulation but the movement on the whole had attained the necessary degree of acceptance to continue into the future.

A handful of those established in the early decades are still open today such as the Walthamstow Club in north London which remains, perhaps somewhat ironically, temperance-based in accordance with the CIU's early principles.

Notes and References

1. The Working Men's Club and Institute Union (WMCIU) is the original and full name but it is now usually referred to as the CIU. It is also known as 'the Union.'
2. Cherrington, R. (2012) '150 Glorious Years!', 150th Anniversary publication, *Club Journal*. June.
3. See Cherrington, R. (2012) *Not just Beer and Bingo! A social history of working men's club*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.
4. Cherrington, R. (2009) 'The development of working men's clubs: a case study of implicit cultural policy', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. Vol. 15, No. 2, pp.187-200.
5. Beaven, B. (2005) *Leisure, Citizenship and working class men in Britain, 1850-1940*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.4.
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17. Beaven, B. (2005) op. cit. p.25.

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24. The distinction between the 'rough' and 'respectable' sections of the working class was one frequently referred to during the early development of clubs with Solly well aware that working men varied in terms of education, professional skills and social behaviour. The respectable section may have been the 'target' group for WMCs but it was hoped that others would join and refine their behaviour as a result. This distinction is still with us today- see, for eg., Watt, P. (2006) 'Respectability, roughness and "race": neighbourhood place

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34. *ibid.* p.23.

35. Tremlett, G. (1987) op. cit. p.54, citing a proposal at the CIU AGM in 1875.

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