BREWERY HISTORY

The journal is © 2026
The Brewery History Society
Brewery History (2026) **207**, 52-54

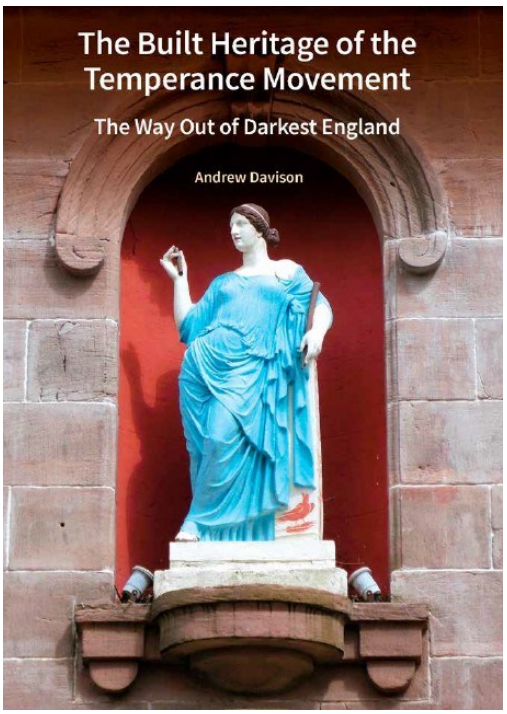
BOOK REVIEW

The Built Heritage of the Temperance Movement: The way out of darkest England
Davison, A.
Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press
2026, Pp.236, £50.00
ISBN: 978-1-83624-583-4

On first hearing about this book, I must admit to feeling a little dubious as to its relevance and importance as a subject, on worth devoting a whole volume to. This may be due to the fact that the Temperance movement has largely been forgotten, as the author himself points out in his introduction. Of all the social campaigns of the nineteenth century, such as the Chartists, the anti-slavery campaign and the Suffragettes, the Temperance movement was by the far the largest which makes it all the more remarkable that is has all but disappeared without a trace. However, as this book so impressively illustrates, this is not exactly true – it did leave a plethora of physical traces, many of which survive.

Davison begins his study with a brief introduction to the evolution of the Temperance, born out of a concern by the middle and upper classes 'about the impact of gin-drinking on the moral and physical condition of the working classes' (p.2). The organised Temperance movement was founded in Boston, Massachusetts in 1826. Its influence soon crossed the Atlantic, the first Temperance societies being formed in Ireland and Scotland in 1929 and England the following year. By 1831 there were 30 Temperance societies in England, their core activity being the holding of public meetings where the evils of intemperance were described, often in graphic detail. This first wave of Temperance societies asked members to sign a pledge not to imbibe spirits and drink wind and other alcoholic beverages in moderation. The second wave of Temperance societies began in 1832 in Preston. Its pledge called for total abstinence born out of a concern that moderation was ineffective. This was more of a working-class movement and by the late 1830s total abstinence or teetotalism was widespread. The 1850s saw a shift in teetotal campaigning from attempting to reclaim drunkards to restricting or banning the sale of alcohol, its main proponent being the United Kingdom Alliance for the Suppression of the Traffic in all Intoxicating Liquors (the U.K. Alliance for short). The highwater mark for the movement was the 1908 Licensing Act which consolidated licensing legislation and restricted public house opening hours. It then went into decline, most societies fading away apart from the Salvation Army.

Chapter two discusses the origins, funding, external design and construction of Temperance rooms and halls. Such venues were the result of teetotalism as before brewers, publicans and magistrates were happy to provide spaces in pubs and civic buildings for the moderate consumption of alcohol excluding spirits. The first Temperance hall opened in Garstang, Lancashire in 1834. This was purpose built, but many others were converted chapels, factories, theatres and even breweries and maltings. By 1859 there were over 300 Temperance halls in England. As there were few precedents



for their design most early halls looked like chapels on the outside and theatres inside. From the 1850s the gothic style was employed, reflecting a general shift in style for serious public buildings. Other styles did emerge over time and the last hall to be built (in 1939) was art deco.

What occurred in Temperance halls is the subject of the next chapter. Of particular importance was tea drinking – Bolton Temperance hall possessed two water boilers, each of 50 gallons capacity, which could boil in 20 minutes. Halls often had a low platform for speakers and performers st one end and a gallery opposite for additional seating. Many had extra rooms for committee meetings, accommodation and sometimes retail outlets, many being rented out to provide income for maintenance and the caretakers wages. Most had plain interiors with painted walls and stained and varnished woodwork although larger halls were sometimes for elaborate. Meetings initially revolved around the explanation of Temperance principles and the salvation of drunkards, but from the mid-1850s they became much more like lectures. Chartists and anti-slavery meetings were also held in the halls and literary figures such as Charles Dickens gave readings in them.

Chapter four deals with Temperance institutes and reading rooms. The Temperance movement had strong links with other campaigns, especially those associated with mutual education and self-improvement, and many were designed specifically to promote these activities, often called Temperance Institutes or Mechanics' Institutes. To this end they contained lecture, reading and class rooms as well as libraries and this emphasis on education increased in the early twentieth century. Reading rooms offered 'daily and weekly newspapers, periodicals, and sometimes small libraries of the classics, novels by quality writers, and technical books' (p.86).

The subject of chapter five is Temperance hotels, buildings which appeared in the earliest days of the Temperance movement. The first opened in 1832 in Preston and by 1835 there were some 22 spread across northern England and the Midlands. Early hotels were small, often converted from pre-existing houses, but purpose-built establishments began to appear in the 1840s and by the 1850s those with 40 to 50 bedrooms were not uncommon. Their growth was aided by the increase in rail travel – Thomas Cook was an influential figure in their development. Eventually there may have been as many as 500 Temperance hotels in England, but only a handful survive today and all have been repurposed.

Chapter six concentrates on coffee houses and Temperance taverns. Like Temperance hotels they emerged at the start of the Temperance movement and although they had the same opening hours as public houses that is where the similarity ended. However, due to slim profit margins (compared to the sale of alcohol) many struggled financially. The refocusing of the Temperance movement coincided with a change in appearance, they became more like beer houses. In fact, the British Workman movement, founded in the second half of the 1860s, took over former beer houses to sell coffee and snacks. The high point of the coffee tavern movement was between 1877 and 1885 when over 260 companies had been registered. By this time some had become quite ornate - Dr Bernardo, the childrens' campaigner, opened 'coffee palaces' reminiscent of gin palaces.

Chapter seven is devoted to drinking fountains, a subject with turns out to be fascinating. The drinking fountain movement owes its origins to Charles Melly, a rich Liverpool businessman, who had the first one installed in Princes's Dock in 1854. The range is size and deign was extraordinary and many still survive.

Temperance missions are the subject of chapter eight. As Davison explains, 'even after the [Temperance] movement had largely withdrawn into its own dedicated accommodation, mission and outreach, especially among the poor and those whose work left them most vulnerable to alcohol abuse, was an important strand in Temperance work' (p.184). Missions were often simple buildings, chapel-like in appearance or converted from other uses. The largest was constructed by Frederick Charrington, of the brewing family, in Tower Hamlets. Its main hall could accommodate 7,000 people and provide lunch for up to 700 poor people. Sailors were an early target of the Temperance movement and several seamen's mission buildings still exist along the Thames. Soldiers' homes and institutes soon followed as did missions for canal boatmen and railway workers.

Chapter nine deals with welfare and healthcare - the Temperance movement built hospitals, convalescent homes, orphanages and retirement homes. Its first hospital opened in 1873 on Gower Street, London and was established to treat people without using alcohol, something common at the time. One of the most impressive facilities was Osea Island, a tidal island off Maldon, Essex, situated at the end of a mile long causeway which was covered twelve hours every day. It was purchased by Frederick Charrington in 1902 for the purpose of treating wealthy with alcohol and opiate addictions.

Sport is the subject of Chapter ten. Early Temperance stressed the health benefits of abstinence. As organised sport developed in the nineteenth century so did Temperance football, cricket and rugby clubs. When it came to buildings Temperance billiard halls were some of the most prominent, the first appearing around 1900. The Temperance Billiard

Halls Limited originated in Manchester in 1903 and made a steady profit beyond World War Two owning 43 halls in total. They were bought by property speculators in the late 1950s and all the halls sold off, many to Mecca, the dance hall, catering, ice-skating and bingo group.

Chapter eleven focuses on Temperance and leisure. The nascent Salvation Army took over a number of music halls – often see as dens of iniquity – and converted them to centres of worship. Temperance music halls began to appear in the late 1860s, characterised by the lack of alcohol for sale and 'clean' variety acts. However, once their novelty wore off, they struggled financially.

The final chapter assesses the legacy of Temperance. The author began by stating that it was the one forgotten major campaign of the nineteenth century. There were over 40,000 Temperance societies, ranging from those based in villages to national organisations, and it has been estimated that there were 3,000,000 teetotallers by the early twentieth century. As this work ably illustrates, the physical remains of the movement remain. Possibly 100 Temperance halls remain, now converted into village and town halls, churches, libraries, theatres and cinemas. A handful of Temperance institutes continue in something approaching their original use and several reading rooms survive. Many Temperance hotels eventually applied for licensed to sell alcohol or closed completely. General social changes resulted in the decline of Temperance coffee houses. However, their effects were long term, particularly regarding public houses which had to start selling non-alcoholic drinks, provide food and cater to women to compete.

Like other recent publications by Historic England/ University of Liverpool Press (such as *Oasts and Hop Kilns* and *The Buildings of the Malting Industry*) this is an extremely well-produced book, beautifully laid out and with copious excellent illustrations. This is matched by the super research delivered in a very readable style. I began reading this book as something of a sceptic with regards to its subject matter, but I am now converted – although not to teetotalism!

TIM HOLT